

CHEZ PANISSE
MENU
COOKBOOK



ALICE WATERS

The Chez Panisse Cookbook Library

Chez Panisse Cooking

Chez Panisse Desserts

Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook

Chez Panisse Pasta, Pizza, & Calzone

THE CHEZ PANISSE MENU COOKBOOK

by
Alice Waters

*In Collaboration with Linda P. Guenzel
Recipes Edited by Carolyn Dille
Designed and Illustrated by David Lance Goines*



RANDOM HOUSE
NEW YORK

~~The truth of the matter is that the restaurant and this book exist only because our customers~~
have constantly expanded our horizons along with their own.

G.B.

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BIRTHDAY DINNER FOR LINDA · NOVEMBER 8, 1980 · FRUITS DE MER SUR LE GRIL · LES PETITES SALADES CHEZ PANISSE · CHOU ET CANARD SAUVAGE · HARICOTS VERTS ET CHANTERELLES CRESSON ET ENDIVE · COTE DE BOEUF L'ANCHOIADE · POMMES ALLUMETTES · FROMAGE DE CHAUME ET FRUITS · MONT BLANC

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INTRODUCTION

Food must be experienced, and I worry that writing about it may not make the sense I want to make of it to! I wish I could just sit people down and give them something to eat; then I know they would understand. Since I cannot do that, I hope that an explanation of how I became involved with food and why I started Chez Panisse will allow a vicarious understanding.

I believe that many of my aesthetic principles have their roots in my early childhood. “I was a picky eater,” my father would say, and I wouldn’t eat just any old thing. I wanted green beans and rare charcoal-grilled steaks every birthday dinner. I remember sitting out in the strawberry patch, happily devouring those fresh berries. I can still taste the applesauce made from the fruit of my apple tree, and can smell the apple blossoms. Friends of the family had a cottage up at the lake, and I was delighted by the possibilities of a seven-foot barbecue in the sand. We had clambakes, complete with roasted corn, chicken, and blueberries we had picked out on the islands. I still love corn, but that was the best. Though I never had anything unusual to eat when I was little, I was lucky to have tasted fresh fruits and vegetables from the garden.

At the age of nineteen I went eating in France—the best description of my year of study abroad. I began eating all kinds of wonderful things I’d never tasted before. It was the first time for so many foods—oysters, crayfish, mussels—and I liked *everything*. The idea of ever opening a restaurant hadn’t entered my conscious mind, but I experienced a major realization: I hadn’t eaten *anything*, comparatively speaking, and I wanted to taste *everything*. I began to see a pattern—a technique for looking at food, examining it, and understanding it.

In France, for the first time, I found that people would spend an hour or more deciding where to eat. My French friends would drive around on Sunday afternoon, stopping at all the restaurants in town to see who had the best of whatever was fresh and in season, and then they would agonize over the final choice, a process of selection that showed much respect for food.

A little stone house we just happened upon in Brittany was the setting for one of the most memorable meals of my life. I had eaten all over France, and it was here that I first heard the usually reserved Frenchmen exclaim over the food. Elsewhere, even when I found the food to be wonderful, they would say only that it was “all right”; but after the meal in this tiny restaurant, they applauded the chef and cried, “*C’est fantastique!*” I’ve remembered this dinner

a thousand times: the old stone house, the stairs leading up to the small dining room, which seated no more than twelve at the pink cloth-covered tables and from which one could look through the opened windows to the stream running beside the house and the garden in back. The chef, a woman, announced the menu: cured ham and melon, trout with almonds, and a raspberry tart. The trout had just come from the stream and the raspberries from the garden. It was this immediacy that made those dishes so special.

I now knew that I loved to eat and that I wanted to eat certain foods of a certain quality. I bought Elizabeth David's book, *French Country Cooking*, and I cooked everything in it, from the beginning to the end. I admired her aesthetics of food, and wanted a restaurant that had the same feeling as the pictures on the covers of her books. It was so important that I was driven, as I had in France, to have a sense of mission. I didn't envision success. All I cared about was a place to sit down with my friends and enjoy good food while discussing the politics of the day. And I believed that in order to experience food as good as I had had in France, I had to cook and serve it myself.

The timing and the location encouraged my idealism and experimentation. This was during the late sixties, in Berkeley. We all believed in community and personal commitment and quality. Chez Panisse was born out of these ideals. Profit was always secondary.

