

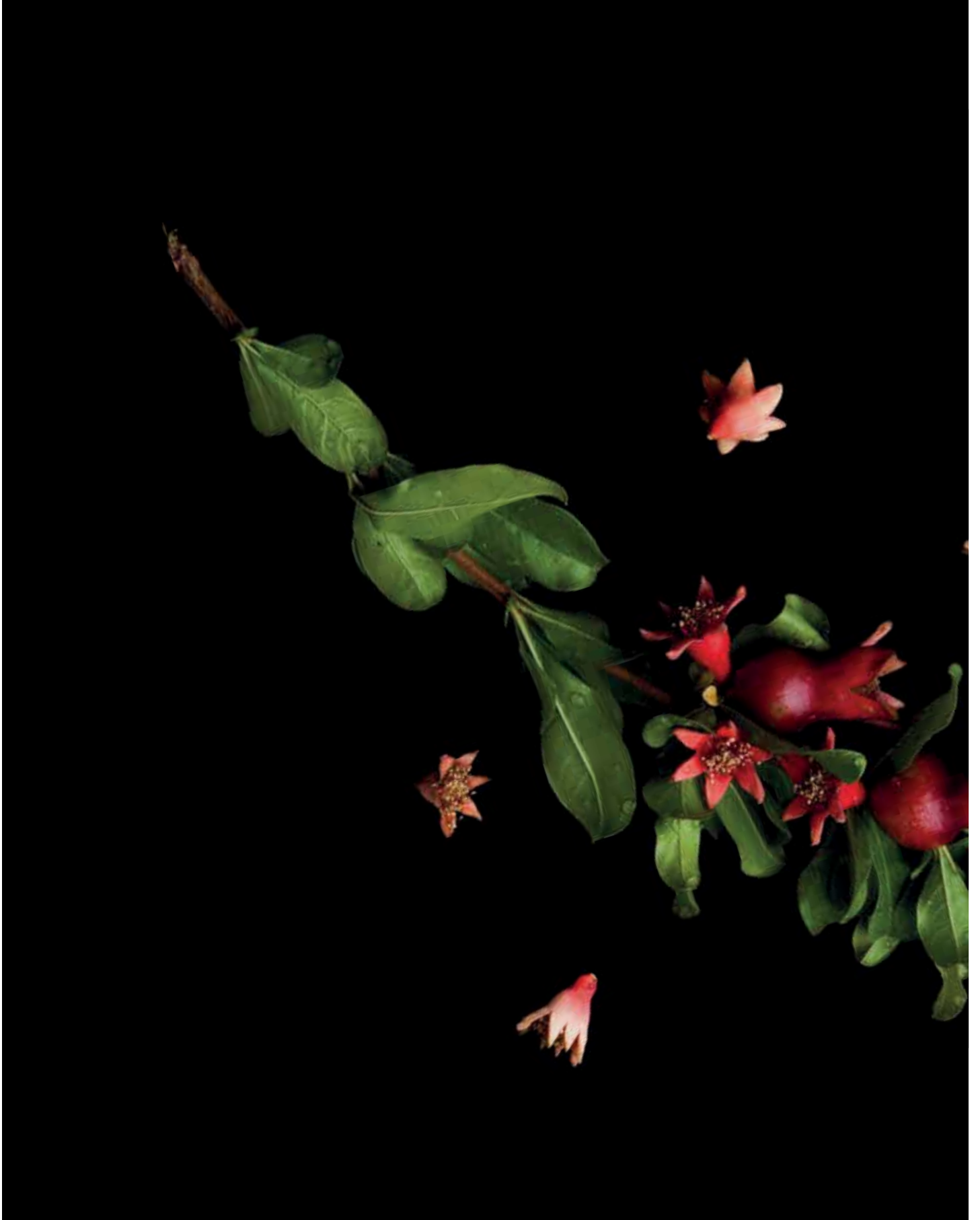
Anna Saldadze & David Gigauri

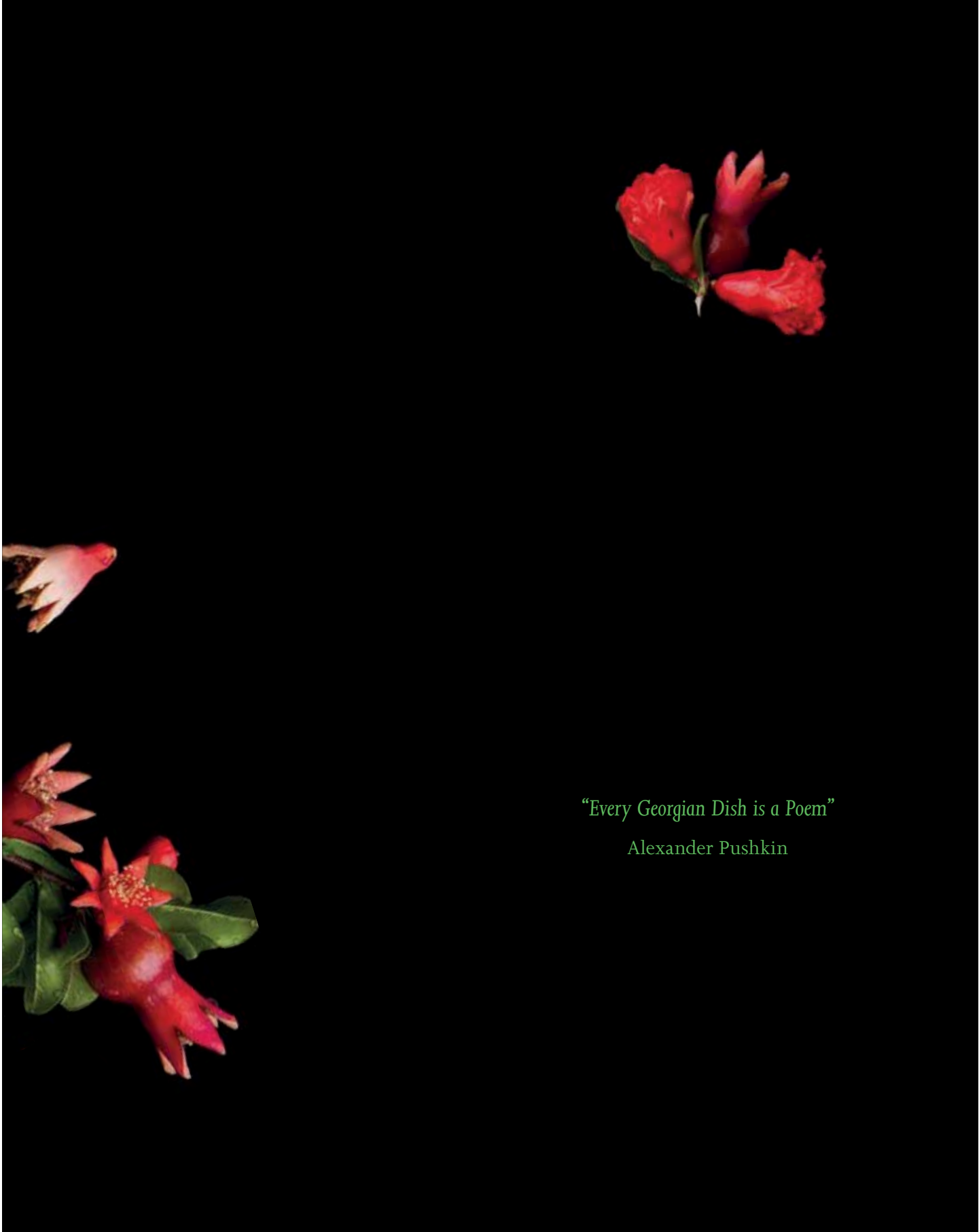
# Be My Guest

The Georgian recipe  
*for* cooking success

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sulakauri  
PUBLISHING





“Every Georgian Dish is a Poem”

Alexander Pushkin



# Preface

Anna Saldadze & David Gigauri

From the times of the Golden Fleece right up to the digital age Georgia has always been a known leader in the arts of hospitality, food and wine. Indeed 'Georgian hospitality' with its highly codified 'supra' (a feast covering the entire table) is the axis and inner sanctum of the nation's talent for charming its guests and invaders (of which there were many). Indeed some have suggested this may be the secret to the nation's very existence today – food as a tool of cultural survival in which the enemy is systematically transformed into a friend.

It can be no coincidence that the nation also gave birth to viniculture eight thousand years ago, developing a similarly rich and diverse indigenous cuisine to accompany its evolving culture of the feast.

