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Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook



Synopsis

This timeless addition to the Chez Panisse paperback cookbook library assembles 120 of the restaurant's best menus, including galas, festivals, and special occasion meals that have become such gustatory celebrations. A full range of menus is featured, from picnics to informal suppers. Line drawings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There's a special reason we go to the books of the great chefs. It's not to throw a meal together in 2 minutes, or to make sure we will find a dish we can cook with no trouble in two pans in our kitchens at home. It's to look inside an imagination and see what someone can achieve with ingredients and passion when it's what they do all day, every day, with devotion. As Nigella Lawson said about another writer, "I often cook, if not directly from it, then inspired by it (which is more telling)". This is a truly inspiring work, one you will go back to again and again. From the buckwheat crepes with glazed fruit and eau de vie, to the amazing amazing fish soup, simple dishes with corn and over the top reworking of french classics, the judgement of flavours and textures is perfect. Ignore Water's fetish about perfect lettuce, read it, and just go to the kitchen. 10 stars out of five, the best of all the Waters books.

I enjoy reading this cookbook more to gather ideas than to find recipes I want to cook. Alice Waters describes how she and her team at Chez Panisse created many of their memorable meals, what

inspired them, the problem that arose, and how they worked around those problems. What she doesn't write about as much is the actual process of preparing the food--the recipes. Of course, for some of these menus, it would be virtually impossible to create in a home kitchen, or to have access to the ingredients (a pig feed a diet heavy with garlic comes to mind). Good ideas for the knowledgeable cook.

This is one of Alice Waters' early books, and it shows, as compared to the later ones. Many of the recipes are complicated, and involve ingredients that are not easy to come by, even in NYC. I read it more for amusement. The later books (*Vegetables*, *Fruit*, *Cafe*), are much more user friendly and result in great dishes. I wouldn't recommend this to someone new to her philosophy of cooking, or who doesn't have serious kitchen experience.

American foodies owe a debt of gratitude to Alice Waters. She is the patron saint of California cooking, or new American cooking, or whatever you want to call it. She's the one who gave us goat cheese croutons, roasted beets, mache, and so many other now-ubiquitous dishes. "Former Chez Panisse chef" is just as much a brand name as the brand named meats and produce she serves at her restaurant. For those reasons, I actually read *The Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook* cover to cover, the way one reads an MFK Fisher book - to get an understanding of the cook's philosophy as well as recipes. Both women write in a formal style and have strong ideas about ingredients, preparation, presentation, and consumption. Unfortunately, Water's writing is more spare, perhaps as befits a patron saint, and lacks the pithy humor that leavens Fisher's books. Reading her prose is more like learning a lesson than being entertained. Which may be why this book struck me as an essential book for someone who wanted to learn to be a restaurant chef, but not particularly useful for someone cooking at home. Most of the menus require some final preparation of the next dish after the preceding one has been served - possible in a restaurant, but not much fun at a dinner party if the cook wants to eat with the guests. The individual dishes are also complicated or labor-intensive, causing me to often think as I read, "I'd eat that if someone made it for me." Waters is particularly fond of leg of lamb, lobsters, and quail and her recipes for these show the difficulty in preparing them at home. First, most of the lamb recipes call for spit-roasting the leg of lamb. She even explains how to build a spit. In my spit-deficient kitchen, those recipes are not possible. Second, while I find a steamed lobster to be a wonderful treat on a special occasion, Waters takes the fun out of it with instructions to semi-cook a lobster, then remove the meat and make a fumet with the shells - a process involving roasting the shells, making the broth, putting the shells in a blender,

then straining the whole thing through a fine sieve - then finish cooking the lobster. Whew! Finally, quail do not usually show up on my dinner table, but if they did, I do not think I'd have the dedication to follow Walter's recipes. In most of her quail recipes she gives similar instructions: "Marinate the quail in a cool place overnight . . . turning the quail four to five times during this time." No little boney bird is worth losing a night of sleep. Reading this Menu Cookbook made me want to spring for dinner at Chez Panisse, but it did not make me want to don an apron and start cooking.

Buyer beware. You can't highlight or copy text in this book as you do in other Kindle books. In some parts of the book it will only let you select a single word at a time. In other parts you can select whole blocks of text as in any other Kindle book. That's not the way I wanted to read the book and it doesn't meet my expectations of a Kindle book as a result. As for content it's very useful and informative, but alas not useful because of this defect. I'm now getting a used hard copy and a yellow highlighter and doing it the old-fashioned way. Beyond this issue, this is a great book for learning and expanding for the weekend cook. This is not and was never meant to be a cookbook for people who are looking for quick and simple meals. It's for people who want to enjoy meals at their best, in season and with freshest quality ingredients. Like so many things Alice Waters-related, the recipes are a bit slapdash and mercurial and not very well written. Take the cassoulet recipe for instance, and reading through it you realize you're making duck confit, stock from the same duck after AGING the duck, that the duck confit can be made much in advance and the flavor will improve (the stock can apparently be frozen), and then you're moving on to all the other steps, which, reading through you will reorder logically. I don't mind though, because I learn the recipe that way and improve my skills and techniques and knowledge, which is why I like cooking this way (plus we get to eat well). If you enjoy cooking and trying new things, this is a great book for you. It's not for the cook who wants things on the table cheap, easy, and fast, and who complains about the difficulty of having to search out ingredients (which I love, since it's a great way to learn and improve as a cook).

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