

From Beirut to London in 100 Dishes

MENACS Book Talk & Drinks Reception with Mona & Sebastian Usher
(BBC Middle East Analyst)

18.30 on Thursday, 28 May 2026, in Arts A108, University of
Sussex, Falmer, Brighton

You are warmly invited to what promises to be a fantastic soir ee with Mona and Sebastian Usher, co-authors of [Never Mind the Hummus](#), hosted by [Dr Feras Alkabani](#), Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Co-Director of the Middle East and North Africa at Sussex (MENACS).

Listen to Mona and Sebastian Usher (BBC Middle East Correspondent, Editor and Analyst) tell us about the story behind their book, life and work between the UK and Lebanon (and the wider region). Enjoy a drink and sample authentic freshly-made hummus and other Lebanese delights. Engage with the authors and get your signed copy for  35 ([retail price:  45](#)).

When: Thursday, **28 May 2026; 18.30** Drinks reception; talk begins at **19.00**

Where: **Arts A108**, Faculty of Media, Arts and Humanities (MAH), University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RH

How to get here: Download the University of **Sussex Campus map** [here](#); see this [page](#) for more details on how to get to the Sussex campus.

About the Authors:

Mona Usher

Born in Beirut in the 1960s, Mona missed out on the glamour of the city in its jetset heyday. All her growing up was during the dark days of the Lebanese Civil War. Mona lived in a very beautiful little seaside neighbourhood in Beirut that was devastated by the Civil War but her father refused to move the family away and they soldiered on for 15 years.

Educated in private school, then at the Lebanese American university where she got a degree in Art. Mona moved to London after meeting her husband, Sebastian - been there for 35 years.

Mona has worked in many prestigious institutions - the Lebanese Embassy in London, Al Hayat newspaper, the BBC and has run her own very successful company for over 20 years.

Never Mind the Hummus, the book was always a dream, which started the day she landed in Heathrow and made her first meal for the house of Usher, who more than lived up to their name. 35 years on, she finally put that book together and it is one of her best achievements after her 2 kids.

Sebastian Usher

Sebastian Usher has been reporting from across the Middle East for more than thirty years - on its political, social and cultural shifts. His interest in the region was sparked by holidays in Lebanon with his grandparents when he was a child. That led him to take a job at the American University of Beirut straight after university where he was witness to the kidnapping of colleagues and friends. For the past twenty years, he's worked for the BBC as a correspondent, editor and analyst focusing on the Middle East.

More about the book

When I left Lebanon for England more than thirty years ago, all I brought from Beirut were a few over elaborate dresses and a doorstopper of an old Arabic cookbook, which was anything but. It contained the one element of my Lebanese culture that was essential - the scents and flavours of my childhood and early youth, which brightened what would otherwise have been a bleak landscape of boredom and war. In London, it was how I first communicated with my new world when my English was still halting and sparse. It gave me a power that helped me deal with all the challenges I faced. Later, it gave me a livelihood, too, as I turned what had been a hobby and a pleasure into a job that freed me from the constraint of offices and institutional hierarchies. I named my company after my second daughter, Samara. The small blue van I used for weddings and parties had and still has a cooking pot as a logo - and on its side, I perhaps unwisely engraved what we offer at Samara cuisine, including Shishas and Belly dancers - something that still stops traffic more than fifteen years later. And all through those years, I nursed the ambition of putting down all I knew of my beloved Lebanese food in a book, which would contain my favourite recipes and some of the stories and memories with which I associated them. This, finally, is that book. I am not trying to re-invent the dishes of my birthplace, but rather to present the best of what Lebanon has to offer through recipes that I have honed over decades of practice, first in Beirut and now for many years in London. I am very traditional about food - I prefer simplicity above all. I want to be reminded of the air high in the mountains above Beirut when I grill spiced meat and the little fish restaurants on rickety platforms into the Mediterranean beneath the Casino du Liban when I cook a sea bass. My aim with this book is to provide a concise guide to all that's good in Lebanese food, but also to give a scent and a taste of world in which I grew up - a Lebanon in its prime, of which I had the briefest glimpse before it was all but extinguished by war. Even now - as the lights are literally out across the country because of economic collapse - comfort and pleasure can still be found in

the unchanging, addictive panoply of flavours in a well-made mezze. Here, in this book, you can find those pleasures waiting for you - it's taken me half a lifetime to get it right. Now, it's your turn to share this distillation of a cuisine that is truly one of the wonders of the world.

More details [here](#). Order your copy online [here](#), or get your signed copy directly from the authors at the event for the discounted rate of £35 on the day (retail price: £45).