Due to the turbulent fate of the country (Georgia is historically one of the most invaded nations on earth) many times Georgians have found themselves living away from their homeland. But for most this never prevented the indulgence of their table DNA, nor a continuing tradition of hospitality in their adopted lands. Not only an excellent means of adapting to environment and cementing friendship, it helped keep their personal identity alive. It is no surprise that many entered the hospitality industry - such as the celebrity restaurateur Gogi Tchitchinadze; Nicholas Eristoff (Eristavi) the man behind Eristoff vodka; and Alexander Tarsaidze who introduced Caucasian Shashlik to the Waldorf-Astoria group of hotels in New York. For them food is a universal language, which with aid of a few glasses of Saperavi red or a personalised cocktail, can make the barriers fall. A good Georgian 'tamada' (toast maker) will employ the combined talents of story-telling, flattery and full-on charm to make guests

quickly forget their differences, open up and remember again the life-enhancing qualities that a meal in its essence provides. See the semi-fictional essay 'How I discovered Tamadism' by Michel Eltchaninoff on page 114.

This book spells out the favourite recipes of Georgia's more exceptional expatriates, along with their stories, and in their language (hence the occasional imperfections in the English). While they achieved fame and success in different fields, one has to remember that their accomplishments were always matched back at home by skills in the kitchen or at the table - for which they were equally remembered by their guests. For instance Prince Bagration, the illustrious general of the Napoleonic Wars, is famous for throwing sumptuous dinners for his troops, regardless of whether the battle was won or lost. George Balanchine, the founder of the New York City Ballet, arrived in America on a mission to make the entire continent fall in love with him and coriander. He surely succeeded with the first and probably the second.

The recipes themselves are either authentically Georgian; improvised versions of the originals; or personal dedications to Georgians themselves - like Lobster à la Bagration by the 'King of Chefs and Chef of Kings,' Marie-Antoine (Antonin) Carême.

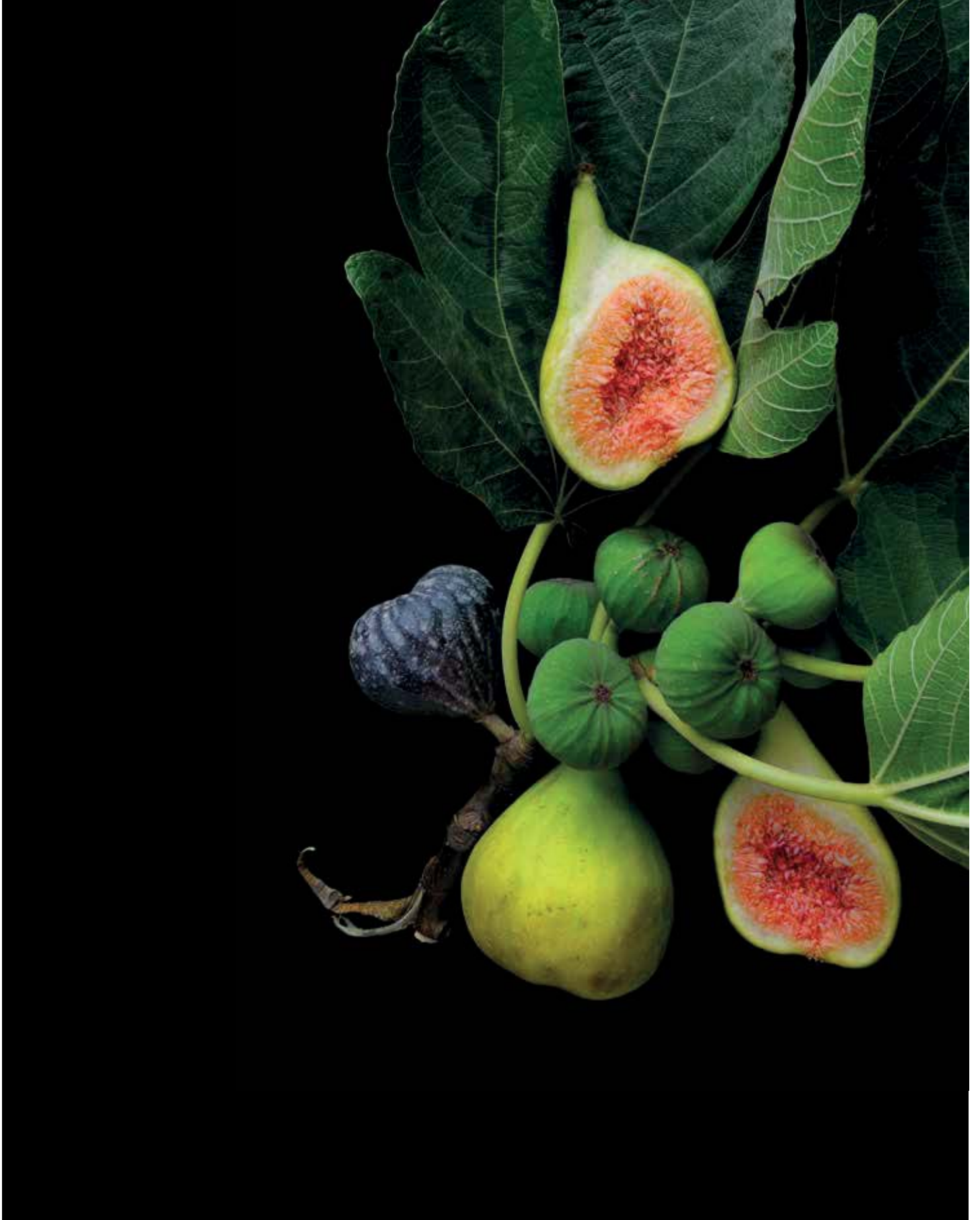
But in truth this national epicurism stems from a simple fact, an instinctive love of people and the dramas they create. The Georgian table has always served as a superb domestic theatre for portrayals of great heroism, romanticism or foolishness, related in the safety of laughing faces, presided over by the delicious aromas of food.



