

BARE

£2.80

BEING AND WELL

**NICE
EYES**

**STRESS RELIEF
TOP TEN SPAS**

**SEVENTY
TWISTED
GIFTS**

MOON
THE DARK SIDE

NIGHT LIFE
SLEEP THROUGH IT

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FEAST

IT'S ABOUT SHARING – NOT JUST FOOD, BUT OUR TIME, THOUGHTS AND NEED TO BE TOGETHER.



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: TABLE DESIGNED BY LAURENS KOLK. BLACK TERRA NEGRA PLATES, £9.95, FROM THE CONRAN SHOP. BEAKERS, PART OF 10-PIECE SET, £175, BY SHEILA HAY, FROM VESSEL

RAMADAN, WEDDINGS, HANUKKAH, THE SPRING EQUINOX, Moses' flight from Egypt, a bumper harvest, the return of the prodigal son. Whatever our culture, there are plenty of events to celebrate – and the way we have traditionally done this is with food. From the gastronomic orgies of Ancient Greece and Rome to the slaughtering of the Paschal lamb, feasts have punctuated civilisation.

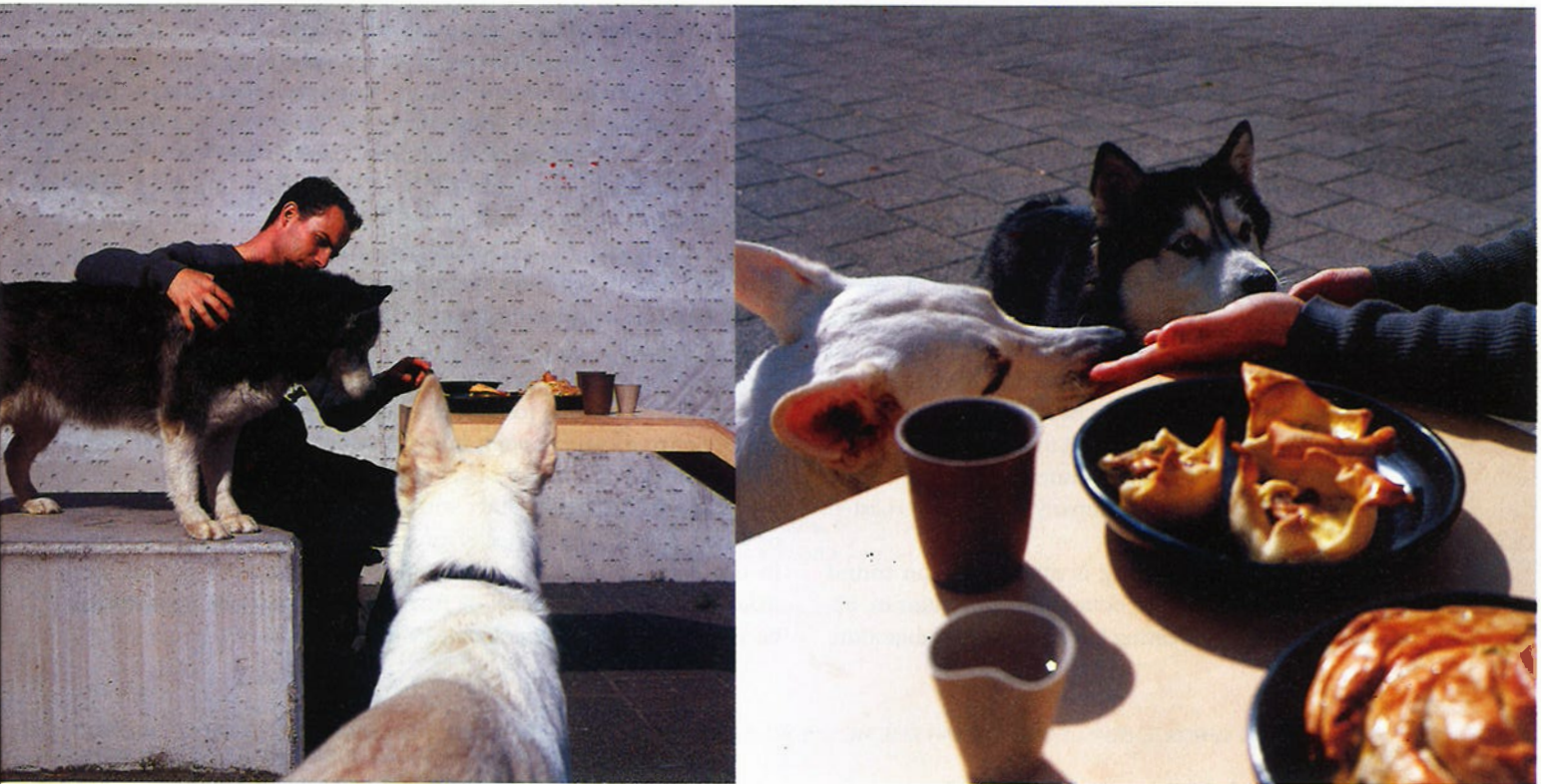
Yet, as fast food gets faster and the stabilising institutions of Church and family break down, the ritual of the sumptuous communal meal struggles to survive. In a recent survey of British families, one in 20 admitted that they ate together only once a year – at Christmas. A third of those questioned said they found it 'more relaxing' to eat in front of the television than chat around the dinner table. The reason, according to 70 per cent of respondents, was that their lives were too busy. A feast can celebrate many things, but is principally a celebration of time.

