



## Nopi: The Cookbook

*By Yotam, Scully, Ramael Ottolenghi*

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Pandan leaves meet pomegranate seeds, star anise meets sumac, and miso meets molasses in this collection of 120 new recipes from Yotam Ottolenghi's restaurant.

In collaboration with Nopi's head chef Ramael Scully, Yotam's journey from the Middle East to the Far East is one of big and bold flavors, with surprising twists along the way.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

#### **Praise for Ottolenghi's previous books:**

"This is simply wonderful cooking...modern, smart, and thoughtful. I love it." --Nigel Slater

"With his 2012 cookbook *Jerusalem*, London restaurateur Yotam Ottolenghi [has] created a sensation by sharing his unexpected and highly personal take on Mediterranean cooking." --*Food & Wine*

"*Jerusalem* is the top-selling cookbook in the country, subverting the conventional wisdom that you need to have a TV show to have a bestselling cookbook. The book...has become something of a phenomenon."  
--*Publisher's Weekly*

"Forget about the fact that it's a vegetarian's best friend. *Plenty* is the sort of cookbook that a home cook will fall for. It's as meaty as its meat-filled counterparts." --Charlotte Druckman food52.com

"*Plenty*...is among the most generous and luxurious nonmeat cookbooks ever produced, one that instantly reminds us that you don't need meat to produce over-the-top food." --Mark Bittman, *New York Times*

"Yotam Ottolenghi's second cookbook has recipes for dishes largely absent from the American kitchen--a fact that almost never crosses your mind when you flip through it hungry. Everything sounds mouthwatering and looks--and is--doable." --*Wall Street Journal*

### About the Author

YOTAM OTTOLENGHI is the author of *Plenty*, *Plenty More*, and co-author with Sami Tamimi of *Ottolenghi* and *Jerusalem*, which was awarded Cookbook of the Year by the International Association of Culinary Professionals, and Best International Cookbook by the James Beard Foundation. All four books were *New York Times* bestsellers. He lives in London, where he owns an eponymous group of restaurants and a high-end restaurant, Nopi. RAMAEL SCULLY was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and started his culinary career at the age of 17 in Sydney, Australia. Now head chef at Nopi, Scully first worked under Yotam Ottolenghi in 2004 at Ottolenghi.

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### Introduction

If you happen to have any of my previous books—Ottolenghi, *Plenty*, *Jerusalem*, and *Plenty More*—you will notice right away that the dishes in this book are somewhat more complex. Therefore, most of the recipes here will be more challenging for home cooks. They are typically made up of a few distinct elements that need to be prepared separately, occasionally over a bit of time, before being put together on a plate at the very last minute.

I start with this disclaimer not in order to put anyone off—I think the food here is spectacularly delicious and I am massively proud of it—but because I want to make it clear that this is a restaurant cookbook: it features restaurant food. The vast majority of the recipes in my previous books were conceived in and for a home kitchen. The recipes here were created from a different frame of mind; that is, in an environment where a team of professional cooks labors for a few hours in preparation for a short pinnacle, the famous service, in which hundreds of dishes are served in short succession to a very large crowd. It is the complete opposite of the way we cook and eat at home.

The contrast between these two mindsets is, really, the story of this book. What Ramael Scully (or just

Scully, from now on, as that's what everybody calls him) and I have attempted to do is to modify and simplify NOPI's recipes without losing their essential core. We tried to keep a degree of complexity that does justice to food that is by its very nature complex, at the same time as allowing a nonprofessional to feel that this is an undertaking that is doable at home, delicious, and gratifying.

The meeting of two distinctive worldviews also makes up the story of my relationship with Scully. I am telling it in detail here because it really is the story of the food you'll find in the following pages and how it came to be.

### Random meeting

Many of life's most momentous moments stem from pretty random circumstances. My meeting with Scully is such a case. Well before I was even vaguely aware of the magical world of rasam, sambal, and pandan, I met Scully on an ordinary trial shift on an ordinary day in the kitchen of Ottolenghi in Islington: a big man with a congenial smile, baffling cultural heritage, and distinctive shuffling gait. Scully responded to what must have been the fifth online ad that Jim Webb, the head chef, had placed early in 2005, desperately looking for a senior chef de partie. His task would be to create a small menu of hot dishes served from the kitchen in the evening, alongside our familiar counter salads and cakes.

