

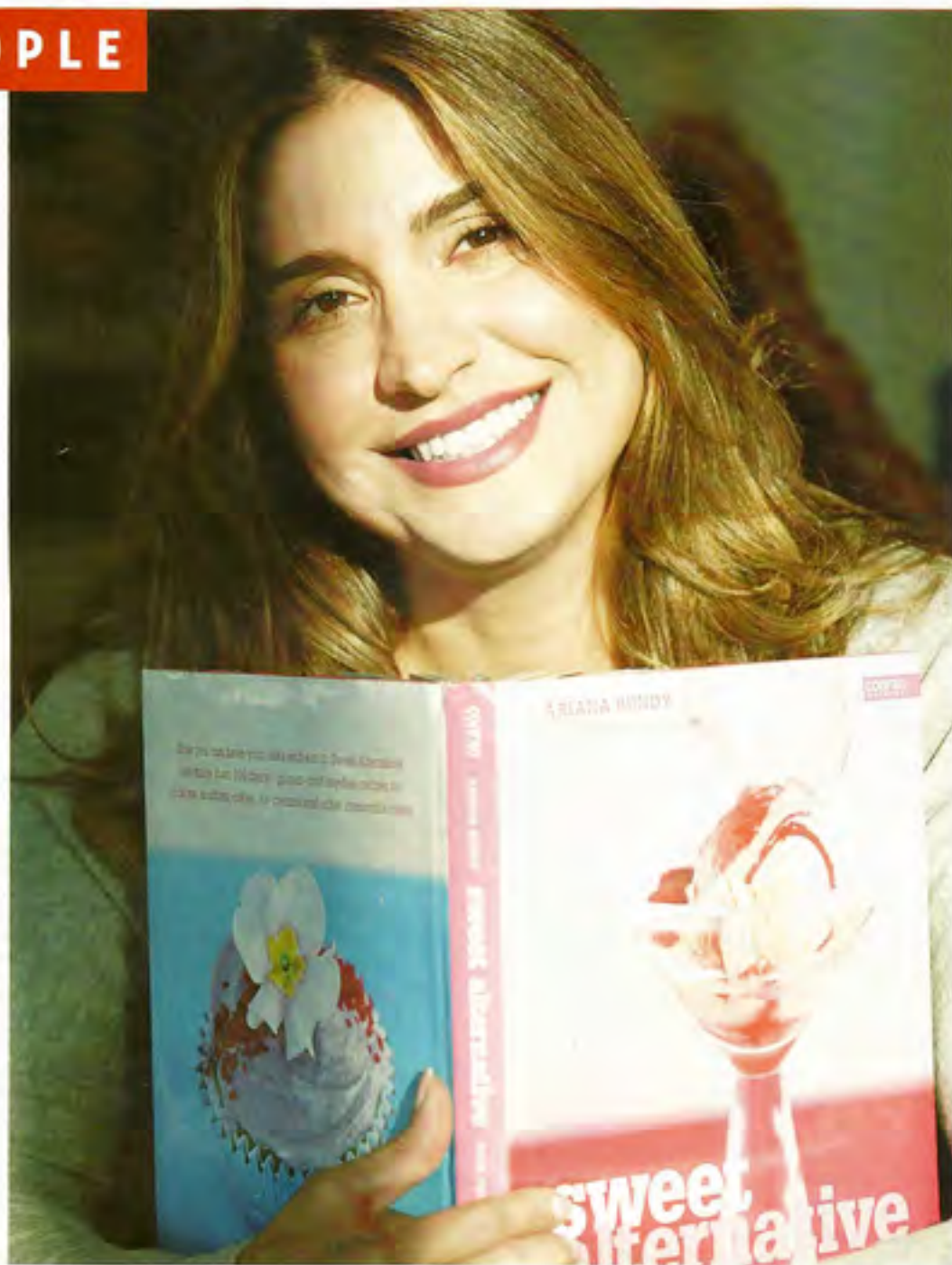
Friday

NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 1, 2005

Great extras

Accessories to string the season along 64





Notes from no-dairy

ARIANA BUNDY WANTS TO HAVE HER CAKE and eat it too – but without the butter or cream. The former pastry chef with a dairy intolerance has written *Sweet Alternative*, a book of dessert recipes without gluten, dairy and soy. By **Vibhuti Arora**. Photos by **Rangarajan**

Is a cake made without wheat or milk as delectable as the original? Ariana Bundy says it's possible if you use the right recipe.

