

**OK!** SPOTLIGHT

**OK!**  
PAKISTAN

# SHAYMA SAADAT

*OK!* Pakistan chats with the incredibly talented Shayma Saadat about her cooking inspirations, entertainment style and more!



**S**hayma Saadat is a cook, food writer, food photographer, food stylist and cookery teacher, who lives in Toronto with her husband and son. She focuses on food from her Pakistani-Afghan heritage, which she refers to as 'Silk Route cuisine'. Each dish that Saadat creates takes us on a beautiful journey, as she reminisces about the events that inspired her to come up with the recipe. Her website Spice Spoon has received acclaim as one of the best food websites and her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail* and other publications worldwide. Saadat helps create a positive image for the people of Pakistan and uses food as a means to bring people from all over the world together. You can follow her culinary journey on Instagram @spicespoon.

**How would you describe your entertaining style?**

**Shayma Saadat:** Unpretentious and non-fussy. When I invite friends over, it's all about getting everyone to gather around the table and get their hands dirty – from scooping up a walnut, herb and feta dip with bread to eating roasted chili prawns with their fingers. I like to serve food family-style so that there are choices for everyone. You'll never find a perfectly set table in my home and even if the theme is a bit formal, there will be lots of odd pieces of mismatched linen; pieces which I have collected over the years. I feel that there is beauty in imperfection and your dining table should be a reflection of yourself and your lifestyle.

**Food brings people together and can break cultural barriers. How do you feel about this statement?**

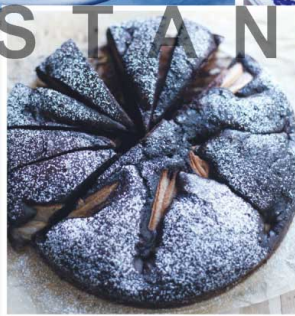
**SS:** Many of my favourite childhood memories are tied to food and it is through these very personal food stories that I want to share with others what Pakistan means to me. I don't want my culture and identity to be circumscribed by the narratives



**“I feel that there is beauty in imperfection and your dining table should be a reflection of yourself and your lifestyle.”**

of violence, which we read about in the media. As a Pakistani who calls Canada home, too, I feel it's my responsibility to show my side of Pakistan to my fellow Canadians – the Pakistan where there are festivals celebrating the 400 varieties of ►





# OK! PAKISTAN

“ One of my favourite things to make during the summer is *kheer* – a rice pudding that I serve alongside roasted Ontario peaches and blueberries. ”

mangos which come into bloom every summer, the Pakistan where a shopkeeper won't let you leave till you've had a sip of tea, or eaten a piece of that flaky samosa he's ordered from the corner shop for you. These are the stories of my Pakistan.

Where do you get your inspiration for different recipes?

SS: My recipes are primarily an expression of my multi-ethnic heritage - Pakistani, Afghan and Persian, which is why I refer to my food as Silk Route cuisine - but the food I make is also a reflection of my life in a richly diverse city like Toronto. You walk around at a farmers' market on a Saturday morning on a hot summer's day and it will inspire any cook's imagination. One of my favourite things to make during the summer is *kheer* – a rice pudding that I serve alongside roasted Ontario peaches and blueberries.

What is the creative process behind each recipe (from conception to product)?

SS: My creative process often starts with the memory of a fragrant dish from my childhood – my maternal grandmother's mint-scented shami kebabs or my mother's lemon meringue pudding. I then pick up a few ingredients from the farmers' market which remind me of that dish and create something which is rooted in family tradition but representative of my life, today, in Toronto. After coming home from the market, I head for the outdoors, clutching my

beloved leather-bound journal and the pen my father-in-law gifted me, and I sit alone and start to piece a recipe together, starting with fragrance and flavour and then building it up from there. I recently made a chocolate and pear spiced cake which was reminiscent of a chocolate and pear pudding my mother used to make for us as children. Creativity to me, is about looking at the world with innocent eyes and learning by tasting, listening and smelling – and translating that child-like joy into a dish I can share with others.

What advice would you give to those who struggle to follow their passion?

SS: Following your passion is actually a tricky topic for a myriad of reasons. I don't think that we necessarily have one true calling in life. For me, the most important part about following your passion is that it has to translate into work, which is financially feasible and sustainable in the long run – especially since my husband and I have a son to take care of. Having said that, I do appreciate that sometimes you're at a point in your life when you feel you want to take that plunge and leave the world of safety and comfort behind. My advice would be to use your talent and passion in a responsible way.

INTERVIEW: ANUSHKA TALPUR  
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY SHAYMA SAADAT





## Rapid Fire Round:

**What makes you quintessentially Pakistani?**

My love for *chaat* – and all things hot, sour, salty, sweet.

**Dream culinary destination?**

A trip with my husband and son to Alba, Italy, during white truffle season.

**Favourite food destination?**

Rome, Lahore and Istanbul.

**Favourite spice?**

Cardamom and saffron.

**Guilty pleasure?**

Walker's Thai Sweet Chili Crisps and Nimco's Chili Chips.

**Most treasured item in your kitchen?**

The silver flatware I inherited from my mother, which was part of her trousseau.

**Tea or Coffee?**

Always a caffè macchiato.

**Hidden talent?**

I speak pretty decent Punjabi.

**Favourite Pakistani dish?**

Haleem with all the accouterments – lime, cilantro, chopped chilies, fresh ginger and bronzed onions, eaten with tandoori roti.

**What makes you happy?**

Enjoying a meal in my home, in my Sunday best, with my friends and family till the wee hours of the morning.

**Favourite Chefs?**

Julia Child, Jacques Pepin, George Malouf, Marcella Hazan, Darina Allen, Najmieh Batmanglij.

**Necessary culinary extravagance?**

A good bottle of Sicilian olive oil.

**Favourite item in your pantry?**

Specialty salt – I particularly love Maldon from the UK, Pink Himalayan from Pakistan and Fleur de Sel from France.