

The New York Times

Cooking



By WILLIAM GRIMES

WHEN THE SEASONAL cookbook offerings include titles like "Fifty Shades of Kale" and an updated edition of the "Eat-It-Up Cookbook," choice is not a problem. The yearly avalanche includes something for everyone. There are books from star chefs and famous restaurants, the latest go-rounds from tried-and-true food writers, the new customary exercises in vegetable-worship, armchair-tourist cookbooks and one book that defines descriptive.

That's Heston Blumenthal's **STITCHES** (Houghton Mifflin, \$26), the one with the recipe for "rago of pig's ears." Blumenthal is the culinary wizard behind the Fat Duck in Bray, Berkshire, and, more relevant in this context, the Hinds Head, a converted 18th-century tavern just down the road that specializes in historic English dishes. Including his antiquarian interests, he has taken a wandering route through history's byways, from the Middle Ages to the Victorian period, and recreated his own versions of forgotten dishes like meat fruit (a pre-Tudor bit of orange fish), the medieval cheese-on-knives and a sandwich and an alcohol-soaked Victorian "mazy cake."

No one is going to cook from this book. Not many will be able to hit it. "Historic Heston" is a headfirst dive down the rabbit hole, with Blumenthal as the Mad Hatter,

pleased to offer you, as it happens, his recipe for roach-tail soup.

Years ago, when star chefs and great restaurants began turning out cookbooks, the approach tended to be educational and high-minded, with an emphasis on techniques and the secrets behind the cuisine. Now everything is personal. The chef wants to be your friend, to share his or her experiences.

In DANIEL: My French Cuisine (David Copperfield, \$40), Daniel Boulud, the celebrated owner of Daniel in Manhattan and its many offshoots, conducts a guided tour of his life and the parts of France he knows best, beginning with the farm near Lyon where he grew up. From there it's a giant leap to the luxuriously complex, drop-dead elegant dishes from Daniel that take up about half the book.

Boulud goes a bit Heston in the second half. With essays by Bill Buford, the book records Boulud's painstaking efforts to recreate a Louisiana classic like pork leg cooked in hay or a turbot soufflé developed with mustard and over-dried tomatoes in a slanted checkerboard pattern. Relief arrives in a chapter devoted to humble seasonal dishes from Lyon, Alsace, Normandy and Provence.

Boulud also has an interesting life story to tell in **JOHN BUSH: Cooking from the Heart: My Favorite Lessons Learned Along the Way** (Andrew McMeel, \$40). A native of New Orleans, he served with the Marines in Operation Desert Storm, then studied at the Culinary Institute of America. After graduating, he trained at a gene-obsessed inn in the Black Forest, at a small French restaurant in Louisiana, La., and in restaurants in Avignon and St.-Rémy-

de-Provence before making his mark back in Louisiana with a highly distinctive reinterpretation of his regional cooking. His restaurant August is consistently rated one of New Orleans's finest.

Not many readers are going to take the plunge and try the wild boar's-head pâté, a signature dish at the Spiegweg in Münster, but Bush's first soup as an apprentice, but schlagobahn (egg potato dumplings from the Baden region), slow-cooked rabbit with creamy rosemary tartar and the stuffed pasta known as maccheroni are well within reach. There are a few too many actual-ouster recipes, but Bush makes an engaging guide, with a rich fond of anecdotes, for his somewhat eccentric personal journey.

Star-restaurant cookbooks face the same challenge as cookbooks by star chefs: How do you faithfully represent the place without recipes that require a full kitchen brigade to execute? Michael Anthony, the executive chef and a partner at Gramercy Tavern, starts with an advantage in **THE GRAMERCY TAVERN COOKBOOK** (Clarkson Potter, \$30), namely, the restaurant's style of cuisine: clean, contemporary and not too complicated. In an interview with New York Metro, Anthony explained that he wanted his mother in rural Ohio to be able to use the book.