A former pastry chef and Paris-based cookbook writer, Bundy challenges many myths about food substitutes in her new book, *Sweet Alternative*. Not only has she put together more than 100 dessert recipes that are free of dairy, gluten and soy, but she also tries to recreate the original textures and taste of these delights.

Let's face it, most of us are not partial to food substitutes unless we are forced to adopt them. Given a choice, most people prefer the original.

But what if a substitute tastes as good and is healthier? Some of us might consider the option, but with a degree of scepticism.

Yet many people with allergies, medical conditions and food intolerance have to change their diet. Bundy, 34, was diagnosed with dairy intolerance two years ago, an experience she describes as "life shattering".

Not even able to eat soy, Bundy was spurred on to explore the world of substitutes and to create desserts that tasted and felt like the originals she loved. What began as an experiment in her kitchen turned into an obsession.

"I would wake up in the middle of the night and make adjustments to the proportions of ingredients. While I was working on my recipes [they were all I thought about] and it took me about a year and a half to [finish her project]," she says.

"At times, I would get very frustrated that my experiments were not leading anywhere, but my mother encouraged me to go on and not give up," she says.

Her diligence paid off when gradually her desserts started turning out to be good.

A former pastry chef, Bundy was trained at the world-famous Ecole Lenotre in France and has a Grande Diploma in Patisserie from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. She says her training helped her immensely.

Sweet tooth stays happy ...

After being diagnosed with dairy intolerance, Ariana Bundy experimented with soy and gluten substitutes, and loosened the hold of her former favourites.

"If it were not for my training I would have taken five years or even longer to put together the recipes," she says.

When using ingredient substitutes, Bundy says in many cases her desserts get very close to the original taste. While some substitutes have their own new distinct flavour, she says it's easy for people to adapt to this.

"Most of the tastes are acquired and one can easily adjust one's palate accordingly. Rather than giving up desserts completely, sweet lovers can adapt to a healthier option," she says.

Each recipe is tried and tested in her kitchen and she makes sure the texture, taste and presentation is as close to the original as possible.

Organic and natural substitutes

With more awareness about organic food and natural ingredients today, there are many options for people who need to alter their eating habits.

Although *Sweet Alternative* has been written for people who are allergic or intolerant of gluten, soy or dairy, its recipes are also ideal for those who simply want to eat healthily.

Natural and organic ingredients are used in many of Bundy's recipes. The basic flour mixes are organic and she

employs natural colours such as turmeric, beetroot extract and colours from berries. Sweeteners include date sugar and agave nectar. Mashed bananas, fruit purees, raw honey, ghee, coconut oil and olive oil are other favourites she uses liberally.

The unsung heroes of the food world

Bundy found researching and writing *Sweet Alternative* quite thought provoking.

"I learnt a lot of new things about food which gave me a whole new approach to cooking. I used to be a snob where food was concerned but I realised there is a vast reservoir of ingredients that are great but are often slighted," she says.

Originally from the United States, Bundy has travelled widely and has lived in Austria, England, Italy, Switzerland and France, immersing herself in various cultures and cuisines.

She has also become open to the idea of trial and error, using new,

lesser-known ingredients in classical cooking.

"There was a time when I would accept nothing but pure farm-fresh butter and cream. It's different now. I am more open to new ideas and like to experiment

'I used to be a snob where food was concerned but I realised there is a vast reservoir of ingredients that are great but are often slighted.'

SOME UNCOMMON INGREDIENTS

Lesser known ingredients of the food world.

■ Coconut butter, coconut milk and coconut cream:

These are loaded with amino acids, which are excellent for the body.

■ **Agave nectar:** A natural sweetener, quite similar to raw honey. It has a low glycaemic index (GI) and is good for diabetics. Bundy has made caramels from it.