There was nothing unusual or particularly promising about this latest Aussie recruit; restaurant chefs tend to come and go quite regularly. Jim seemed to like him and that was good enough for me. Plus, with the chronic shortage of chefs in London, I couldn't really afford to be picky. And so Scully got the position and started training to run our evening service in the restaurant. After a few days, he seemed to be doing a decent job, though I can still remember a fleeting chat inside a walk-in fridge where Jim expressed certain concerns about Scully's experience and his efficiency during service.

I suggested that we wait and see.

A few days later I got my first taste of Scully's food. He cooked, if my memory serves me right, portobello mushrooms braised in white wine, hard herbs, and, in typical Scully fashion, tons of butter, and topped with pearly barley with feta and preserved lemon. He also served the crispest pork belly that had ever entered my mouth, with a sweet and sharp compote

of plums, rhubarb, chile, ginger, and star anise. I was hooked!

Everything that is brilliant about Scully's cooking was there in those two dishes: his ability to combine ingredients with virtuosity and flair (preserved lemon, rosemary, feta, and barley), his meticulousness in getting things just right (that heavenly crackling), his unreal generosity (a bottle of white wine in each of the dishes), his expertise in and understanding of both Mediterranean and Asian cooking, and his knack in blending them together thoughtfully, never willy-nilly, in a modern context.

Scully's food also fitted, almost perfectly (and I will explain this "almost" later), with the Ottolenghi way.

The bold, surprisingly intense flavors that became synonymous with the name, the irreverent blends of ingredients, the vibrant colors on the plate, the generosity of spirit and big gestures, the curiosity and somewhat restless approach to food (always looking for the next ingredient, a fresh combination, or a radically different method): all these were features we unmistakably had in common.

Within a few weeks of joining, Scully was running the evening section at Ottolenghi, constantly creating new recipes and new flavors, many of which I had been oblivious to before; he was serving our customers dishes ranging from squid with quinoa, smoked cherry tomatoes, and prosecco to poppy seed tart with squash, goat cheese, and carrot jam. And with the food came stories: the sambal was a hybrid of his mother's recipes with those of his many aunties; the duck confit was salted and left in fat for three months because that's the way it was done at Bathers' Pavilion, the Sydney waterfront restaurant where Scully did his apprenticeship.

Scully's food reflected his rich and intricate background. He was born in Malaysia to a mother of Chinese and Indian heritage and a father with Irish and Malay blood. At the age of eight, he moved with his mother and sister to Sydney, where he went to school and later to catering school. When he came to us, Scully had

very particular culinary baggage. His Malaysian flavors were, like Sami Tamimi's and my "Jerusalem flavors," the basic building blocks of his culinary world. He also had his years of training in the European tradition and his experience in formal restaurants. He was, just like us, an unusual hybrid. The dynamic that has evolved ever since—world Ottolenghi meets world Scully—has become the creative engine behind a large chunk of what we have been doing since Scully joined.

### Taming Scully

First, Scully brought with him his very recent experience in the world of contemporary restaurants. After a few years of running Ottolenghi, with its focus on daytime dining and general sense of food inspired by the street or the home, Sami and I were less conversant in the old restaurant kitchen language. We needed a firsthand, up-to-date take on the theme.

Scully's first attempts at creating an evening menu for Islington showed his talent and enthusiasm for what I can best describe as "composition"; that is, putting together quite a few complex elements on a plate in an arranged, thought-through manner. There would normally be a piece of meat or fish, marinated for at least a day and cooked to perfection in a very particular stock, accompanied by a vegetable that had been braising slowly and was then mashed with some of Scully's favorite ingredients (miso, perhaps, or rehydrated dried chiles or an obscure Korean spice paste). A couple of other elements would no doubt be there: crisp vegetable pickle, maybe, or a caramelized nut and seed mix. A fruity salsa with fresh coconut could also work. Maybe even all three.

