



pleasures

Dominique Rizzo went back to her roots to find inspiration for her first cookbook, writes **Amanda Keenan**.

WATCHING A FRESHLY SLAUGHTERED pig being bled out and cut down would be the stuff of nightmares for most three year olds, but for Dominique Rizzo it was a seminal moment in a life defined by food.

The daughter of a Sicilian migrant father and an Australian-born mother, young Dominique was taken to the province's capital of Palermo to meet her extended family. There, the curious girl with a hungry (and steely) stomach immersed herself in the Sicilian way of life and relished the moments with her zias (aunts) and nonna in the kitchen and with her zio (uncle) on the farm.

"To have that an experience as a young child and go travelling and see what I saw and be part of living on this farm, and running around after chooks and watching animals being processed down naturally, and watching sausages being made and vegetables being picked," she says, still swooning at the thought after so many years.

"I saw the pigs getting processed on my uncle's farm and it was very natural, they were just doing it in the open garage under the grapevines and it fascinated me. That's the thing about food, I was just mesmerised by everything: the colours, the smells, all the different vegetables, stopping by the side of the road and picking





bunches of grapes; prickly pears; diving for mussels ... it was so amazing and it probably wasn't until I was in my teenage years that I really started to go, 'wow'. I started to really embrace my Italian culture."

And 18-year-old Dominique "fell" into cooking at a crossroads in her life. "I thought 'what am I going to do with my life' and that's when I decided to become an apprentice; I loved cooking so why not? It was always in my blood. And it just grew as I did my apprenticeship, became a chef and had a restaurant," she recalls.


A regular foodie guest on television shows such as Ready, Steady, Cook and the 7pm Project, Brisbane-based Dominique was approached to write a cookbook and initially, wasn't keen. "I was like, 'hasn't everything been done before?' But then, as I'm looking through my recipes and then when I went back to Sicily to chat with my aunts and uncles and gather some recipes I'd grown up with, I thought, 'well I haven't seen this recipe and, this is something new and a bit different'."

Her book, My Taste of Sicily, has loads of deliciously easy dishes, often with few ingredients or just one pot needed — "Italians have more important things to do than wash dishes!"

"The style of Sicilian cooking is really beautifully simple and I think that my book showcases an array of recipes that are very family friendly. You don't have to be a savvy cook, and all the ingredients you can get at your local supermarket." She says her book also has a host of easy, tasty vegetable dishes "which are sometimes really hard to come by".

"I love creating and showcasing and giving people different tips on how to 'zhoosh up' vegetables, because they are the hardest thing we find to make exciting. There's the beautiful broccoli pasta where you boil your broccoli, take it out and smash it in a pan with some pancetta, garlic and a bit of chilli and olive oil and then put your pasta in the same water, cook that and toss your pasta through this beautiful broccoli sauce and it is just simple but delicious."

Most of the recipes come with options to modify them for fussy eaters or those with special dietary requirements, or even to change them into a completely different dish: add beaten eggs to the capsicum with olives and oregano dish and you have a tart.

Dominique says the whole process was rather draining. "I don't know how it is for comedians or swimmers who put cookbooks out ... but for a real foodie chef to put a cookbook out it's quite emotional because this is my life that I'm sharing with people; it is who I am. I think it's really nice to see the reality of food and that's what Sicilian food is to me: it's food from the land and the people, and it is so beautiful because it is so simple." 



Dominique Rizzo
Lantern, \$39.95