■ **Yukon potatoes:** Good all-purpose potatoes

with yellow flesh and a rich buttery flavour.

■ **Olive oil:** Using this in cakes may sound unfamiliar, but light tasting olive oil combines perfectly with chocolate.

■ **Agar agar:** An algae used in Japanese foods, which comes as ground powder or flakes. It's a natural binder, a good substitute for gelatin for vegetarians or those who cannot consume beef gelatin.

■ **Chickpea flour:** This is gluten free and a good wheat substitute in flour mixes.

■ **Quinoa seed:** High in protein, calcium and

iron. This is a gluten-free grain for those with gluten sensitivity. Quinoa flour is used in making pasta and a variety of baked goods such as pancakes, bread, muffins, and crackers.

■ **Ghee:** This has a buttery flavour and is excellent for baking. It gives cakes, muffins and other baked treats a lovely texture.

■ **Apple sauce:** May be substituted for the fat used in baked goods. On its own it makes a great dessert.

PEOPLE

with a diverse range of ingredients."

"I have used coconut cream to make mousse. Coconut cream and coconut butter are perhaps the most undervalued products that work wonderfully in the absence of milk. Coconut cream, for example, folds beautifully and its taste can be neutralised by mixing it in the right proportions with fruit essences, chocolate or other flavours," she says.

The coconut butter she uses is unrefined and expeller pressed and is fairly neutral in taste. She uses this in her chocolate spread. In her baked desserts, Bundy also often uses vanilla to mask other flavours, such as coconut.

Ghee makes an appearance in some of these baked desserts. It has a buttery flavour and bakes perfectly.

Some people who are dairy intolerant may consume ghee, but it's best to first check with a medical practitioner.

Instead of using gluten as a binding agent, Bundy employs xanthan gum. Added to gluten-free flour mixes, this recreates the sticky qualities of gluten.

Bundy's favourite dessert is ice-cream and for this, instead of milk and cream, she uses rice milk, grapeseed, tasteless oils, gelatin, eggs and vanilla beans.

"I have also made ice-creams with almond milk, cashew paste as well as coconut milk using sweeteners like unrefined pure crystallised sugar or raw honey," she says.

Cashew nuts are soaked overnight then crushed and beaten the next day to make a frothy, creamy paste which works amazingly well in frozen desserts.

In her pumpkin flan, she uses rice milk and coconut milk along with various natural flavours to mimic original taste.

Although she has not yet devised a recipe of dairy-free and soy-free cheesecake, she has created something



'There was a time when I would accept nothing but pure farm-fresh butter and cream.'

with cashew paste that is close but not quite the same. In other words, her quest continues.

The future

Recently, Bundy has been busy launching her book, travelling to the US, London, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and, of course, Dubai.

No longer a chef, she is concentrating on being a full-time author. Her next project will be a book on savouries, again using alternative ingredients, followed by a book of quick-fix recipes. Bundy also intends to publish recipes that cater for young women "on the go".

"While I was working I had no time to eat properly [and] as a result I developed severe anaemia and vitamin deficiency," she says.

"My book will give some easy to follow ways to load up on vitamins and minerals and also give alternatives to make up for lost nutrients."

Next week, *Friday* will feature some recipes from *Sweet Alternative*. **E**

SUBSTITUTES

Some regular ingredients and some of the substitutes Ariana Bundy uses:

- **Sugar:** Maple, raw honey, agave nectar, unrefined fruit sugars, date sugar
- **Milk:** Coconut milk,

rice milk, almond milk.

- **Cheese:** Rice cheese, soy cheese.
- **Gluten:** Xanthan gum, guar gum, agar.
- **Butter:** Trans fat-free margarine, ghee.
- **Artificial food colourants:** Fruit extracts like beetroot, coloured sugar crystals, blueberries.
- **Cream:** Cashew cream,

coconut cream

- **Wholewheat:** Tapioca flour, chickpea flour, bean flour, nut flours, potato flour, rye, rice, barley, arrowroot, buckwheat, oatmeal, cornmeal and millet. (Gluten-free flours are generally used in combination with one another.)



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