

# Kajsa Ståhl

November 2019

Be Like Teflon is a book by Jasleen Kaur, commissioned by Panel for Glasgow Women's Library and published in 2019. Its form, designed by Kajsa Ståhl of Åbåke, is a direct result of its content – a unique collection of recipes, reflection and resistance.

Focusing on the act of preparing and eating food, Be Like Teflon foregrounds the voices of women of Indian heritage living in the UK. As with all conversations, whether around a table, in front of the TV, travelling by car, or preparing food, the voices occupy different spaces, some loudly present, some quietly distant. Here, Jasleen makes space for them all:

“Whether it's around a kitchen table or from the pages of a book, hearing the voices of resilient women is like having the companionship of a sister or mother – tender and sustaining, like maha di dhal on a sodden wet day in Glasgow. With that innate knowledge of measuring by eye, atta, chawal, mirch, comes the wisdom of a woman's experience, as she tells us to, ‘be like teflon, be like teflon, don't let anything stick.’”



## ***Kajsa, how did the brief to work with Jasleen on Be Like Teflon develop?***

Very personal discussions about life and family is where it all started. In a way, the brief was us talking about Jasleen's family.

## ***The book opens with ‘A Recipe for a Book.’ How important was the focus of cooking when approaching design and layout?***

Although the book is not only about cooking, it is the one thing that brought it all together. Food and cooking reflect feelings.

Me and Jasleen met through Leila McAlister who has a food shop and café called Leila's in Shoreditch. Me and Leila joined Jasleen's wedding, which was a huge privilege and a great way to understand the book that Jasleen wanted to make. It was like a speed date with her whole family in one afternoon, with snacks provided.

We looked at cookbooks for inspiration:  
The Alice B Toklas Cookbook (1954)  
The Book of Garlic, Lloyd J. Harris (1974)  
Wild Women in the Kitchen, Nicole Alper & Lynette Rohrer (1996)

Artist Cookbook: Conversations with Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors by Madeleine Conway and Nancy Kirk (1977)

And mostly How to Cook a Wolf, by MFK Fisher (1942). The title is just so good! It reflects Jasleen to me. A bit mysterious but also very open about feelings. If you read the contents page in How to Cook a Wolf, it reads like this:

“How To Be Sage Without Hemlock; How To Catch The Wolf; How to Distribute Your Virtue; How To Boil Water; How To Greet The Spring; How Not To Boil An Egg; How To Keep Alive; How To Rise Up Like New Bread; How To Be Cheerful Though Starving; How To Carve The Wolf; How To Make A Pigeon Cry; How To Pray For Peace; How To Be Content With A Vegetable Love; How To Make A Great Show; How To Have A Sleek Pelt; How To Comfort Sorrow; How To Be A Wise Man; How To Lure The Wolf; How To Drink To The Wolf; How Not To Be An Earthworm; How To Practice True Economy.”

We looked at notebooks for inspiration. Talked about how a book lives in the kitchen or in your bag. Decided that this book definitely needs a grease-proof plastic cover for survival.

## ***Can you tell us about the typeface used in the publication, and its connection to your design thinking?***

The fonts are bastardised fonts, made by Åbåke. They are hackneyed or hackneyfied, meaning we have added traces of accents in the typeface, traces from the community in Hackney, being Turkish, Vietnamese etc. Hackneyed Times Regular, Hackneyed Baskerville Italic and Hackneyed Helvetica Bold. I saw a connection between these bastardised fonts made by us and Jasleen's work. Both talk about origins, accents, differences and locality.

The book has no images, this was a long discussion. I think the font chosen holds the text, like an image.

## ***Yes, and each conversation is marked by a physical switch in paper colour and texture. How important were these differences in representing the range of voices that the book contains?***

Cover in a paper called Nuclear Acid, Mum in Champagne, Granny in Milk, Amanroop in Lavender, and finally Mireille, Bolly, Edna and Nikita in Harvest. Also, Amanprit Sandhu's voice is in Harvest.

To choose papers related to food, made it fun to choose the different voices coming through. It was a way to build different rooms within the book.

## ***This is the first collaboration between your publishing hut, Dent-de-Leone and Glasgow Women's Library. Did this feel like an important connection to make and how important was visiting the Library itself to the design process?***

As Dent-de-Leone, we are very proud to publish Jasleen's book as we love her work. The fact that we co-published with Glasgow Women's Library made it even better. For the launch of the book at Glasgow Women's Library we donated some other female voices that we have published to the Library collection. We hope this is not the last co-published book we make with them.

Early on in the process of making the book I visited the Library. A great way to find inspiration, so yes, very important. The house has a spirit.

## ***Can you tell us a little about Åbåke, the design collective you are part of?***

Åbåke is four graphic designers, we have a blood bond, a complete trust, all working under the same name, but under four or more different locations. We love Europe.

## ***Kajsa Ståhl is a founding member of Dent-de-Leone, a not-for-profit publishing hut operating since 2007. It produces mostly books but also objects and immaterial publications based on conversations. Dent-de-Leone is also Martino Gamper, Gemma Holt and Maki Suzuki.***

Åbåke is a transdisciplinary graphic design collective, founded in 2000 by Patrick Lacey, Benjamin Reichen, Kajsa Ståhl and Maki Suzuki in London, after meeting at the Royal College of Art. Much of their work concentrates on the social aspect of design and the strength that collaboration can bring to a project.

Be Like Teflon is co-published by Glasgow Women's Library and Dent-de-Leone and is commissioned by Panel.

The book is an edition of 750 and is sold at £12.00. [Available to buy here](#)

In conversation designed and edited by Laura Richmond

