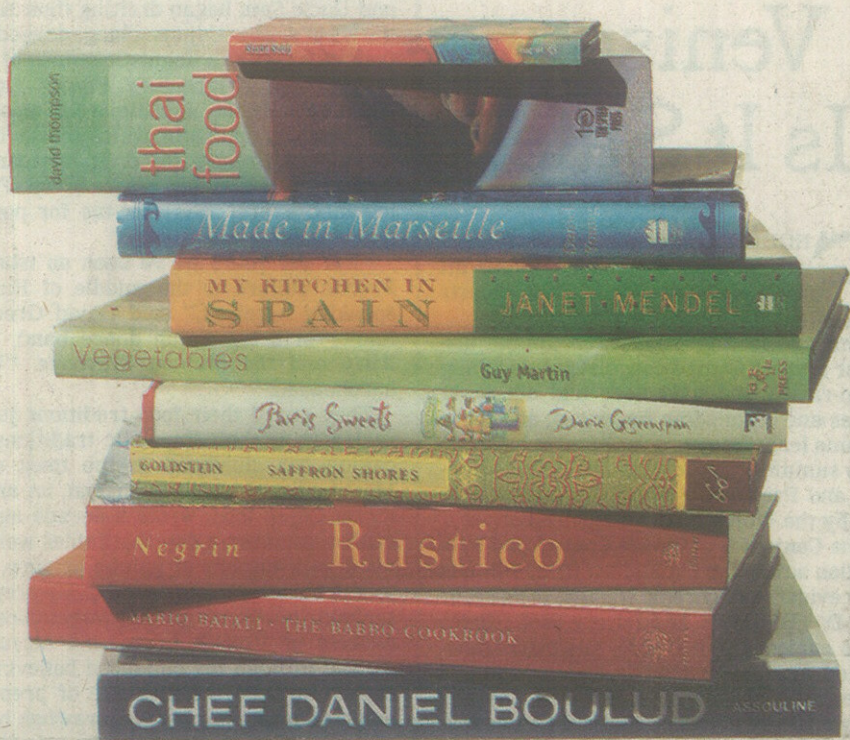


Inside Every Chef, A Writer



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

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THAI FOOD by David Thompson (Ten Speed Press, \$40) is not merely a work of wit. This beautiful doorstop, which comes equipped with a pair of bright ribbon bookmarks to help keep track of the recipes in its nearly 700 pages, is also breathtakingly rich and sure-footed in its detail. The author, an Australian chef, gives a history of Thailand and its food culture, details about ingredients with appropriate substitutes and hundreds of inviting recipes. Preparing the jungle curry of fish did make me sneeze and the trout braised with caramel, celery and fish sauce made me wish I had doubled the recipe for leftovers. The headnotes for the recipes are not perfunctory space fillers and deserve attention.

For the herbivore: **VEGETABLES** by Guy Martin (Ici La Press, \$36) is as inventive as it is beautiful, with recipes like a creamy radish bouillon, a turnip tarte Tatin, roasted eggplants with anchovy oil, and potato and fennel galettes. Some of the recipes, by the Michelin three-star chef of Le Grand Vefour in Paris, go too far, like the green pea ice cream with a carrot garnish, or crême brûlée with artichokes. I would never bother baking fennel in salt. But the flatbreads are splendid.

For those who are infatuated with Iberia: **MY KITCHEN IN SPAIN** by Janet Mendel (HarperCollins, \$34.50) covers the country with authority and provides an excellent introduction to the varied cooking of its regions. The author, who has lived in Spain since 1966, takes us to markets and introduces us to neighbors. She provides accessible recipes for a cuisine that deserves attention beyond paella and gazpacho.

For those who prefer the foods of Italy: **RUSTICO: REGIONAL ITALIAN COUNTRY COOKING** by Micol Negrin (Clarkson Potter, \$35) is a straightforward, region-by-region survey, filled with alluring tidbits, trivia, notes and lists of markets and restaurants. I was hooked by the many recipes calling for bread crumbs, like Swiss chard and bread crumb gnocchi, and a frittata with bread crumbs and mint.

For those who love France's melting pot: **MADE IN MARSEILLE** by Daniel Young (HarperCollins, \$32.50) is a romance. Its text and appropriately grainy photographs brought back the Marseille I knew and loved decades ago. And the book also puts this raffish repository of many cultures on today's culinary map for more than bouilla-

baisse. It pays to approach the recipes, virtually all of which are from restaurants, with care: 25 to 30 minutes is too long to roast a three-pound fish that has already been seared, and there is no way to fit two pounds of squid strips into a single large skillet. But the trick of making a butterlike spread by freezing a little olive oil, then putting it in the refrigerator until it softens, is a keeper.