*“In these terrific Georgians we had met more than our match. They could out-eat us, out-drink us, out-dance us, out-sing us. They had the fierce gaiety of the Italians, and the physical energy of the Burgundians. Everything they did was done with flair.”*

John Steinbeck





# Every recipe is a signature

Keti Bakradze,  
Chef patron of “The Dining Room”  
Tbilisi, Georgia

George Balanchine, Prince Bagration, Salome Andronikova... every Georgian has undoubtedly heard these names, admired their achievements and felt a small twinge of pride knowing they hailed from their homeland. Shooting stars, glowing somewhere over the rainbow, I always asked myself what kind of people they might have been, what were their passions? What were their fears? Discovering their recipes gave me a unique opportunity to get an exclusive insight into their personalities, as cooking, after all, is a very individual and private matter. It is all about you and your relationship with others, your taste, but also your appreciation of the things that surround you. Like body language, it is something unique, it's one's personal signature.

It was a great privilege and pleasure for me to work with their recipes. Even if you do not know that Tamara Toumanova was one of the greatest ballerinas of her generation, when you read her recipes you sense a very rigorous and demanding person, for whom everything is about physical performance, well-being and efficiency. With Balanchine, it is all about generosity, passion and friendship. Whether it's the Fast Soup he used to prepare for himself and his corps de ballet during long rehearsals, or Easter Paska and Koulichi, they all intended to gather people together around some common cause. Like a pointillist artist placing dots of different colours one next to another in order to create a picture, Balanchine mixes his Georgian influ-



ences with all the others gained throughout his adventurous life in Russia, France, Monaco and the United States.

Next to these artists of perfection, it was almost touching to see George Papashvily writing about very traditional Georgian dishes and using his local variations of them, the ones he inherited directly from his family. That is where I realised what it must have meant to him, as an immigrant thousands of miles away from home to cook exactly the same recipes as his relatives were doing in his little village. This gesture goes far beyond the simple act of cooking - it is an act of memory.

As a professional cook, I tried to interpret these intentions and make them visually complementary – with one exception, however: Lobster à la Bagration by Antonin Carême. Since its creation it was always considered more than a dish, rather a culinary work of art. For me it has more to do with symbolism than with a mere recipe for a lobster. That is why I allowed myself to leave it as such, as a representation, as part of imagination, as a legend or a tale of what is woven so deep into Georgian souls.

