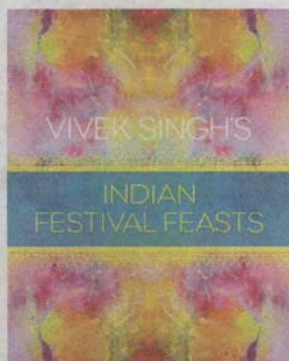


Books



INDIAN FESTIVAL FEASTS

by Vivek Singh (Absolute Press, £26)

Aimed at: students of India, people with big parties coming up

Not just a recipe book, but a commentary of India's finest festivals and the food that goes with them

'I wasn't looking forward to writing another cookbook,' sighs Vivek Singh (below). 'I wanted to go a bit deeper, so when I had this idea, it seemed to really fit.'

This idea is a book about some of the festivals in India, part-history, part-social commentary and of course, some recipes. Singh wanted to acknowledge the importance of these festivals to him, even as the world changes.

'I have great memories of the Vaisakhi festival in Delhi,' he says. 'The food is always central to celebrations and having a great time. Think of ingredients like tomatoes which have only been in India 150

years, potatoes and chillies brought by the British - everything changes, the world is a melting pot and I aim to be connected to the past but also live in the present.'

There are stories, explanations and recipes from 10 festivals including Eid al-Fitr, Diwali and Navroze. The food is sensational but some of it is not easy, and some of it will not be to every taste. There are not many cookbooks which have a warning stating that some dishes will take years to fall in love with.

'Not everything is to be loved,' he laughs. 'I think that's an important life lesson. Some of the sweets require a specialised skill and take years of practice. But that was a choice. I didn't want to dumb

down and make it all classics because that wouldn't be honest.'

All that said, there is no shortage of dishes that are easy to make - chickpea village curry, tandoori chicken and a wedding custard to name three. And there are also snacks and hand food, some of which is from his favourite festival, Holi.

'Perhaps not my favourite in terms of food,' he explains. 'But because it is very much an anything-goes event. India is a very hierarchical society, and I remember it as the only time when teachers would let their hair down.'

'Most of the festivals have some element of abstinence or fasting - but Holi definitely doesn't. You can just really enjoy yourself, so that certainly appeals to me.'

