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THE
Spring
ISSUE

Guide:
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ISSUE
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Candleholder, Dhs250, bonbon jar, Dhs175, Mirror Paris Mode, Dhs1,600, Tablecloth, Dhs860, cakestand Dhs250, butterdish, Dhs100, decanter Dhs200, serve bowl, Dhs 175, Hydrangea, Dhs650, plum blossom, Dhs1550, all available at Bloomingdale's Home



COLOUR, SPARKLE AND JOY

Photographs by JOVANA OBRADOVIC
Styling by TORY WALLER & ARIANA BUNDY

As Iranians the world over prepare for another Persian New Year, author and chef ARIANA BUNDY tells us the story of this important tradition and gives us the ingredients for the perfect Haftseen table ...

Norouz crosses boundaries both religious and geographic. All Iranians no matter their faith, join together to celebrate this 'New Day', the most festive and holy in the Zoroastrian calendar that marks the spring equinox — ushering in the first days of the new season.

There is a lot of excitement in Iranian households come Norouz. It's just like Christmas when you know you'll be getting presents, eating lots of delicious food, and everyone is in a great festive mood. The radio or TV will always be turned on to connect you to other Iranians around the world and there

will be lots of hustle and bustle going on inside the house. Everything needs to be clean and shiny and people have to wear at least one item of clothing that is new. My grandmother used to buy her daughters these gorgeous identical Verni shoes, ruffled dresses and for my uncle a velvet coat, shorts with a shirt and bow tie. Very kitsch but very cute!

My grandfather and his brothers would play backgammon or chess while the women and maids were busy frying fresh fish and steaming dill rice while the children just ran amok. We used to grab at food as if we were on a rampage, as it was the only day we were allowed to eat whatever we wanted. During the entire week of

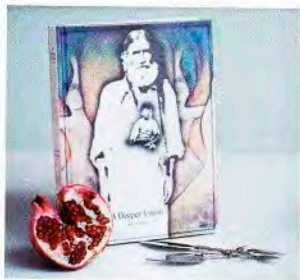
celebrations we would visit relatives and have guests come over, and every table would be laid with delicious dishes and pastries - it's no different today.

The centerpiece of the Norouz festivities found in every Iranian home is the Haftseen table. The Haftseen, literally meaning 7 'seens' or things that begin with the letter S, is laid with symbolic items such as Seeb (apple), sekkeh (coins) and sabzeh (wheat, barley or lentil sprouts growing in a dish). Although now the custom has expanded to include more than seven items and things which do not start with an 'S', such as mahi (goldfish in a bowl), ayeneh (a mirror), tokmeh morgh (eggs) and shaam (candles). ➤

Bonbon jar, Dhs175,
Bloomingdale's Home



Fish bowl, Dhs200,
serve tall bowl,
Dhs200, Argento bowl,
Dhs375, all available
at Bloomingdale's
Home. A Deeper Vision
by Behzad Mohit,
buckeyeexpress.net



For our family, our Haftseen table would carry a copy of Hafez poetry which traditionally would be picked up and opened on a random page, the verses read foretelling our future for the coming year. The ritual dictates that everyone should be gathered around the Haftseen table as the clock strikes the first and most auspicious hour of the New Year. They say that whatever mood you are in on Norouz will determine the rest of your year, so people ensure they are on their best behaviour and that the sights, smells and sounds around them are the most inspiring.

Part of the festivities is the Festival of Fire. Chaharshanbeh Suri, literally meaning red Wednesday, takes place on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, when people light bonfires in their gardens and jump over them singing "zardi-ye man az to, sorkhi-ye to az man," meaning "give me your fiery glow and



take away my sickly pallor". The goal is to purify and cast off all the tiredness and problems of the past year which will hopefully now come to an end, replacing them instead with energy and life.

Children get to stay out late and play with sparklers, watch amazing

firework displays and go trick or treating to neighbours' homes, returning with armfuls of sweets. As a child, I remember visiting our nanny's home in the downtown part of Tehran where they would disguise us with a white 'chador' (hejab) and let us trick or treat for candy. For me, it's so reminiscent of Halloween.

Marking the end of Norouz is 'sizdah bedar', the 13th day of the New Year when everyone in Iran goes out for a picnic. River banks, parks, and mountain sides are packed with groups of people enjoying the fresh air, playing board games, eating and drinking tea. At the end of the picnic the 'sabzeh' (green shoots) from the Haftseen table are thrown away, usually into a

stream or river. The sabzeh is said to have collected the sickness and bad luck of the family from the previous year, so keeping it at home after sizdah bedah is considered bad luck. On the same day, the tradition is for young unmarried girls to tie a knot in a blade of grass, in the hope that the coming year will bring them a husband just as the knot symbolizes the bond of marriage.

It was 10 years ago to this day that I invited my husband-then-boyfriend to my house for Norouz. He says it was when I absentmindedly picked the bones out of his fish for him, that he knew he wanted to marry me!

You can set a Haftseen table anywhere in the world, as most of the Iranian Diaspora do. I even remember my mother putting a lovely makeshift table together when we were staying at a hotel in London. This year, I'm lucky enough to take my family to Iran where my 4-year-old son will celebrate his first proper Norouz: a time when he can start gathering good memories so that he may one day pass these traditions on to his own family. ■

A selection of Norouz recipes can be found in Pomegranates and Roses, by Ariana Bundy, published by Simon & Schuster, Dhs145. Jashanmal bookstores