Mom can probably handle the recipe for chilled corn soup, bright and fresh with squeazings of lime and a touch of honey, or the one for pickled Swiss chard stems, a minimalist gem. Recipes are organized by season. Slow-roasted pork shoulder, water recipe, feels just like home. There are many more. Why did it take nearly a decade to translate their (the Speed Press, \$25), belatedly from British success of their second volume, with their cuisine, we meet and seasonally that of the Middle East.

The authors dazzle, just page after page of that elevates ham and ribs — without inevitability to dishes with lime yogurt or the author's use of pumpkin and cinnamon.

Some cooks who are in luck. Jack, 70, in unexpected ways in seasonally blind pigs, then with profit, then to a store have sleep of travel.

POK POK: Food and Memories (Random House, \$25) by Andy Sidler with 22 told thousands of dishes bore by what Ricker, meta in Portland, Ore., protein rainbow curls on the limited, highly This restaurant in the

Unreconstructed meat eaters will want to give a big bro hug to John Currence for **PICKLES, PIGS AND WHISKEY: Recipes From My Three Favorite Food Groups (and Then Some)** (Andrews McMeel, \$40), a culinary rebel yell in a new key.

Currence, the chef and owner of City Grocery in Oxford, Miss., does a lot of hootin', hollerin' and carryin' on. A lot of cussin' too, not something you normally find in a cookbook. Tune out the noise, ignore the idiotic music recommendations for each dish ("Cock the Hammer," by Cypress Hill, for ham stock), and you still have a book full to bursting with imaginative New Southern recipes. Or maybe New New Southern, in the case of Kentucky soy-collard kimchi or rosemary-pickled lamb hearts.

Currence really works the territory. Steen's cane syrup, a Louisiana classic, brings an earthy sweetness to pork belly braised in ham stock. Bourbon-braised pork cheeks was a dish just waiting to happen, and the recommended side dish — creamy garlic-Parmesan grits — is typical of Currence's approach. Pick a Southern staple and take it on a foreign trip, or make it even more Southern. We have him to thank for a double-Bubba treat: okra and green onion hush puppies, accompanied by Ministry's "Jesus Built My Hotrod."



can't be beat. Ricker is enthusiastic, prodigiously well informed and full of colorful stories from his many trips to Thailand.

Nearly every page brings a revelation. Long mewing, the dark-brown smoked pork salad served in northern Thailand, bears no resemblance to the mound of sweet-thick pork from central Thailand served in most American Thai restaurants. When he first encountered it, Ricker says, he didn't even recognize it as Thai. "It was fragrant, pungent, bitter — and wonderful," he writes. "There was no obvious sweetness, except from the crunchy bits of fried garlic and shallots scattered on top. There was definitely no lime or coconut milk." And here it is.

The only snag in "Pok Pok" is ingredients. Many can be found, but many can't, or at least not easily. There are more than enough malleable dishes, however. Some are disarmingly simple, like grilled corn with salty coconut cream. Others, like Burmese-style pork-belly curry, require many steps but deliver a whopping payoff.

Jeff Koehler does justice to another regionally complex country in **SPAIN: Recipes and Traditions from the Verdant Hills of the Basque Country to the Coastal Waters of Andalucía** (Chronicle Books, \$40). The author, a food writer who has lived in Spain for many years, focuses on roots cooking: the simple, flavorful dishes that warm Spanish hearts.

Koehler is an expert guide, providing highly informative backstories to each recipe, often explaining regional variations in the same recipe and suggesting some clever tips. In his recipe for clams with olives spray, for example, he suggests substituting dry white wine with a little brandy if sherry isn't at hand. These pages abound in inductively recipe dishes like pork baked in a salt crust and served with fruit compote, chestnut purée or a blue cheese sauce.

Japanese cuisine can seem chilly and aloof, an endless catalog of refinements. Tadashi Ono and Harris Salat explode that stereotype in **JAPANESE SOUP, COGNAC, HAM, TARTAR, TEMPURA, and More from the Streets and Kitchens of Tokyo and Beyond** (The Speed Press, \$27.50). Spaghetti? Sure. Ketchup? You bet. Mayo on the side? Just try to make it Kewpie brand.