This was in extreme opposition to Sami's and my tendency to just "throw together" a few things on a large platter in a pretty effortless way: large chunks of roasted butternut squash with a drizzle of citrusy tahini and a dusting of za'atar would do us just fine. Scully would just have to add something else: five-spiced crispy shallots, maybe, or a drizzle of reduced passata with ginger and chile. He was also partial to liberal quantities of butter, various rich stocks, and salty, umami-heavy condiments such as kimchi or ikan bilis (salt-cured anchovies). Again, a far cry from our simpler favorites: yogurt, lemon, and garlic.

The years that ensued saw us in a constant state of negotiating to find a middle ground. A permanent Islington kitchen fixture would be myself or Sami engaged in one of our famous "tastings" with Scully to introduce a new dish to the menu (normally around 2 p.m., when the kitchen was already bursting at the seams with manic lunch service overlapping highly space-consuming dinner prep). "Scully, this is marvelous but can we tone it down a notch? Lose an element or two? Wouldn't a plain salsa suffice?" And the answer: "Man, this is already super simple. I was actually going to slow-cook it for an extra twenty-four hours. Did you not see how David Chang does his kombu broth in five stages over three days?"

Scully's delight in slow processes—including meandering around Chinatown looking for any number of new ingredients while service is practically on its way, or vegging in bed with a pile of cookbooks by his side until inspiration finally hits—earned him our love and, occasionally, a fair bit of harmless exasperation. There's quite a lot Scully can get away with, owing to his disarming charm, big heart, and enormous talent. Thanks to these exceptional qualities, collaborating with Scully has always been a breeze. In every single case we've managed to find a compromise, a dish that is a little lighter and simpler than Scully had in mind and a little heftier and more involved than what Sami and I wished for. This became the blueprint for the hot food we now serve at NOPI and at Ottolenghi in Islington and Spitalfields. In short, Scully showed us how to do "restaurant," we taught him how to do "Ottolenghi," and the result was this new hybrid set of dishes that are now the "Ottolenghi haute cuisine," and are featured in this book.

Scully's second big contribution to Ottolenghi and, similarly, a bit of a bone of contention at the outset, was a very fresh set of flavors, most of them Asian: curry leaves, yuzu, dried shrimp, lime leaves, glutinous rice flour, pandan leaves, galangal, ketjap manis, and many more. These were great additions to our repertoire and made complete sense because they were just as bold and colorful and rich as our sumac, preserved lemons, and pomegranate molasses. Yet they weren't part of our usual palate and I vigorously resisted turning the menu too "Asian" and losing the Middle Eastern/Mediterranean blend that was much more natural to Sami and to me. Much of the first few years of us working together were spent with me trying to curb Scully's "Asian tendencies." Slowly, however, I gave in. One dish in the first year (white

pepper-crusted soft-shelled crab, with miso cucumber and wasabi mayonnaise, I believe it was), two the following year, then three, and, finally, as many as Scully wanted, really, when NOPI opened in 2011. While haggling with Scully over the degree to which Ottolenghi would “go Asian,” I secretly (I was keeping my cards very close to my chest, you see), developed my own love of all things to do with the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Through my physical and virtual travels and through friends and colleagues, one of whom was Scully himself of course, I was beginning to seriously enjoy my laksas and tamarind broths, my misos and yuzus, my tofus and peanut sauces. And so, gradually, my palate and the Ottolenghi repertoire naturally expanded eastward.

#### Our “grown-up” restaurant

The reason for NOPI was a somewhat self-indulgent one: a desire for what we called a “grown-up restaurant.” We are not sure what made us think that the Ottolenghi delis weren’t quite grown-up enough, but the reality was that Noam Bar, who formulated the vision, and the rest of the team—Cornelia Staeubli, Basia Murphy, Sarit Packer, Alex Meitlis, Scully, and me—were all ready for a fresh challenge: an all-day brasserie, a “proper” West End establishment serving the kind of food that we’d developed in Islington over the years, drawing in people seeking genuinely good food throughout the day with the quality of a serious restaurant but without any of the stuffiness and formality.

