

**ALEXINA ANATOLE**





## ALEXINA ANATOLE

Is a cook who researches, writes and talks about flavour.

She approaches flavour through science as well as how it features in and across various cultures. This is then translated into delicious food. Her first cookbook *Bitter*, part of a five-part series on flavour, will be published by Penguin in September 2023. Followed by *Sweet* in Spring 2024. Currently Alexina also runs a successful monthly supperclub, which sells out within the hour of her pressing sending on her popular newsletter.

Born in Brighton, her family moved to Paris when she was a few months old. As a result she grew up in the city of Light, with baguettes, croissants and *petit gateaux* available on every corner. Aged eight, the family moved back to UK and settled near Brixton in South London and she has never left; "I'm a south Londoner through and through!"

After attending a state school in South London she secured a place to read English at Cambridge University, a transition she likens to heading to Hogwarts: "magical and challenging in equal measure". After graduating, Alexina got an internship at one of the top investment banks, leading to a decade-long career in the City.

Of mixed heritage - granddaughter of chicken farmers from Cambridgeshire, and Saint Lucian grandparents who arrived in London during the time of the Windrush period – Alexina found that it was a challenging environment to exist in and, "truly, I loved to cook and eat."

In 2020, mid pandemic Alexina submitted an application to Masterchef and went on to be a finalist in 2021, where she demonstrated her enthusiasm for grapefruit, love of liquorice and intense dislike of mint-chocolate.

## PHILOSOPHY OF FLAVOUR

*“What delicious food has in common is dimension. And by that, I mean something that lifts it or gives it complexity. This can be the balance of flavours (salty, sweet, sour, bitter, umami), it can be texture, it can be context, it can be emotion — it can be all of these things in concert. It explains why few things boost our enjoyment of food quite like memories do.*

*During Masterchef I was able to hone in on this idea, as a key ingredient to cooking, time, was taken away from me. Think of all the flavour that develops when you cook a hunk of meat low'n'slow in the oven, or you allow something to ferment (think: sourdough, miso paste, yoghurt), or you dry something out (think: sundried tomatoes, parmesan, dried porcini mushrooms). But in a round of MasterChef you typically have around an hour to produce a dish - suddenly, all of those flavour-enhancing tricks are stripped away from you.*

*I quickly surmised that (a) I ought to use the element of surprise and (b) I simply had to knock them over the head with flavour. Which is why I ended up using a lot of strong, bold and bitter flavours during my time on the show: it was simply the easiest way to add dimension to food. Realising this was a bit of an ‘aha’ moment, one that compelled me to dig deeper into bitterness as a flavour profile.”*



# Alexina's approach to food is fun, playful and bursting with flavour! And perfect for a busy lifestyle – as these recipes show!

## Lemon, Orange & Earl Grey Possets

Serves 4 to 6

Possets are one of the greatest desserts: quick, easy and mouth-puckeringly delicious. The Earl Grey and lemon reflects the way that some people take their Earl Grey – with a slice of lemon, no milk – and the orange bridges these two flavours, speaking to the flavour of bergamot in the tea and softening the transition.

Juice of 1 orange

Juice of 1 lemon

125g caster sugar

2 Earl Grey tea bags

425ml double cream

- Use ramekins or little pots/glasses
- Measure out 125ml of citrus juice: half orange, half lemon.
- Add the juice and sugar to a small heavy-bottomed saucepan and place over a high heat. Stir occasionally as you bring the mixture to the boil. Once the mixture is boiling leave it to bubble away for 30 seconds, then remove from the heat and pour into a small glass or container.
- In the same pan, add the cream and the tea bags and heat gently until it comes to the boil. Fish out the teabags then whisk in the syrup. Pour the whole mixture through a sieve into a jug.
- Divide the mixture between the ramekins and allow to cool, then pop in the fridge for a couple of hours to set.

## Watercress & Asparagus 'Orzotto'

Serves 4 to 6

You'd never guess there was no cream in this dish! Orzo is a quick way to create a risotto-style texture.

500g orzo

1 litre vegetable stock

1 bunch of asparagus, trimmed and each spear cut into 3 to 4 pieces

## For the watercress sauce

1 small garlic clove, peeled

200g watercress

200g silken tofu

25g basil leaves, plus extra leaves to serve

2 tbsp olive oil

Zest and juice of ½ lemon

¼ tsp fine salt

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste

- Blanch the asparagus and garlic in well-salted boiling water for a couple of minutes then drain.

- Separately, add the orzo and stock to a wide-based saucepan (add extra salt to the water if your vegetable stock isn't very salty) and simmer gently until the stock is absorbed but the mixture is still quite loose and the pasta is just slightly *al dente*, around 6 minutes. Stir occasionally during this time to make sure the pasta isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan.

- Meanwhile, make the sauce by combining all the ingredients in a blender and whizzing until smooth. It should be a thick-ish consistency.