Feasting is a way of formalising pleasure – and making it last for hours, or even days. Whether it respects an event, a place, a race, a deity, an animal, a relationship or a human soul, a shared meal encourages us not just to eat, but to talk, reflect, philosophise and connect with family and friends. It can be a time to slow down and

be quiet, a respite from rushed breakfasts, power lunches, TV snacking and solitary grazing. What all feasts share, as well as the promise of plenty, is the harmony of all those present. Though rooted in the idea of sustenance, a feast appeals to higher instincts. At a banquet, attendance is sufficient, but a feast commands us to participate – it is an event, not just a happening, a stretching of minds as well as stomachs. A feast turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, the mundane into the joyous, the worldly into the spiritual.

In Plato's time, the feast or 'symposium' of the Ancient Greeks revolved as much around intellect as it did gastronomy. First came the eating, with vast quantities of fish and meat flavoured with honey, vinegar, anchovies, red wine and thyme. Stage two began with a slave boy washing each guest's feet before the alcohol was poured. Sour and salty *tragemata* (like tapas) were served to stimulate thirst, while draughts of wine, beer and mead instigated debate. Political speeches were practised, hymns to Dionysus sung and Platonic ideas promulgated. As Louis Pasteur commented centuries later, 'There is more philosophy in a bottle of wine than in any book'. At Plato's feasts, the guests philosophised so much that their slaves had to carry them home.

WELL, EVERY NOW AND AGAIN AT LEAST



FEASTS FOR ANIMALS

Our relationship with animals is highly complex. We dominate them and yet are in awe of them. Seeing them as furry humans who cannot answer back, we use them as surrogate children, for companionship, and sometimes even as therapy for sick children in hospitals. We encourage our guard dogs to attack intruders, and then have the courts execute other dogs who can't tell the difference between an innocent child and a burglar. When we are happy with our pets, we give them treats like chocolate – and Gucci dog baskets. Perhaps we should try a more appropriate way of expressing our love for our pets. Animals enjoy feasting. They eat, play and enjoy each other's bodies – just like we do – and they have their own drugs, such as catnip. Making your own pet food can be healthier than buying dried or tinned varieties. You already play together – and maybe sleep together – why not feast together? Cook a meal you can share, gorge yourselves, then both curl up in a warm corner and snooze.

DOG CAKE

Take three hungry dogs...

- 2 eggs
- 200ml milk
- 200ml water
- 250g flour
- 2 crushed cloves of garlic
- 300g grated cheese
- 4 tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 sweet pepper
- 1 sheet of frozen dough
- 1 egg yolk

First, grease a baking tin and pre-heat the oven to 200°C. Then mix the eggs, water and milk together in a large bowl. Sift in the flour and stir slowly to avoid lumps. Keep stirring until the mixture thickens. Add the garlic, cheese and parsley. Slice the pepper into rings and lay them on the bottom of the baking tin, then pour in the mixture on top. Cut out a bone shape from the dough, brush it with the egg yolk and place on top of the mixture. Bake in the oven for 50 minutes.

The garlic protects dogs from worms, ticks, fleas and mites, and the parsley combats the ensuing garlic breath. Parsley is good for bad dog breath in general – humans take note – whether due to illness or tinned food. Another way to keep your pet mite- and flea-free is to hang rosemary or eucalyptus around its collar, or lay it in the place where they sleep.

BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: BURR ELM P LATER, £79, FROM HARRODS. BEECH WOOD NUT BOWL, £43, BY LIAM O'NEIL, FROM DAVID MELLOR. HORN BEAKER, £15; HORN SALAD SERVERS, £30, ALL FROM NOM. BOWL, £93.60, BY DON WHITE, FROM DAVID MELLOR. COCONUT LEAF PLATE, £15 FOR 6, FROM MINT

