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ARAB/AMERICAN: LANDSCAPE, CULTURE, AND CUISINE IN TWO GREAT DESERTS

GARY PAUL NABHAN

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160 pp., 15 photos, 2 maps, 6 x 9
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*World-renowned desert ecologist reminds us that, quite often,
borders are simply lines drawn in the sand.*

The landscapes, cultures, and cuisines of deserts in the Middle East and North America have commonalities that have seldom been explored by scientists – and have hardly been celebrated by society at large. Sonoran Desert ecologist Gary Nabhan grew up around Arab grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in a family that has been emigrating to the United States and Mexico from Lebanon for more than a century, and he himself frequently travels to the deserts of the Middle East. In an era when some Arabs and Americans have markedly distanced themselves from one another, Nabhan explores their common ground, historically, ecologically, linguistically, and gastronomically.

Arab/American is not merely an exploration of his own multicultural roots but also a revelation of the deep cultural linkages between the inhabitants of two of the world's great desert regions. Here, in beautifully crafted essays, Nabhan explores how these seemingly disparate cultures are bound to each other in ways we would never imagine. With an extraordinary ear for language and a truly adventurous palate, Nabhan uncovers surprising convergences between the landscape ecology, ethnogeography, agriculture, and cuisines of the Middle East and the binational Desert Southwest. There are the words and expressions that have moved slowly westward from Syria to Spain and to the New World to become incorporated – faintly but recognizably – into the language of the people of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. And there are the flavors – piquant mixtures of herbs and spices – that have crept silently across the globe and into our kitchens without our knowing where they came from or how they got here.

As award winning author Diana Abu-Jaber notes, *Arab/American* “provides a sumptuous mosaic of personal and cultural history,” and offers “a delicious read.”

Gary Paul Nabhan is a world-renowned desert ecologist, ethnobotanist, and essayist whose works have been translated into five languages. Among his two dozen books are *The Desert Smells Like Rain*, *Gathering the Desert*, *Enduring Seeds*, and *Counting Sheep*, all available from the University of Arizona Press.

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