- Once the orzo has absorbed the vegetable stock, add the sauce to the pasta along with the blanched asparagus and stir on a low heat for 2 to 3 minutes until the sauce is warmed through and the asparagus is fully cooked through. Taste, adjust the seasoning and serve immediately.

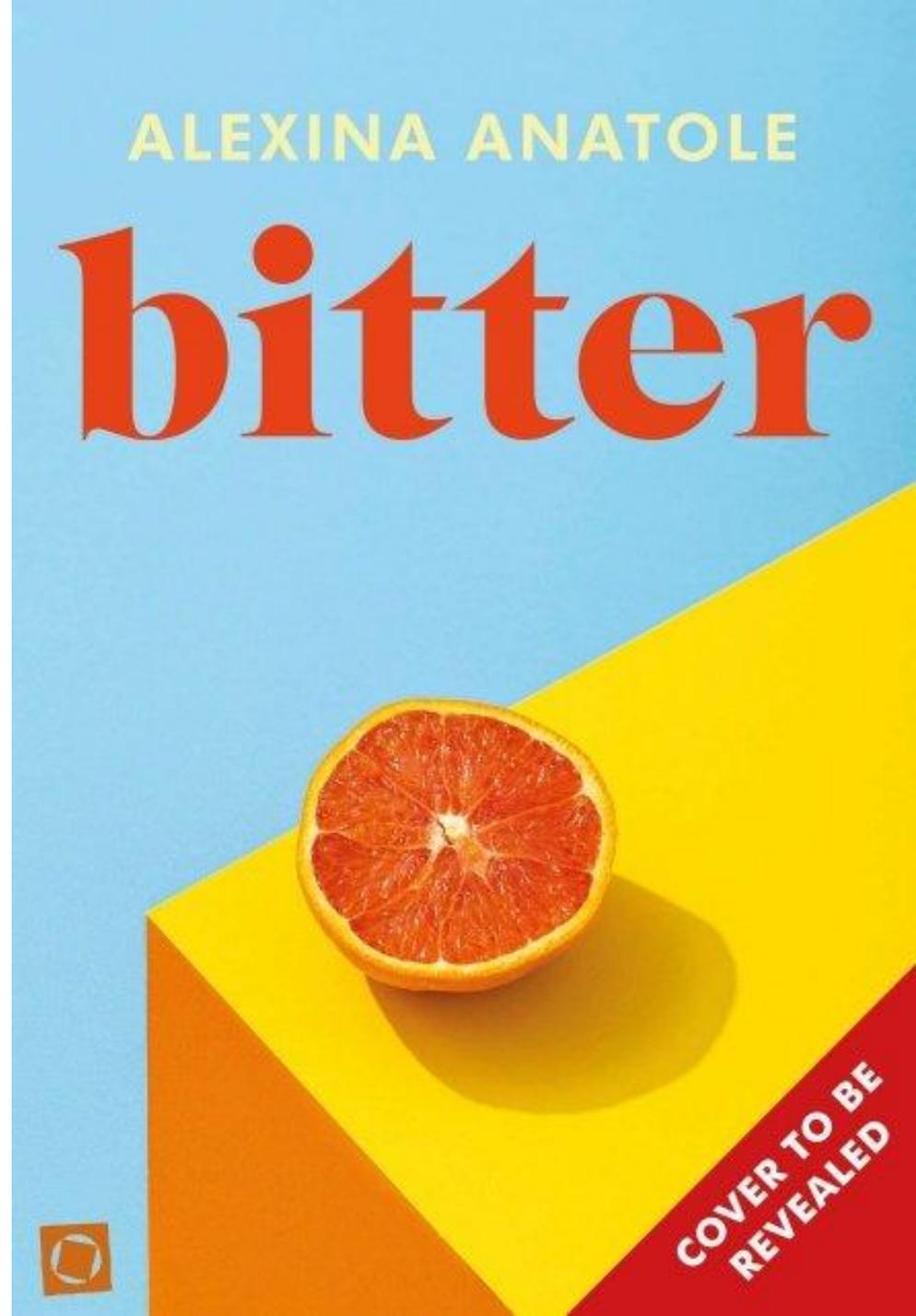
## BITTER + beyond...

Alexina's series of cookbooks are based on the five tastes: *Bitter*, *Sweet*, *Salty*, *Sour* and *Umami*. They will be a step-by-step exploration of flavour.

*Bitter*, released in September 2023 by Penguin, is all about making bitterness more familiar to the home cook.

If you like half a grapefruit in the morning, a square of dark chocolate in the afternoon, and an espresso after dinner; or a pint of beer down your local, cranberry sauce at Christmas and a G&T or negroni for cocktail hour - then you're in the right place!

*Sweet*, out in Spring 2024, will not only help you to understand sugar itself — the history of it and the significance of its role in baking — but, crucially, the formula for creating knockout desserts (hint: the answer is looking beyond sweetness).



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