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# The Year's Notable Cookbooks

By JULIA MOSKIN, FLORENCE FABRICANT, PETE WELLS and NICK FOX

*It's hard to do justice to all the great cookbooks published this year, but here are some of the Dining staff's favorites:*

**ANCIENT GRAINS FOR MODERN MEALS** by Maria Speck (Ten Speed Press, \$29.99). Yes, part of the appeal is the title: "Ancient" sounds so much more interesting than "whole." But Ms. Speck's skill as a researcher, and her dual heritage in Greece and Germany, enrich the text — and not just in flavorful recipes like bulgur with butter-roasted almonds and cinnamon, and brown rice cakes with pecorino cheese, olives and sage. Refreshingly, she covers — and then dismisses — the subject of eating whole grains for health in the first half-dozen pages. She's interested in flavor first, texture second and history along with both. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**COOKING IN THE MOMENT** by Andrea Reusing (Clarkson Potter, \$35). Most chefs aren't writers, but Ms. Reusing, of Lantern restaurant in Chapel Hill, N.C., is a compelling exception. She built her reputation in the kitchen with ingenious combinations of Asian and Southern ingredients. Here she offers a vision of modern domestic life that includes chickens and small children, local bok choy and carnitas — and it's written so nicely that you don't hate the visionary. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**COOKING MY WAY BACK HOME** by Mitchell Rosenthal and Jon Pult (Ten Speed Press, \$35). A Louisiana-influenced chef, Mr. Rosenthal runs three soulful American restaurants in San Francisco. He understands simple pleasures (prime rib, barbecued shrimp, angels on horseback) and how to give them the modern tweaks that home cooks want, like dates stuffed with peanuts and tasso. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**THE FOOD OF MOROCCO** by Paula Wolfert (Ecco, \$45). More than an update of her influential 1973 book, "Couscous and Other Good Food From Morocco," this colorful tome is the culmination of 40 years' research and unprecedented access to Moroccan cooks and kitchens. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**THE FOOD OF SPAIN** by Claudia Roden (Ecco, \$39.99). The first hundred pages of this doorstop

by a prolific and serious food writer and Sefardita, or Jew of Spanish origin, offer a comprehensive history of the evolution of Spanish food. They are followed by a collection of clear recipes divided into a dozen sections, starting with tapas, and made accessible by inviting the cook to use canned beans and stocks. My guests raved about the thick spinach and chickpea soup, giant Galician tuna empanada in flaky pastry and lamb stew with honey. **FLORENCE FABRICANT**

**THE HOMESICK TEXAN COOKBOOK** by Lisa Fain (Hyperion, \$29.99). The author was never told in her Texas elementary school that if she ordered queso or kolaches or chalupas once she left home, she'd get only a plateful of disappointment. Transplanted to Manhattan, she found out. In her Dr Pepper-deficient environment, Ms. Fain taught herself to conjure the flavors she grew up on, and the fruits of her research make up this appetite-rousing book. **PETE WELLS**

**MAKE THE BREAD, BUY THE BUTTER** by Jennifer Reese (Free Press, \$24). A great read for cooks afflicted by curiosity about the do-it-yourself movement in food. Ms. Reese goes beyond jam and chutney into [pasta](#), pastrami and graham crackers. Even her failed experiments, like homemade hot dogs, are entertaining. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**MISSION STREET FOOD: RECIPES AND IDEAS FROM AN IMPROBABLE RESTAURANT** by Anthony Myint and Karen Leibowitz (McSweeney's, \$30). Admittedly, fewer than half of the 223 pages are devoted to cooking instruction. The rest of the book recounts how a sui generis pop-up in a Guatemalan taco truck in San Francisco led, as these things will, to a sui generis pop-up in a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco. In fact, the whole project is sui generis, including the cookbook portion of this volume. The recipes provide not just serving sizes but approximate cost, and are laid out comic-strip style, with photo panels illustrating each step. There's even a photograph of what mayonnaise looks like when the emulsion breaks, and what to do next. **PETE WELLS**

**MODERNIST CUISINE: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF COOKING** by Nathan Myhrvold, Chris Young and Maxime Bilet (The Cooking Lab, \$625). Dr. Myhrvold, a former Microsoft chief of technology, and his merry band of lab assistants have published an epic account of all cooking methods known to humankind — from primitive clambake to immersion circulator. The recipes are likely to drive home cooks mad, but the photography is both revolutionary and museum-worthy. **JULIA MOSKIN**

**A NEW TURN IN THE SOUTH** by Hugh Acheson (Clarkson Potter, \$35). Though he is the chef behind acclaimed restaurants in Atlanta and Athens, Ga., Mr. Acheson thinks and cooks like a civilian. His modern, Southern-leaning recipes are models of clarity and simplicity, and reading

them makes you feel at home: the book begins with lemonade (spruced up with mint, rosemary and vanilla) and ends with [chocolate](#)-chunk oatmeal [cookies](#). **PETE WELLS**