Chez Panisse began with our doing the very best we could do with French recipes and California ingredients, and has evolved into what I like to think of as a celebration of the very finest of our regional food products. The recipes of Elizabeth David and Richard Olney provided a starting point and an inspiration to us; and we soon realized that the similarity of California's climate to that of the south of France gives us similar products that require different interpretations and executions. My one unbreakable rule has always been to use only the freshest and finest ingredients available. Our quest for the freshest and best of the region has led us to Amador County for suckling pigs and wonderful, peppery watercress; to the Napa Valley for Zinfandel made especially for the restaurant; to Gilroy for garlic; to Sonoma County for locally made goat cheeses; to the ocean daily for oysters; to the backyards of our customers where we have our own gardens; and finally, if we must, to the local produce markets for that which we cannot grow or procure ourselves. Our goal is to be totally self-sufficient so that we need not depend upon the unreliable quality and inconsistencies of the commercial food wholesalers.

My definition of fresh is that the perfect little lettuces are carefully hand-picked from the

hillside garden and served within a few hours. Over the years, the notation "If Available" has frequently appeared after a particular item on our menus. This means that if the food listed is available in the best condition, we will serve it; otherwise, we will make a substitution.

When people come to the restaurant, I want to insist that they eat in a certain way, try new things, and take time with the food. Therefore, our format of serving only one five-course dinner each evening often surprises people at first, but I think the appealing aromas and the roasted flavors of food cooked over the charcoal grill, and the earthiness of those lettuces, tend to seduce the hesitant. For me food is a totally painless way of awakening people and sharpening their senses. I opened a restaurant so that everybody could come and eat; remember that the final goal is to nourish and nurture those who gather at your table. It is there, within this nurturing process, that I have found the greatest satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

A.L.V.

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WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT COOKING

My approach to cooking is not radical or unconventional. It may seem so simply because we as a nation are so removed from any real involvement with the food we buy, cook, and consume. We have become alienated by the frozen and hygienically sealed foods. I want to stand in the supermarket aisles and implore the shoppers, their carts piled high with mass-produced artificiality, “Please ... look at what you are buying!” Food should be experienced through the senses, and I am sad for those who cannot see a lovely, unblemished apple just picked from the tree as voluptuous, or a beautifully perfect pear as sensuous, or see that brown-spotted two-foot-high lettuce, its edges curling and wilted, is ugly and offensive. It is a fundamental fact that no cook, however creative and capable, can produce a dish of a quality any higher than that of the raw ingredients.

It is unfortunate for the children who will not remember or will never know the taste of real food. They will believe that the mass-produced imitation, the phony, is the real and the genuine, and I worry that they will be deprived of so much pure pleasure. Communication around the dinner table and the sense of family which comes with it are largely missing in our society. One of my goals at Chez Panisse is to re-establish the gastronomic excitement that inspires and encourages conversation and conviviality. Depersonalized, assembly-line fast food may be “convenient” and “time-saving,” but it deprives the senses and denies true nourishment.

Much of the alienation we suffer at the hands of the fast-food giants comes from the distance they create and emphasize between the food and the diners. The high plastic counters, disposable dishes, and emphasis on a minimum of contact between the foods and human hands—to ensure “cleanliness and hygiene”—also ensure distance and estrangement between the diners and those who prepare the food, to say nothing of the distance between the “cooks” and the food itself. I am reminded of a small neighborhood restaurant where I have eaten for years. It is run by an Indian man and his Mexican wife who do everything themselves: they prepare the food and serve it. The restaurant continues to support itself and thrive modestly against the prevailing winds of faster and faster food purveyors. Seated at one of their tables, I am always captivated as I watch them prepare our order in their tiny kitchen. If I should look out the window, I find my gaze captured by the scene in the doughnut shop across the street: the customers, totally isolated from one another and the

food itself by the gleaming white sterility of the plastic counters, tables, and walls, are all facing in different directions. The result can be nothing but alienation from one another, as well as from the food and those who cook and serve it. It is doubly sad to me because they *could* simply have walked across the street to reap the humane benefits of this little restaurant for virtually the same price!

As I have watched the transformation of a stressed and rather uninterested diner at Chez Panisse into an involved, excited, and participatory member of his party, I have more clearly understood the necessity and importance of feedback from the kitchen to the dining room and back again. It all has to do with the opening up of the senses on the part of the diners, and I do believe that such things as flowers, food on display, lovely linens, and appealing china can greatly enhance the experience and aid in bringing about the metamorphosis of that hurried and harried diner into the relaxed patron who has submerged himself in the very pleasurable act of eating. But basically it is the genuine involvement with food that fosters this sensory receptiveness.

