

97 WAYS TO BECOME A BETTER COOK

TIPS + RECIPES FROM
THE WORLD'S BEST
COOKING TEACHERS

Gourmet

THE MAGAZINE OF GOOD LIVING

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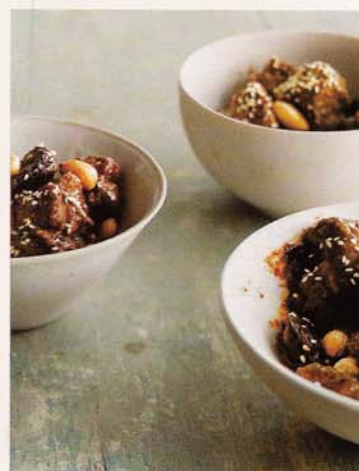
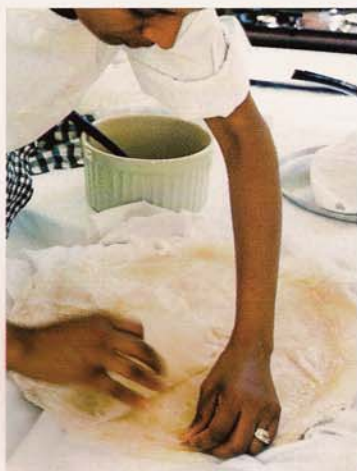
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ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

MARRAKECH, MOROCCO I picked up the old-fashioned (and extremely beautiful) bellows and crouched down on the pavement to encourage the hot coals in my brazier. I was taking a *tagine* workshop, of all things, and one that just happened to be in paradise. Two colleagues and I were cooking and eating our way through Morocco under the knowledgeable eye of **Peggy Markel**, whose culinary tours extend to Tuscany, Sicily, Elba, and Thailand as well. At the guesthouse Jnane Tamsna, we had each been given an individual *tagine*, the North African earthenware casserole dish with a conical lid, in order to make our own delicious stews, which go by the same name. The form of the pot follows its function so elegantly: The tall lid collects the condensed steam and returns the moisture to the stew, the knobby handle stays cool, and the dish is wide and shallow, to facilitate eating *à la marocaine*, with the first three fingers of the right hand. My stew would go perfectly with the couscous that Bahija Lafridi, the house chef, was going to show us how to make next, and I was already looking forward to handling *warka*—the paper-thin pastry sheets integral to the classic

pigeon or chicken pie called *b'stilla*—the following day. Jnane Tamsna, owned by interior designer Meryanne Loum-Martin and her husband, ethnobotanist Gary Martin, was a great base for trips to the Medina, with its labyrinth of small shops selling everything from carpets and sequined slippers to lemons, mint, and *ras-el-hanout*, an intoxicating, complex blend of myriad spices. We spent the rest of our days exploring ancient Berber traditions (bread baked in a clay oven, for instance), hiking in the High Atlas Mountains, seeing goats climb into argan trees, and sampling the superb grilled fish in the white-and-blue coastal city of Essaouira, where the sun seems to shine especially brightly. (800-988-2851; peggymarkel.com; \$4,595, double occupancy, for nine days, including all meals) —*Paul Grimes*

WHAT I LEARNED That a really good exotic spice blend like *ras-el-hanout* can have a profound impact on the way you cook. I use it all the time now to roast vegetables and to broil meats, fish, and birds. **BIGGEST SURPRISE** The health properties and culinary uses of argan oil. **BEFORE YOU GO** Pack extra tote bags. You'll want to bring back lots of goodies.



At Jnane Tamsna, Bahija Lafridi separates delicate pastry leaves for *b'stilla* and steams couscous; lamb *tagine*, rich with cinnamon and prunes.

LAMB TAGINE WITH PRUNES AND CINNAMON

Adapted from Bahija Lafridi, Jnane Tamsna, Marrakech, Morocco

SERVES 6

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR

This well-balanced stew is intense yet mellow. The prunes soak up the fragrant spices, and long, slow cooking turns the lamb fork-tender.

- 2½ lb boneless lamb shoulder, cut into 1½-inch pieces
- 1 medium red onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons plus ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- 3 (3-inch) cinnamon sticks
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 pinch saffron threads
- 1 tablespoon white wine or water
- About 2½ cups water
- ½ lb prunes (about 2 cups)

- 3 tablespoons mild honey
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- ½ cup whole blanched almonds

►Toss together lamb, onion, 3 tablespoons oil, spices (except saffron), 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot. ►Lightly toast saffron in a dry small skillet (not nonstick) over medium heat until just fragrant, 15 to 30 seconds. Crumble into wine and let stand 1 minute. Add wine to pot, then add enough water to just cover lamb. Gently simmer, partially covered, stirring occasionally, 1½ hours. ►Stir in prunes and honey and simmer until meat is tender and sauce has thickened, 15 to 20 minutes. Season with salt. ►Toast sesame seeds in dry small skillet over medium heat, stirring, until pale golden, then transfer to a small bowl. ►Heat remaining ¼ cup oil in same skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then fry almonds until golden. Drain on paper towels. ►Serve *tagine* sprinkled with sesame seeds and almonds.

COOKS' NOTE: *Tagine* can be cooked 1 day ahead and chilled (covered once cool). Reheat gently, thinning with water if needed.