# Until you have seen Georgia you have seen nothing...

John Steinbeck  
*A Russian Journal*, 1948

In order to put all these culinary experiences of Georgians abroad into context, it is worth noting the reverse – the gastronomic observations of foreigners in Georgia. A fine example of this is a report by the Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winning author John Steinbeck and pioneer of photo-journalism Robert Capa, who visited Georgia together in 1947. Their account is published in the book *A Russian Journal*.

“Wherever we had been in Russia, in Moscow, in the Ukraine, in Stalingrad, the magical name of Georgia came up constantly. People who had never been there, and who possibly never could go there, spoke of Georgia with a kind of longing and a great admiration. They spoke of Georgians as supermen, as great drinkers, great dancers, great musicians, great workers and lovers. And they spoke of the country in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea as a kind of second heaven. Indeed, we began to believe that most Russians hope that if they live good and virtuous lives, they will not go to heaven, but to Georgia, when they die.”

Their journey from Western Georgia to Tbilisi was accompanied by continuous invitations to dine. In true Georgian style all meals were an all-embracing affair involving traditional toasting, dancing and, naturally, wine. Saying no is not an option in Georgia, whether you are being welcomed by an official host or a

stranger, as our American guests found out: "... the manager of the farm caught up with us...He asked us to stop by at his house for a bite to eat, God help us!...I think it is the only meal or dinner we ever attended where fried chicken was an hors d'oeuvre, and where each hors d'oeuvre was half a chicken. It went from there to a cold boiled chicken over which was poured a cold green sauce, delicious with spices and sour cream. And then there were cheese sticks and tomato salads and Georgian pickles. And then there was a savoury stew of lamb, with a thick sauce. And then there was a kind of fried country cheese. There were loaves of flat Georgian rye bread piled up like poker chips, and the center of the table was loaded with fruit, with grapes, and pears, and apples. And the frightful thing about it was that everything was delicious. The flavours were all new, and we wanted to taste all of them. And were nearly dying of overeating."

"The Georgians we met are like Welsh. In any group of, say, ten men, there would be at least seven fine voices. And at this table now the singing broke out, magnificent choral singing. They sang the songs of the Georgian shepherds of the mountains, and the old fighting songs. And the voices were so good, and the chorus was so good, that they seemed to be almost professional group, and they were not. And then the tempo quickened, and two men took chairs, and turned them over their knees, and used them for drums, and the dancing started. The women came out of the kitchen and danced, and the men leaped up from the table and danced. And the music was the chorus of male voices, and the patted chair bottoms, and the clapping of hands. It was magnificent dance music. Sometimes a man would dance alone, and sometimes a woman alone, and sometimes they danced together, in formal quick steps, traditional dances of Georgia."

