



The Judicial Palate

By Susan E. Poppiti, Esquire



A Meal for All Seasons

It is that time of year again...time to make your New Year's resolution. In this month's article, I suggest a resolution that will improve your health and overall sense of well-being—cook in one more night per week (or per month, depending on your current habit) using recipes from the below cookbooks. Making this pledge will bring you hours of enjoyment, relaxation and good tastes, not to mention the fact that you will save money by buying your own ingredients as opposed to ordering take out or dining at a restaurant.

For readers who have never fried an egg, this article will equip you with the tools to accept this challenge, specifically, a cookbook for each season. As my dear friend Kathleen, who is another home chef, says, "As long as you can read, you can cook." Even if you are an experienced cook, just flipping through a new cookbook can offer inspiration. Although each of the below books contains a variety of recipes, I highlight one book for each season.

Winter – *Il Viaggio di Vetri: A Culinary Journey* (2008)

This cookbook is written by Marc Vetri, owner and chef at Vetri, considered by many to be Philadelphia's top restaurant. The hearty Italian dishes in the "Poultry, Game and Organ Meat" section of this book are perfect for winter. Two favorites are the "Rustic Rabbit with Sage and Pancetta" over polenta and the "Venison Saddle with Bitter Chocolate Sauce and Quince." Both meals would be best enjoyed in front of a fireplace with a glass of full-bodied red wine.

On the subject of wine, this cookbook offers a wine pairing suggestion with each recipe. The Vetri sommelier, Jeff Benjamin, features wines from around the world, not just Italy; for example, he pairs the rabbit with a Bandol, one of the best wines from the south of France. Another section of the cookbook ideal for the

winter months is on stocks and contains recipes for fish stock, lobster stock, and veal stock, in addition to the more common chicken stock. If you decide to make the "Wood-Fired Polenta" recipe, you should prepare this traditional Italian winter comfort food in a large pot over your fireplace or over a fire pit.

Spring – *The French Market: More Recipes from a French Kitchen* (2005)

The name of one of the co-authors, Joanne Harris, should ring a bell as the author of the touching and food-filled novel *Chocolat*, about how food can change people's lives. Co-author Fran Warde is a chef, food writer, and food stylist and joined forces with Harris to offer recipes that incorporate fresh ingredients like those from French markets.

The French Market offers several light salads perfect for springtime. They include the "Salade Printanière" (a spring salad with bacon and eggs), "Haricots en Salade" (fava bean and goat cheese salad) and "Lentilles en Salade" (lentil salad with sorrel or spinach). In addition to these fresh, colorful salads, Harris and Warde present fabulous fish recipes including "Seiche Farcie" (stuffed squid with pork and pistachios), "Salade de Calamars" (squid salad) and "Maquereau à la Dijonnaise" (roasted mackerel with Dijon mustard). Although I chose this book for the spring, several of its recipes are better suited for the winter months, especially the Cassoulet—the epitome of a winter comfort food.

Summer – *Aquavit and the New Scandinavian Cuisine* (2003)

This cookbook will be a unique addition to your bookshelf. How many of you already have a book on Scandinavian cuisine? Born in Ethiopia and raised in Sweden, author Marcus Samuelsson was executive chef at Aquavit in New York. He was the youngest chef to receive a 3 star rating from the New York Times and has since opened several restaurants in New York, most recently Red Rooster in Harlem.

This cookbook features instructions for raw and cured seafood, such as gravlax, bass ceviche, and tandoori smoked salmon. There are also recipes for cooked fish, including a coconut poached cod. However, I primarily use the book for the sorbet recipes during the summer. Some of the sorbets, such as the cucumber sorbet and curry sorbet, serve as palate cleansers, while the raspberry sorbet and the vanilla yogurt sorbet are tasty dessert sorbets. The simple syrup recipe that is the key ingredient to the sorbets could not be simpler to prepare. I always have a container of it in the refrigerator should I decide to make a last minute dessert.

Fall – *Canal House Cooking Volume No. 2* (2009)

Authors Christopher Hirsheimer and Melissa Hamilton have held various positions in the food industry including restaurant owner, chef, and food writer. These two foodies have a studio and test kitchen in Lambertville, Pennsylvania, where they create cookbook volumes by the season. Volume 2 focuses on fall and the holidays and offers dinner menus for Thanksgiving and Christmas. The recipes are intended to be fairly simple to prepare and contain fresh ingredients.

The "Crown Roast of Pork with Corn Bread Stuffing" served with "Baked Apples with Savory Stuffing" is one of my favorites in this colorful book. The corn theme is carried throughout this meal as the apples are stuffed with corn bread in addition to ground pork. Another savory recipe is the "Mushroom Ragu on Polenta." A fall is not complete without a mushroom dish, and this one can serve as an appetizer, a side dish to a meat or poultry dish, or a meal in and of itself. The hot polenta topped with the rich mushrooms and sherry will be a source of solace as winter approaches.

Whether you are a seasoned home cook or have never cracked an egg, try something new from one of these cookbooks this New Year. 🍷