Flexibility is an essential component of good cooking. You should never feel locked in to a recipe or a menu unless it involves a basic principle regarding procedure or technique such as those involved in breadmaking and pastry. I don't ever want to write anything in this book that is so precise that the reader must invoke great powers of concentration on every last detail in order to ensure the success of a recipe or a dinner; ingredients are simply too variable. I want to *suggest* the expected taste; I want to *suggest* the appearance of the completed dish; I want to *suggest* the combination of ingredients; and I want to *suggest* the overall harmony and balance of the meal. Then it will be up to you to determine the correct balance and composition. Perhaps the garlic is sharp and strong and you will use it sparingly in a particular presentation, or you may find the garlic to be sweet and fresh and you will want to use twice as much!

When I mention a particular garnish, I cannot always tell you what to substitute if the suggested one is unavailable. I *can* make a definitive statement regarding my personal choice for garnishing a particular dish. In the recipe for artichoke and grapefruit salad, I have suggested garnishing the salad with chervil because I felt the need for a light, green, feathered touch of delicacy. Chervil looks right and has the requisite bit of sharpness in its distinctive flavor. At times I have substituted a small sprig of young fennel, a suitable replacement in appearance and flavor. If my recommendation is unobtainable or unreasonably expensive

your own ingenuity, resourcefulness, and personal aesthetics must come into play. When you are faced with the absence of a certain ingredient, don't panic; formulate your own acceptable or inspired replacement, always having the anticipated harmony and balance of the dish uppermost in your mind. I would like these recipes to be understood by someone who doesn't know how to cook at all. The absence of technical knowledge need not prevent a person from understanding the inspiration of rubbing the bread with garlic!

I have not attempted to oversimplify the problem of obtaining first-quality ingredients, nor have I de-emphasized the sometimes exorbitant cost demanded by those who can supply exceptional or unusual foodstuffs. In the same vein, I have not attempted to simplify the complex preparation of an apparently simple dish. Remember that the ultimate quality of a dish is determined initially by the worth of the ingredients and the time and effort expended by the cook. Certainly some dishes require a less complex presentation, but those are usually the dishes which require an additional application of diligence in the selection of the rare ingredients.

If your culinary expertise does not extend to *beurre blanc* and *demi-glace*, but you do understand and empathize with the guidelines set out here regarding freshness and excellence of ingredients, then teaching yourself to make a good *beurre blanc* would be a simple matter, indeed. There are innumerable cookbooks devoted solely to the perfection of cooking techniques, but this book is not about complicated sauces. My style of cooking involves combining ingredients that harmonize because of their quality, freshness, aroma, and flavor. If you should encounter an unfamiliar technique or process in these recipes, it is the simplest thing in the world to check any of the procedurally oriented cookbooks. This is how I learned to cook!

We all cook differently. On many occasions I have tasted the same dish prepared by different cooks using the same recipe; the results were similar, but they were *not* identical. My pinch of salt may be larger than your pinch of salt; or I may prefer a slightly saltier taste while you may, quite justifiably and correctly, fancy a more lightly salted flavor. If your ingrained philosophy tells you that an ingredient or an amount called for in a particular recipe wouldn't be right, eliminate the component or change it to one which falls into the same categories of flavor, texture, and aroma; you should alter the amount of any element you think needs change. And it is vitally important that you continually taste and retaste your ingredients, raw and cooked.

Learn to trust your own instincts. A good cook needs only to have positive feelings about food in general, and about the pleasures of eating and cooking. I have known some cooks who did not seem to discover pleasure and gratification in things culinary. At the restaurant, look for employees who are interested in working in the kitchen for reasons above and beyond those of simply needing a job, any job. This applies equally to the home cook: a cook who dislikes food is a bad cook. Period. Even an ambivalent cook is a bad cook. Yet a person who responds to the cooking processes and the mound of fresh ingredients with a genuine glow of delight is likely to be, or become, a very good cook indeed. Technical skills can be acquired and perfected along the way, but dislike or ambivalence toward food cannot always be overcome.

In the early stages of my culinary pursuits, I cooked as I had seen cooking done in France. I copied some of the more traditional cooks, and I stayed within the bounds they had laid out so carefully because I didn't trust my own instincts yet. Having imitated their styles, I found that with time and experience, their fundamental principles had become a part of my nature, and I began to understand why they had done certain things in a particular way. Then I could begin to develop a different and more personal style based on the ingredients available to me here in California.

When I cook, I usually stand at my kitchen table. I may pull a bunch of thyme from my pocket and lay it on the table; then I wander about the kitchen gathering up all the wonderfully fresh ingredients I can find. I look at each foodstuff carefully, examining it with a critical eye and concentrating in such a way that I begin to make associations. While the method may appear chaotic to others, I do think best while holding a tomato or a leg of lamb. Sometimes I wander through the garden looking for something appealing, absorbing the bouquet of the earth and the scent of the fresh herbs. Sometimes I butterfly my way through cookbooks, quickly flipping the pages and absorbing a myriad of ideas about a particular food or concept.