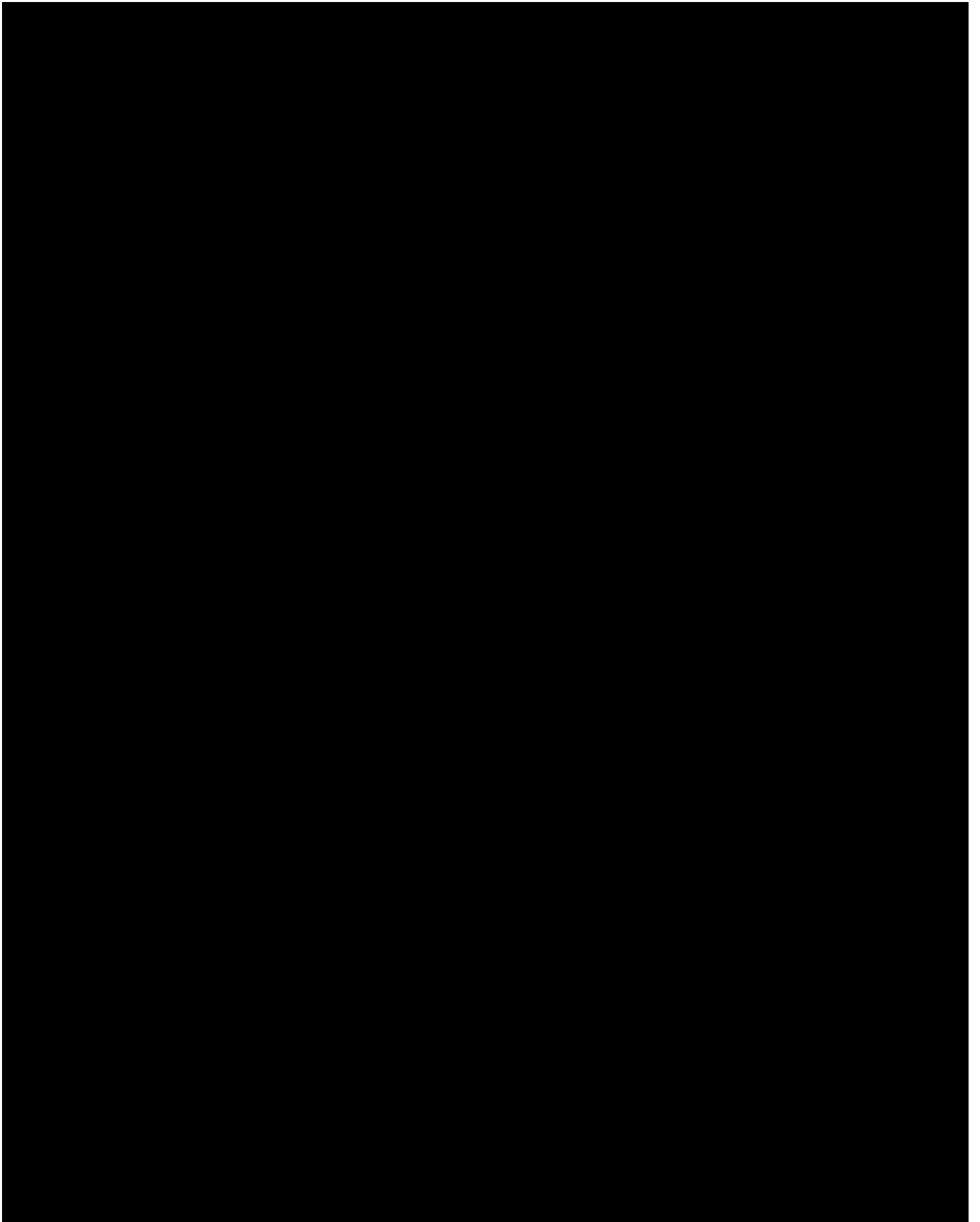
As Steinbeck and Capa reached Tbilisi, an official farewell dinner was organised in their honour by the Georgian intelligentsia. "We were so tired", Steinbeck recalls, "and we did not want to hear speeches, particularly intellectual speeches. We did not want to think about art, or politics, or economics or international relations, and particularly we did not want to eat or drink... The dinner started, as all such dinners do, with a few stuffy speeches, but the Georgian nature, and the Georgian genius, couldn't tolerate it, and it went to pieces almost immediately.

They just are not stuffy people, and they could not contrive to be for very long. Singing broke out, individual singing and group singing. And dancing broke out. And the wine passed. And Capa did his famous kazatzki, which is not graceful, but it is remarkable that he can do it at all... I recall trying to do a Georgian dance with a handsome woman who turned out to be the greatest Georgian dancer in the world. I recall group singing in the street finally, and that the militia came to see what the singing was about, and joined the chorus... We had a wonderful time, and this dinner which we had looked forward to with horror and reluctance turned out to be a magnificent party.”

*“It is a magical place, Georgia, and it becomes dream-like the moment you have left it. And the people are magic people. It is true that they have one of the richest and most beautiful countries in the world and they live up to it. And we understood thoroughly now why Russians had always said to us, “Until you have seen Georgia you have seen nothing.”*

