

[BY THE] LETTER

AUTHOR PROFILES:
DEB ROUSSOU AND PHIL SCRIMA



DEB ROUSSOU GREW UP

in the kitchen of the family restaurant where every meal was prepared from scratch. Her father, a trained chef, inspired her love of the culinary world. “He was the most amazing cook,” she says. “He knew how to really bring out the flavor in foods.”

Today, instead of in a restaurant kitchen, you are more likely to find Deb Roussou ambling up and down the aisles of her local grocery store, checking food

ingredient labels while doing research for her latest recipes.

Author of several cookbooks with almost a million copies in print in five languages, Roussou says, “People think being a cookbook writer is a glam job, but it’s hard work. You write on tight deadlines and you have to take the work as it comes in.”

In her role as a freelance corporate food consultant, Roussou works under contract for manufacturers of small kitchen appliances that want to package cookbooks with their product. Some of her projects have included recipe books for the Foreman Grill and Cuisinart blender. “In the cookbook world, you have to do both (corporate and private publishing) unless you’re a celebrity,” she says.

While a product is still in development, she tests and analyzes its capabilities before developing recipes. “Every project has some sort of a thematic challenge—grilling, low-fat recipes or quick meals,” says Roussou. “For me, it’s still all about the flavor. Just because we’re doing something with steam that is low fat, doesn’t mean I want to sacrifice flavor.”

Aspiring cookbook writers should consider several factors. “Some of the corporations will use ‘From the Test Kitchen of _____,’ instead of the author’s name,” says Roussou. “If you’re trying to build a repertoire of published credits to add to your resume, it’s nice to have a book with your name on it.”

Additionally, international cookbooks commonly use both

imperial and metric measurement standards, so authors need to be familiar with conversion. Thinking beyond the current season to recipes that can be enjoyed year-round is another challenge.

Roussou admits the life of a freelance writer is not a particularly balanced one. “I’m working on two books at the same time because that’s how the contracts came in, so other things have been put on hold,” she says. “I just shipped a product to Hawaii so I can continue working while I’m on vacation.”

The newest book, *350 Best Vegan Recipes*, published by Robert Rose Publishing, dedicates 400 pages to a variety of unique and tantalizing culinary delights, from Nori Rolls and French Herbed Strata to Mocha Cupcakes with Almond Icing.

“My kitchen became a science lab and my experiments the basis for writing the cookbook,” she says. “I realized a lot of these alternatives aren’t generally available.” For example, she created a sun-dried tomato herbed Greek soy feta cheese in olive oil by first freezing and then thawing and brining tofu as a substitute for dairy cheese.

Roussou’s best advice to wannabe cookbook writers? Be specific in recipe instructions. “Look at a good cookbook and see how it’s written,” she says. “Then look at a bad cookbook and see how it’s written. The devil is in the details.”

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Claudia Mosby is fascinated by the power of words to influence, inspire and heal. She became a freelance feature writer so she could tell people’s stories. She lives in the North State and leads workshops, classes and retreats on writing and wellness. Visit her website at www.writinginsideout.org.