One and later serve up dozens of fascinating food history, and some very good recipes, as they explore the vernacular dishes that constitute Japanese diner food. These are the popular fusion dishes — most dating from the last 100 years, many from the postwar period — that soothe the Japanese and the way cheeseburgers and fries cheer Americans.

With zest and an irrepressible you-can-do-it attitude, the authors explain and write the scripts for gyoza dumplings, curries, tonkotsu, the floured and deep-fried dishes known as kara-age, tempura, soba, udon and other humble Japanese fare. The ramen chapter is especially rich, but toward the end, some really odd creations await, including hamburger (a ground beef, pork and pork-crusty patty covered in a ketchup-based sauce) and mesquite spaghetti, a 1980s-Vintage pasta tossed with spicy marinated pollock roe.

Melie Katzen leads the vegetarian pack with **THE HEART OF THE PLANT: Vegetarian Recipes for a New Century** (The McGraw-Hill Companies, \$24.95). It's been more than 30 years since her scribbled notes and recipes evolved into the groundbreaking "Moonwood Cookbook," which she's done a lot of cooking and dining in the mountains, paring down, eliminating fat and devising a style she describes as "sharper, sweeter, spicier, lighter and more relaxed than it used to be."

Almost half the recipes in the book are vegans, without the pain. Some can go either way, like farfalle pasta and rapini in a creamy walnut sauce that becomes vegan when soy milk is substituted for cow's milk. Salads — bright, colorful and vibrant — are particularly well done. Many can do service as a main course, like her grilled bread and kale salad with red onions, walnuts and figs.

Unreconstructed meat eaters will want to give a big bro hug to John Currence for **PICKLES, PIGS AND WHISKEY: Recipes From My Three Favorite Food Groups and Then Some** (Andrews McMeel, \$40), a culinary rebel yell in a new key.

Currence, the chef and owner of City Grocery in Oxford, Miss., does a lot of hootin', hollerin' and carryin' on. A lot of cussin' too, not something you normally find in a cookbook. Tune out the noise, ignore the idiotic music

recommendations for each dish ("Cock the Hammer," by Cypress Hill, for ham stock), and you still have a book full to bursting with imaginative New Southern recipes. Or maybe New New Southern, in the case of Kentucky soy-collard kimchi or rosemary-pickled lamb hearts.

Currence really works the territory. Steen's cane syrup, a Louisiana classic, brings an earthy sweetness to pork belly braised in ham stock. Bourbon-braised pork cheeks was a dish just waiting to happen, and the recommended side dish — creamy garlic-Parmesan grits — is typical of Currence's approach. Pick a Southern staple and take it on a foreign trip, or make it even more Southern. We have him to thank for a double-Bubba treat: okra and green onion hush puppies, accompanied by Ministry's "Jesus Built My Hotrod."

Finally, two confidence-builders. Some cookbooks challenge. Others perform the neat trick of convincing even beginners that it's possible to make guest-worthy food in a small, ill-equipped kitchen. **THE RECIPES ARTIST'S COOKBOOK: Recipes and Lessons from Paris and Provence** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$26) comes directly from the cooking classes Patricia Wells gives at her homes in Paris and Provence, so the recipes include plenty of uncomplicated dishes that have been tested with an inch of their lives. Most require only a handful of ingredients and a few simple techniques. Even hesitant amateurs can turn out seared duck breast with figs and black currant sauce or trenato tartine made with store-bought puff pastry.

Lidia Mattiolo Bastianich and her daughter, Thyra Bastianich Manoli, do the same thing with Italian food in **LIDIA'S CROMBIONESE ITALIAN COOKING** (Wiley, \$26), based on the public television series of the same name. The cowboy cook might start with the number 100 (tomato, sliced thin and sautéed and simmered in a pan with olive, red onion, and orange juice flecked with orange zest, it doesn't get any easier than this, or easier). The authors don't include song recommendations. May I suggest "Agnese Napolitano," by Claudio Villa?