You can use these recipes and adapt them to your regional ingredients just as I adapt the recipes of other regions and cooks to the ingredients here in California. I enjoyed a marvelous meal at Frédy Girardet's restaurant just outside Lausanne, Switzerland; the chef had achieved a certain perfection and elegance in his use of regional foodstuffs; I admired and appreciated the meal as a work of art. Back in Berkeley I wanted to re-create a part of it. The first course was fresh foie gras—unobtainable here. So I concentrated on the technique they had used

prepare it: sautéing the goose liver, deglazing the pan with sherry vinegar, adding shallots, parsley, and walnut oil, and pouring the sauce over the liver like a vinaigrette. We prepared the dish at Chez Panisse with duck livers, which are readily available to us at an affordable cost. They do not taste the same as foie gras; but we do not pretend that they do. The dish tastes like duck livers prepared in an interesting way, and that in itself is wonderful. Careful substitutions and adaptations can considerably expand the potential applications of any recipe.

Cooking, preparing food, involves far more than just creating a meal for family or friends; it has to do with keeping yourself intact. Because most people cook and eat three meals a day, this process becomes an integral part of one's daily routine. These eating and cooking habits can either be sensually nourishing, even on an unconscious level, or they can rapidly become redundant. There is a marvelous scene in a film by Les Blank of the morning-coffee ritual of an old Southern lady. We watch her reach into her store of coffee beans for a handful, which she puts in a pan on the stove to roast. When she is satisfied with the degree and depth of roast, she shakes the fragrant beans into a hand-cranked coffee grinder and proceeds to pulverize them into a cloth napkin filter. Then she boils the water and pours it through the coffee-filled filter to produce a cup of coffee for herself—one you know must be wonderful. She sits and drinks her coffee in a totally intimate and relaxed manner, and eventually rises to wash out the napkin and hang it out to dry. This ritual is important because she is making a celebration out of the act of making coffee for herself. For others, this coffee habit can be as alienating as a Styrofoam cup of coffee from a vending machine.

So many people believe that by using a myriad of machines and equipment in the kitchen, they're simplifying it and making the whole process easier. Somehow, we have been indoctrinated into believing that by making food preparation easier and less time-consuming, we're gaining valuable free time. No mention is ever made of what we lose by this whittling away at our direct contact with our food or what better thing we might do with the time thus gained. I strongly believe that much of what has gone wrong with American food has been the result of mechanization and the alienation that comes with it. The quality of the home food prepared in France has deteriorated, too. It is no longer a simple matter to find hand-kneaded and -shaped bread and homemade aioli. The harsh sounds of the machine have replaced the rhythmic chop of the knife.

I simply don't believe that all the "gourmet" equipment and utensils are vital. To beg

with, the terms “gourmet” or “gourmet cooking” have all the wrong associations for me: they somehow seem to imply that one is more interested in the gleaming copper pans and the flashy chrome and plastic of the food processors than in what one is cooking, and certainly more impressed with them than with the food itself. It is far easier to cook with good sharp knives, but you *can* cook without them. Perversely, some of the very best times to cook are those occasions when you are faced with virtually nothing in terms of equipment—you must make do, improvise, and focus primarily on the food itself. So you may gather rosemary branches from the yard and use them to skewer the meat before you put it on the charcoal grill. If you do, you will have learned something fundamental about food, unrestricted and unhampered by equipment. You need to learn to cook first, and then you will learn when equipment is genuinely important to you.

When you use a machine, you never really touch the food, a fact that deprives you of much of the sensual pleasure and sensory experience so important in developing good cooking habits. When learning to make pesto, you *need* to rub the olive oil into the pounded garlic and the basil with your pestle in hand. You *need* to be able to stick your finger into the mixture to feel the transformation of the ingredients. Otherwise the information just does not come through all your senses. The senses of smell, touch, and hearing, in addition to sight and taste, must work together to enable you to judge what is happening to the ingredients. Machines have a place, but only after you have reached a point in your cooking at which you *know* what you are sacrificing in sensory stimulation for the questionable exchange of a slight saving in time and effort.

Every time we make pesto at the restaurant, it's different. If it isn't garlic with a hot taste or the basil with a bitterness from too much sun, it's the cook pounding it differently—or it may be that the customer who loved it last time isn't in the mood this time. Maybe every six months the waiters are in the right mood, the cooks cook it right, the customers feel like eating that particular dinner, and I feel satisfied with the results; when that happens, I know that it has been worth the effort.

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