For the lover of pastry and Paris: The beginning of **PARIS SWEETS** by Dorie Greenspan (Broadway Books, \$26) is heartbreaking, with its thumbnail sketch of Lionel Poilâne, who was killed recently in a helicopter crash, and whose talent and vision restored artisanal bread to respectability in France. Like many of the recipes in this book, the one for Boulangerie Poilâne's melt-in-your-mouth butter cookies called

Bites of Italy, gobs of France, slices of Spain, a plate of Thailand.

punitions, or punishments, is brief, efficient and foolproof. There are recipes from 17 pâtisseries. The book's reasonable price is probably attributable to the absence of color photography, which would have been useful for some of the elaborate cakes.

For a last-minute Hanukkah gift: **SAFFRON SHORES: JEWISH COOKING OF THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN** by Joyce Goldstein (Chronicle Books, \$35) is a bright and intelligent addition to the Jewish cookbook shelf that is filled with mouthwatering recipes predominantly from North Africa but also from southern Europe and the Middle East. Syrian chicken with macaroni and Tunisian fish balls simmered in a tagine offer a change of pace for a Hanukkah menu. The recipes are kosher, and Ms. Goldstein, a former chef, gives the necessary adaptations for meat or dairy meals.

And, finally, for children: **STONE SOUP** is a charming trifle published by Magnet Communications, a public relations firm, and being sold for \$10 to benefit Citymeals-on-Wheels. The folk recipe about the rewards of giving is apt for all ages. To order: (212) 687-1234, extension 3005.

Inside Every Chef, a Writer

By FLORENCE FABRICANT

GIVEN the increased sophistication of home cooking, it is no surprise that many of this year's intriguing new cookbooks come from chefs. Once-rare ingredients are now widely available, making restaurant-style food more accessible to the home cook.

Here is a selection of cookbooks to give as gifts or to keep in the kitchen.

For cooks who want to prepare restaurant food at home: Unlike those in many chef's cookbooks, the recipes in **THE BABBO COOKBOOK** by Mario Batali (Clarkson Potter, \$40) are clear, easily prepared at home and delectable. Consider tender short ribs in a winey sauce, Babbo's chick pea bruschetta, and ziti tossed with Tuscan cauliflower. Mr. Batali is sensibly clever, with carpaccio of smoked sablefish, braciolo made with duck, and a method of parboiling and drying small pastas, like orzo, then finishing them like risotto. I found his unassuming nut-based cakes irresistible.

And for those who dare not: **CHEF DANIEL BOULUD: COOKING IN NEW YORK CITY** by Daniel Boulud and Peter Kaminsky (Assouline, \$34.95) is an argument for booking a table. I'd rather dine at Mr. Boulud's DB Bistro Moderne than attempt the tomato tarte Tatin, eight small tarts requiring six recipes — and that is before assembly. But the quick little chocolate clafoutis, with just a few ingredients, are a good reason to stay home. The book is jazzy, colorful, and makes restaurant life seem improbably rosy. In deference to its title it describes the suppliers, the staff members — including the dishwashers — and some of the restaurant's famous clients.

For those who want opinions with their

dishes: Despite nearly two dozen illustrations by Donald Sultan, **JEREMIAH TOWER COOKS** by Jeremiah Tower (Stewart Tabori & Chang, \$35), is not a coffee-table book, but a great, highly opinionated read in which Mr. Tower puts his food memories, his career as a chef and restaurateur, his friends and colleagues on the table. He makes delicious reference to James Beard's "socialite students," and takes credit for introducing roasted garlic. Mr. Tower freely acknowledges his sources, including the London restaurant St. John's for the parsley and onion salad to which he adds mint, a humble exception to an array of recipes that often require luxury ingredients. Not all those I tried were as pleasing as the salad. The roast chicken is too complicated for so-so results, and braised chicken did not need five cups of liquid. But Mr. Tower is a master of fruit desserts.

For the serious, fearless cook: You have to love a book with a recipe that reads "add curry paste and continue to fry over high heat until fragrant enough to produce a sneeze." But

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WRAP IT TO GO
For delicious thank-you's, "Jeremiah Tower Cooks."

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A breakfast revolution introduces a family to the pleasures of the daily stack.

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At hunting season, some wonder if venison and elk are risky propositions.

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Eric Asimov gives three stars to the robust Italian fare at L'Impero in Tudor City.

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