



Read & Feed

Let's Hear it for Jacques Pepin

Cornelius O'Donnell

I've been writing this column called *Read and Feed* for a couple of years. In it I try to highlight cookbook writers and their books that are easy to cook from—no complicated instructions or exotic ingredients.

Why has it taken me so long to get to the best example of a chef-writer whose output is not only prodigious, but each is a teaching tool? I am talking about an old friend, French-born Jacques Pepin, whose career has had one goal—to produce competent and creative cooks.

His early books *La Technique* (1976) and *Le Methode* (1979), were virtually a professional chef's cooking school between covers, as they featured hundreds of

photographs. These may not have been designed for home cooks (although I learned a lot from both). The two volume set *The Art of Cooking* (Borzoi, softcover, 1987) is a valuable update of both books and very pricey in the used book market.

As you'll read, Jacques soon turned his attention to the two most important aspects of contemporary home cooking: healthful food and quick preparation. I promise you, look into any of his books highlighted below, and you'll cook healthful and delicious meals.

Have Recipes Will Travel

You may not be aware that there are chefs and cooking personalities who roam the country going from one local cooking school to another and giving classes at each stop. Jacques was the most acclaimed—and sought after—of these. Despite this grueling schedule, he managed to get a Master's Degree from Boston University and he began to teach there.

To gain a wider audience, he accepted an offer from San Francisco's KQED and began a string of 26-episode televised cooking programs starting about 1991 and called

Learn More

Some culinary students spend a couple of years in classes and—voilà—they are called Chef. Not so when Jacques was growing up in France. His family owned a restaurant but he was apprenticed as he hit his teens and learned all the positions in a professional kitchen from the potato-peeling up. He certainly learned, as he became chef to DeGaulle, and at the Plaza Athenee in Paris. Barely in his twenties, he decided to come to New York to seek fame and fortune—and to teach others what he learned. Read *The Apprentice: My Life in the Kitchen*, a riveting 2003 autobiography published by Thorndyke Press). And try the simply beautiful book *Chez Jacques: Traditions and Rituals of a Cook* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2007), a cookbook featuring his favorite recipes and presented in a storytelling format with many illustrations.

Jacques lives in Madison on Connecticut's coast with his wonderful wife Gloria, and they have a full television studio on their property. At our age who needs a long commute, right Jacques?

Today's Gourmet. Each of the series resulted in a new Jacques book. Ergo, a listing of his books would fill the remaining space on this page. The book from the 2001 series, *Jacques Pepin Celebrates*, won the prestigious James Beard award. (A couple of the series and resultant books featured the chef and his daughter Claudine.)

See *Pepin* on page 30



I learned about Jacques—and first met him—in the 1970s when he was the House Beautiful chef and brand new to the USA.

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- Mediterranean Chicken Pasta
- Broiled Seafood Platter
- Crab Cake Dinner

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Julia and Jacques

Pepin's profile was enhanced when he was paired with the aging Julia Child for a charming series that resulted in the book *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home* published by Knopf in 1999. The "he says and she says" format is great fun. Meanwhile a revised *Complete Techniques* appeared in 2001.

Jacques has always emphasized good health in his writings, and he is in great shape for a man who is exactly my age. I recommend *The French Culinary Institutes Salute to Healthy Cooking* (Rodale, 1998); Jacques was one of the contributors along with three other acclaimed chefs. And Jacques is now a dean at the Institute. *A Fare for the Heart Cleveland Clinic Cookbook* appeared in 1988; *Simple and Healthy Cooking* (with illustrations by the talented author!) was published in 1994.

A Local Connection

I learned about Jacques—and first met him—in the 1970s when he was the *House Beautiful* chef and brand new to the USA. His mentor was the magazine's wonderful food editor Helen McCully and her office and test kitchen were a few floors above Corning's then-New York office. I was determined to hold a fund raiser in Elmira for the Arnot Art Museum; Jacques agreed to come—gratis—and I still recall the cauliflower soup (among other dishes) he produced in the auditorium at the Elmira Psych Center.

Faster, Easier, and Fresher Than Ever

Jacques interest in "quick and good" cooking started with his first conventional cookbook in 1980, *Everyday Cooking*, my own copy of which is not only well-thumbed but food-spattered. Then there was *The Short-Cut Cook*, a 1990 Morrow release.

As you can see, Jacques is far from a one or two-book wonder. These days I find I'm drawn to Jacques' newest pair of books—again based on his TV shows—*Fast Food My Way* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004) and *More Fast Food My Way* (HM, 2008).

Here is a lightening-fast no-cook hors d'oeuvre from the latter book's minute recipes section. Can you get any faster? You may taste this at the Soiree on November 6th to benefit Wellsboro's Soldiers and Sailors Hospital—I'll be rolling these at Dunham's Furniture—with Pat Davis as the piano accompaniment! 🎹

Chef Pepin's Salmon Rolls

Using a good sharp vegetable peeler, cut lengthwise strips from 1 unpeeled (but washed) zucchini—or 2, if small. Stop when you reach the seeds in the center. Rotate the zucchini and repeat the procedure. Discard seeds. Place a long strip of zucchini on the table. Top it with a small slice of smoked salmon; it should cover only the center portion and stick out a little beyond it on either side. Spread about 2 teaspoons of whipped cream cheese on the salmon and add a sprinkling of salt and freshly ground black pepper. Roll up the zucchini slice, encasing the salmon and cream cheese into a tight roll. Cut down the center and arrange both halves cut side down and green side up on a serving platter. Repeat with the remaining zucchini strips. Serve the rolls on their own or with thin sesame crackers.

Note: I've used a dab of salmon flavored cream cheese instead of the plain, and sprinkled a little chopped dill and chives over the cream cheese.

Chef, teacher, and author Cornelius O'Donnell lives in Corning, New York.