Easier said than done—much easier! The year that preceded NOPI’s opening saw a painstaking process of getting details right—all the details!

Alex, mastermind of the Ottolenghi look, was translating Noam’s ideas into a reality that included plenty of patina-laden brass, smooth-polished bloodshot marble, whitewashed brick, striking art, and the famous bathrooms, where a set of floor-to-ceiling concertina mirrors threw customers into a perplexing Wonderland and evoked a general sense of bewilderment and slight unease.

Cornelia and Basia were making sure that upstairs was quite the opposite. Everything—all the things you are not meant to notice when you sit comfortably in a restaurant enjoying a serene meal—needed to tick along in the nicest, smoothest, slickest, most predictable way. Waiters’ probable journeys in strategic junctions were plotted and analyzed; training manuals perfected so that staff knew their stuff inside and out (grape varietals, the obvious distinction between farro and spelt—just between us, I am still not quite sure about that myself—and the very elusive art of laid-back etiquette). Reception had to operate in full harmony with the bar, shift managers, and downstairs office; the expeditor to be alert to the kitchen intercom and movement on the floor; table covers to be regularly stocked, wiped and changed; plates seamlessly cleared; bills to arrive on time; tables turned; guests called; guests seated; wines decanted; food served; kitchen informed. Once we were open, at the top of the pyramid stood Basia, the general manager, who came from Ottolenghi in Islington and built up NOPI with infinite amounts of passion, commitment, and know-how. You didn’t need to actually see Basia on the floor to recognize her mark, her boundless upbeat energy, clearly apparent in the movements of the waitstaff and in the smoothness and elegance of the operation. Basia was the embodiment of the restaurant in the first few years and the absolute key to its popularity. More recently she has been replaced by our very own Heidi Knudsen, a different kind of force of nature but with a similarly affirmative presence.

Since we never do things simply at Ottolenghi, NOPI’s kitchen was designed from the start as a slightly peculiar, three-headed creature with responsibilities shared between Sarit (now running her own super-successful restaurant, Honey & Co), Scully, and me: an arrangement that generated a fair bit of confusion among our poor chefs. Even some exasperation, no doubt, when Scully’s garnish of fried chile and baby cilantro was replaced by Sarit’s fresh chile and pomegranate seeds and finally by my “Who needs a garnish at all?” Nevertheless, the aim was to create a strong structure that benefited from my experience, Sarit’s management and food skills, and Scully’s particular style and years of working at Ottolenghi.

Months before the restaurant was due to open, we would all get together once or twice a week at the back table of Ottolenghi on Motcomb Street and get to taste the progress of recent creations. In order to “sign off” on a dish, we’d all need to like it. Anyone who’s ever worked with the Ottolenghi team can tell you how utterly impossible the task is of getting Noam, Cornelia, and me to unanimously agree on anything; adding

all the others to the equation, the food really needed to be pretty spectacular to pass through our little committee. Scully and John Meechan, who worked with Sarit on desserts and bread, rose to the challenge and created some of NOPI's most iconic dishes: twice-cooked baby chicken, beef brisket croquettes, pig's cheeks, strained ricotta, and coffee financiers—they were all there.

On the day NOPI opened to the general public—February 17, 2011—we were all thoroughly exhausted and more than slightly anxious. Anyone who'd tell you that opening a restaurant is a trivial, cheerful kind of matter would be lying through their teeth. Even more difficult, though, is running a new restaurant; the real hardships start when the doors are finally open. It took a long while for the (proverbial, we assure you!) dust at NOPI to completely settle, probably a couple of years. Some key players had changed—Cornelia and Sami had become more involved in the kitchen once Sarit left, Basia was replaced by Heidi—but we think we can now say with confidence that we did manage to realize our dream of a “grown-up” restaurant, and that the vision that was set in motion in early 2011, or, actually, in early 2005, keeps on moving forward and expanding all the time.

Yotam Ottolenghi

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