John Steinbeck

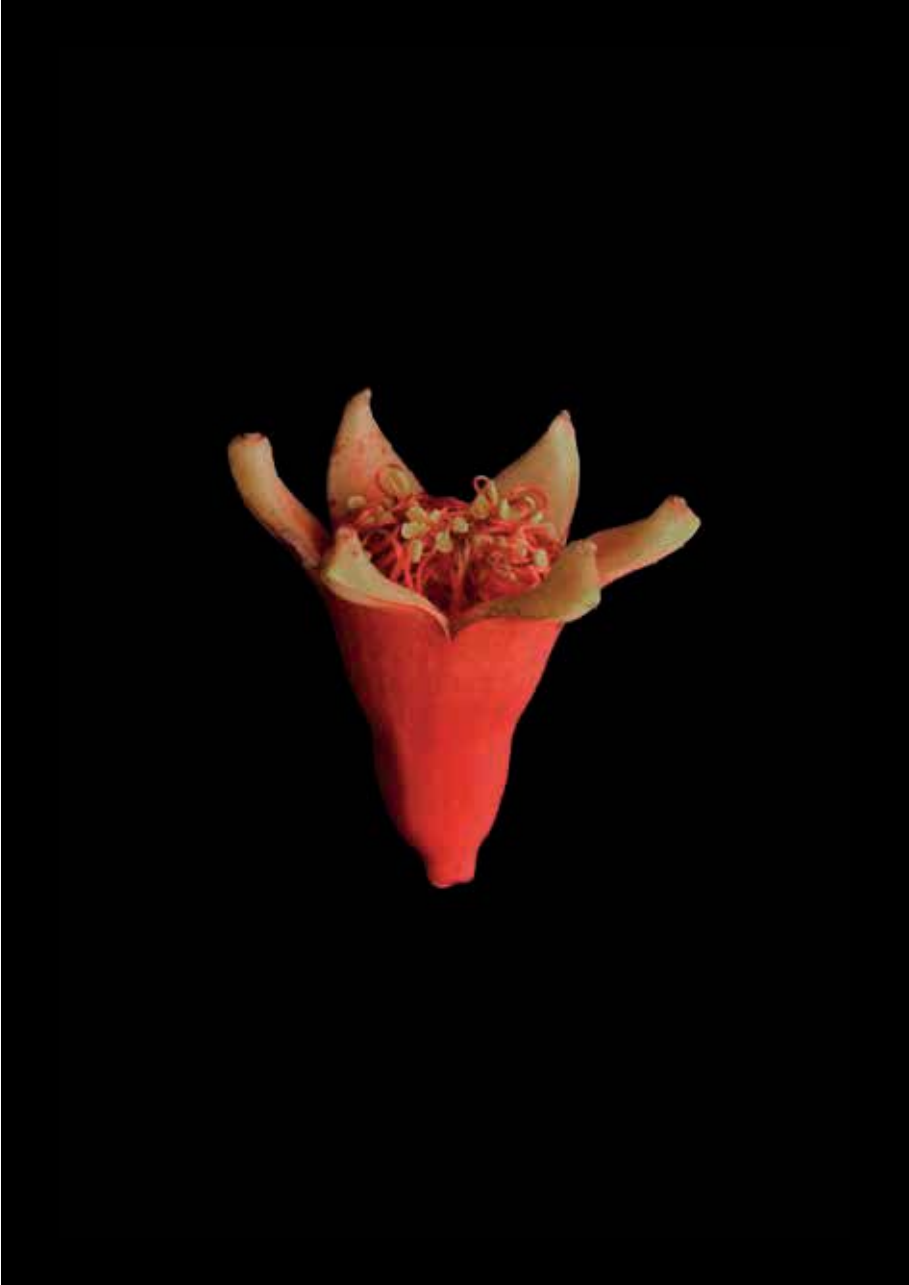






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# Salome Andronikova

*“Cooking can be more than good fun.  
It makes you improvise, explore your imagination.  
It can in every sense be a truly creative act.”*

Salome Andronikova



Known as the ‘Muse of the Silver Age’, Salome was a prominent socialite in the literary and artistic salons of pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg. Member of the eminent Georgian Andronikashvili family, she became an inspiration and subject for some of the greatest artists and poets of the age, including Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Zinaida Serebriakova etc. In the aftermath of the Second World War, she published a cookbook *The Good Food from Abroad*, which featured her favourite dishes from Georgia and other countries she lived in. Published in England, the recipes were adapted to limited ingredients available in post-war Europe.

"I am neither a professional cook nor a scientific expert on cookery. But when after the war I returned to (England) and found conditions so radically changed that there was no question of resuming the old way of life, with servants doing all the work for me, I realized that, whether I liked it or not, I would have to do the cooking myself. This was quite a problem, for I knew literally nothing about it. By now, however, I have become a fairly good cook. I entertain a great deal and all my friends seem to enjoy my dinners."

Salome Andronikova



# Fried Aubergines



*“All my life I believed myself to be a muse,  
but in the end turned out to be merely a cook”*

Salome Andronikova