**ODD BITS: HOW TO COOK THE REST OF THE ANIMAL** by Jennifer McLagan (Ten Speed Press, \$35). Sweetbreads with orange and cumin may seem like something that only the mysterious wizardry of high-end chefs could produce. But with this book on offer guiding you through a Sunday's worth of soaking and poaching these truly odd bits, they can be an elegant dinner on a Monday night. Light the candles, pour the wine, bring out the good silver; you'll think you're in a restaurant. **NICK FOX**

**PLENTY: VIBRANT RECIPES FROM LONDON'S OTTOLENGHI** by Yotam Ottolenghi (Chronicle Books, \$35). This collection of vegetarian recipes has been avidly taken up by those who shun meat, but it will be an eye-opener for carnivores. (Mr. Ottolenghi is one himself.) With their cosmopolitan influences and unfamiliar seasonings — stock up on sumac — these dishes make a compelling case that vegetables hold far more interest than meat for cooks and eaters alike. **PETE WELLS**

**RICE AND CURRY: SRI LANKAN HOME COOKING** by S. H. Fernando Jr. (Hippocrene Books, \$19.95). A wonderful tour of a lesser-known cuisine. If you dined out and ordered Leela's Chilaw crab curry you'd make a spectacle of yourself, coating your wrists in gravy rich with coconut, curry leaves, chile, garlic and cumin, flecking your face with bits of crab shell. At home, only your family will stare, and they'll be a mess, too. **NICK FOX**

**RUSTICA: A RETURN TO SPANISH HOME COOKING** by Frank Camorra and Richard Cornish (Chronicle Books, \$35). Beautifully photographed though somewhat randomly organized, this book, by an Australian chef who was born in Spain, covers key regions and ingredients with many alluring home-style recipes: crisp baby shrimp fritters, fat green beans with garlic confit, roasted cod zapped with hot garlic and chile dressing and cheesecake with a caramelized top. **FLORENCE FABRICANT**

**SEOULTOWN KITCHEN: KOREAN PUB GRUB TO SHARE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS** by Debbie Lee (Kyle Books, \$24.95) isn't a comprehensive guide to the cuisine, but her beer-friendly recipes are an easy way in. And once you make the pimento-scallion glaze — part of several dishes and delicious alone on burgers, cold shrimp, eggs — it won't seem an inconvenience to go to a Korean store for the thick crimson gochujang chile paste you'll need. While you're there, you can pick up magnolia berry syrup for Ms. Lee's chicken meatballs, soju for her chile chicken wings and sweet rice flour for her jeon-style shrimp cake. (If you give a moose a mandu....) **NICK FOX**

**SIMPLY GREAT BREADS** by Daniel Leader (Taunton, \$22). When did bread become so complicated? Too many new bread books are thick with words, expounding on dry topics like the differences between a levain and a poolish. This slim volume, perfect for novices, contains just 28 recipes that manage to cover a lot of ground, from English muffins to ciabatta to chocolate babka.

**JULIA MOSKIN**

**THE SWEETS OF ARABY** by Leila Salloum Elias and Muna Salloum (Countryman Press, \$21.95). The authors of this intriguing cookbook are sisters of Syrian ancestry who plumbed the text of the “Tales of the 1001 Arabian Nights” for food references, then adapted recipes from medieval manuscripts to accompany 25 of Scheherazade’s stories. Most of the confections, made with nuts, phyllo, dates, saffron, honey and sesame oil, will be discoveries for those who know only baklava: many are fried, and even the halvah, perfumed with rose water, is unusual — a firm pistachio jelly.

**FLORENCE FABRICANT**

**TENDER: A COOK AND HIS VEGETABLE PATCH** by Nigel Slater (Ten Speed Press, \$40). The organizing principle is the tiny farm Mr. Slater tends in the 40-foot yard behind his house in London. He has seeded the book with tips for urban gardeners: how to weed [asparagus](#) (by hand), what to do when foxes take up residence (get used to them). Most recipes are in a Mediterranean mode, and all bear Mr. Slater’s impatience for nonsense and his unerring instinct for what’s good to eat.

**TRULY MEXICAN** by Roberto Santibañez with J. J. Goode and Shelley Wiseman (John Wiley & Sons, \$35) focuses on sauces, with chapters on salsas, guacamoles, adobos and moles. So rather than create composed dishes, you can use his unusual red peanut sauce or deep, rich adobo D. F., made with chiles and Mexican chocolate, to dress rotisserie chicken. Try a few more recipes from Mr. Santibañez — Rosa Mexicano’s culinary director before he opened Fonda in Brooklyn — and anchos, pasillas and guajillos could become regulars in your cupboard.

*This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

***Correction: December 7, 2011***

An article last Wednesday about the Dining staff members’ favorite cookbooks of 2011 misidentified the publisher of “The Homesick Texan Cookbook,” by Lisa Fain. It is Hyperion, not Free Press.



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