

FOOD & WINE

Taking time out to cook with the family

BY LISA ROCKMAN

FOR Rita Dixon, the ritual of cooking and eating is something to be celebrated and shared. The kitchen is the heart of her home, and food an expression of love.

But the tradition of eating a family meal together these days is missing one vital ingredient - time. It's something Dixon, a handy home cook and business owner, is pleased to be able to offer people at her cooking workshops.

Dixon gave up a career in the corporate world to follow her passion for food and establish her own business, My Father's Table. Under this banner she hosts cooking classes and has established her own product range. She grew up in a Lebanese family in the southern suburbs of Sydney and it was her father, Gassan Couri, who shared with her the language of food.

"Both of my parents worked long hours so my Dad would do the prep work and I would come home from primary school and get dinner under way," she said. "I have been cooking since I was a very little girl - my father in particular taught me to cook and that is why my business is called My Father's Table. It pays homage to the kind of food we would eat at his table."

At her cooking workshops, Dixon shares with a maximum of 12 people the joy of

food preparation, cooking and conversations about food; the importance of taking time to bring fresh, simple ingredients to life. Her next class is about Lebanese street food at Pork Ewe Deli, Mayfield, on September 18.

"I find that people want to share the responsibility of cooking, and how to cook, with their children but with our busy lifestyles it's really difficult to find beautiful ingredients and to talk about ingredients," Dixon explained.

"At my workshops we have food discussions. It's about discovering, sharing and gathering around a table and taking a few hours to do food prep while talking. Then we eat."

The family recipes Dixon shares at her classes and through her products are from northern Lebanon, where her father's family originated. The flavours (and cooking methods) from that province are rustic and earthy, with three signature ingredients: garlic, lemon and herbs, particularly mint.

She says "about 80 per cent" of the dishes she cooks are vegan or vegetarian. If she does use meat, she is very picky about its provenance, how it was raised and its quality.

"My take is that it's not necessary to make animal proteins the centrepiece of a meal when there are so many other fresh foods and vegetables that you can



PASSION: Rita Dixon left the corporate world behind to establish her own food business, My Father's Table. **Picture:** Jonathan Carroll

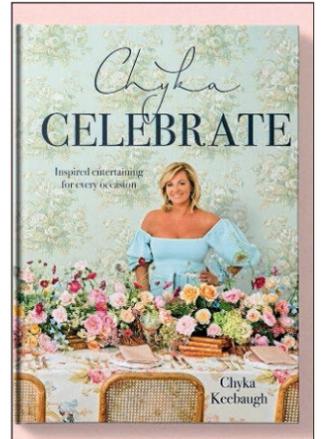
prepare in different ways to become the hero of the dish," she explained.

Her handmade products - based on traditional family recipes - are stocked at Pork Ewe Deli and include falafel,

dips, spice blends, Turkish Delight and Middle Eastern cooking products like garlic paste. For Dixon, it's a labour of love.

"I gave away my corporate life to work on creating a

business that was very close to my heart," Dixon said. "It's all about sharing my passion for food and the beautiful recipes that my Dad passed on to me. It is so very, very special to me."



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