

## BARCELONA – 9<sup>TH</sup> GOURMAND BEST IN THE WORLD COOKBOOK AWARDS 2003

By Josephine Bacon



The Ninth Gourmand World Cookbook Awards were handed out at a magnificent reception and gala dinner held at the Llotja de Mar on February 27, 2004. This imposing building near the harbour, which was once an indoor market, dates from 1385. Though the entrance is 17<sup>th</sup> century baroque. The building also served as an art school, among whose illustrious students were Picasso and Joan Miro. It has been sensitively modernized, so that despite the vast arches and cathedral-like ceilings, it was warm as toast for the lightly clad diners in evening dress.

The awards were bestowed for the Best in the World Cookbooks for 2003. There were around 50 categories, each of which had a winner and a runner-up or honourable mention, so 100 worthy laureates mounted the rostrum to be greeted by Edouard Cointreau, the organizer and promoter. The guest judges were Dan Gifford, Fatima Hal and three celebrity chefs, Chef le Divellec, Chef Roland Mazère, and probably the most famous of them all, Chef Wan.

The guests were treated to Spanish *tapas*, little appetizers, during the prize giving, and sat down to a gourmet meal afterwards, consisting of creamed cauliflower soup with caviar, pasta with truffles and superb Spanish milk-fed lamb.

There is no room to list all of the winners, but among my personal favourites, from the books the guests could view before we sat down to dinner were: *Cucina Portugees* by Carla Kentgens, published by Unieboek in the Netherlands, *Maroc, la Cuisine de ma Mère*, by Alain Jaouhari, published by Minerva, Switzerland, *Mat för gudar: libanesisk matkultur fran Beirut Café* (in Swedish) by Donald Boström, published by Wahlström and Widstrand). I think it is no coincidence that all of these were books about a national cuisine published outside the country in question and in a foreign language, there is nothing like nostalgia for whetting the appetite.

Many of the books had spectacular photography such as the winner of the “Best Asian Cookbook” award, *Asian Cook* by Terry Tan, photography by Michael Paul, published by Jacqui Small and the Brazilian *O Cozinheiro e O Mar*, the cuisine of Edinjo Engel and the Restaurante Manaca, photography by Romulo Faldini.

Barcelona, with its love of food and merry-making was the perfect backdrop for the awards, and many of us spent time during the day, admiring the glorious displays of fruits and vegetables and the vast array of fresh fish and cured hams in the magnificent central food market, the *Mercat de la Boquería*, just off the Ramblas.