

# Chef chat

Feisty, glamorous and talented, **Silvena Rowe** fronts this month's Dubai Food Festival. Here she talks healthy eating, cooking with love and why she adores tomatoes

## Roast pumpkin & almond soup with almond and cumin dukkah

SERVES 6

### INGREDIENTS

#### FOR THE DUKKAH

50g whole almonds, toasted  
1 tbsp coriander seeds, toasted  
½ tsp cumin seeds, toasted  
¼ tsp fennel seeds, toasted  
6 tbsp olive oil

#### FOR THE SOUP

1kg pumpkin, peeled, de-seeded and cubed  
8 fresh sage leaves, finely chopped  
2 onions, quartered  
6 garlic cloves  
4 tbsp olive oil  
800ml chicken stock  
100g ground almonds

#### TO SERVE

3 tbsp pomegranate seeds

**Step 1** To make the dukkah, place all the

ingredients in a food processor and blend until well combined. Transfer to a small bowl.

**Step 2** To make the soup, preheat the oven to 180°C fan/gas mark 6. Spread the pumpkin, sage, onions and whole garlic cloves on a roasting tray and drizzle with the olive oil. Season to taste and cook in the oven for 35 minutes, until the pumpkin is soft. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

**Step 3** Using a food processor, blend to a purée, adding a little of the chicken stock to ease the process. Tip the pumpkin purée into a saucepan and add the rest of the stock. Simmer for 20 minutes, stirring from time to time to ensure a smooth consistency. Finally, add the ground almonds and combine well.

**Step 4** Drizzle the soup with the almond dukkah and sprinkle with pomegranate seeds to serve.

"Dukkah is an Egyptian spice and nut blend that has a fantastic crunchy texture. Here I've mixed the dukkah with olive oil so that it blends deliciously with this comforting soup"



### What type of cuisine best describes you and your personality?

Modern, health-conscious, life enhancing and alluring Arabic cuisine. Arriving in Dubai, I decided to completely change the way I eat. My diet became sugar-free, dairy-free and gluten-free, which resulted in a weight loss that increased my energy levels and contributed to a major life enhancement. I wanted to share these benefits with the people of Dubai and I truly believe that my restaurant, Omnia Gourmet, has done just that.

### Your love of cooking came from your father. How do you make sure his traditions and cooking live on in your family?

My love of cooking has already been passed onto my sons, who not only love eating well, but also cooking well. I still create dishes that were made by my father. The foods of my childhood – I especially remember the baklava, stuffed peppers and vine leaves – are ingrained in all that I cook and maintain an influence in every dish I put on my menus. Regardless of where I cook, the lessons I've learned from my father will always remain at the forefront of my ethos.

### Who do you enjoy cooking big meals for the most?

I enjoy cooking the most when I'm doing it for the people I love the most – my family. Food and love go hand-in-hand. One cannot be achieved without the other.

### So what will you be rustling up for Valentine's Day?

I would begin the meal with a luxurious array of fresh local seafood, followed by a grilled Wagyu fillet with an Emirati-scented Béarnaise sauce. For dessert, I would serve up Omnia Gourmet's iconic cheesecake, which is gluten-free, sugar-free and guilt-free, just like the rest of my desserts.

### What's your favorite meal of the day?

Most people would probably choose breakfast, but I love dinner – a Sunday roast or Friday brunch in particular. When it comes to food, I believe more is more!

### And your favorite ingredient?

Tomatoes. They're full of antioxidants and umami, extremely versatile and have been an ever-present ingredient throughout my life as a chef. I couldn't live without them!



## Sumac crab & avocado with tahini dressing

SERVES 8

### INGREDIENTS

#### FOR THE DRESSING

1 egg  
150ml olive oil  
Juice of 1 lemon  
100g fresh brown crabmeat, cooked  
1 tbsp tahini

#### FOR THE CRAB

450g fresh white crabmeat, cooked  
Juice of ½ lemon  
1 tsp ground sumac  
50g pack of fresh basil, leaves only, finely chopped  
50g pack of fresh parsley, leaves only, finely chopped  
2 large avocados  
Extra lemon juice for the avocados

#### TO SERVE

Black sesame crisp flatbread  
2 lemons, cut into quarters

**Step 1** To make the dressing, whisk the egg, drizzling in the olive oil at the same time, until you have a thick consistency. Add the lemon juice and the cooked brown crabmeat. Combine and season well before finally stirring in the tahini.



**Step 2** To prepare the crab combine the cooked white crabmeat, lemon juice, sumac and herbs, and season to taste. Peel and thinly slice the avocados, squeezing lemon juice over the top to prevent discoloration, if not using immediately.

**Step 3** Top pieces of black sesame crisp flatbread with some of the sumac crab and the avocado slices, and drizzle with the tahini dressing. Serve with lemon quarters.

### You're a supporter of the local, organic markets here.

I strive to use organic and locally-sourced produce whenever I can, especially in Dubai's winter season when the supply is bountiful. Higher quality is always worth the extra effort; go the extra mile to make your food and dishes special.

### Omnia means wish in Arabic.

#### What is the next wish for Silvena Rowe?

Omnia by Silvena is my flagship restaurant, set to open in Downtown Dubai later this year. It's where Emirati food and culture will be celebrated and where Western cooking techniques will be teamed with the timeless traditions of Emirati food and its rich recipes. My wish is that the people of Dubai embrace the concept I am so very proud to be able to deliver.

