



The Culinary Library



In just about every kitchen there is a little shelf of books. This is in kitchens large and small, home or commercial. Mostly dog eared, and stained, they are used consistently during the year, when a new project comes up, or an idea is needed for a dinner party. The task of buying cook books is difficult, as there are thousands of books on the market.

There are books on about every single style of cooking and every single food item imaginable. Some of these books are outstanding, and well worth the time and money. With all this to choose from, selecting a book for a cook can be a daunting experience.

You may know an aspiring Chef, or that someone in your family is getting interested in the culinary arts. They probably are reading on the subject quite often, to learn the basics of a very useful skill. Much of the literature is repetitive, but there are some great books on the subject.

I took a very informal survey. I asked a number of Chefs in the area what they would consider the most important volumes in their culinary library. Each was to name three books, which they either use regularly, or consider important to the development of their art. There were some odd books in there, about specific styles of cooking, such as BBQ, or vegetarian cooking. The following books were mentioned more often than most. These few could make the backbone of a good culinary library.

I am sure that any culinary professional would be able to add a few items to this list. Each of us has our own style, and learns from very many sources. These books would be considered the reference library, books that will be as useful to a Chef in 20 years, as they are useful today.

Here are, in no real order, the most popular books that I heard speak of in this survey. I would consider them the essentials, from which all other books are created. They are all in print, and available on line, or at better book stores.

La Cuisine, August Escoffier, 1905.

If there is need to research classical cooking, this is the source. The volume available is a close translation. The book is in two sections, methods, and recipes. The detail on every subject is intense, and it is easy to see how this work has become the standard by which all cookbooks are judged. It is remarkable in it's depth, as it is not limited to the standard French cuisine of the day, but touches on a great number of styles, and of ingredients.

Joy of Cooking, 1997. Irma Rombauer, Marion Rombauer, and Ethan Becker.

If there is an American version of "the cooking bible", this is it. There are articles and methods for just about every single classic dish imaginable. This is the newest version of the classic first published in 1931.

Mastering The Art of French Cooking, Vol. 1 and 2. 1961, 1968. Julia Child and Simone Beck.

This is the step by step classic on all aspects of Cuisine. Written for cooks with a general background and interest in the finest culinary methods. To read a chapter in this book is to gain a serious knowledge on a particular subject

Beard on Bread, 1973. James Beard.

If you had to choose only one James Beard book, this would be a good start. It describes in detail all of the steps and systems needed to produce fine breads, for the amateur or professional. Any of Mr. Beard's books are well worth the price and effort to find.

The Baker's Manual, 1972. James Amendola

Every baker should have a copy of this work. It contains the basic formulas for quantity baking and pastries. This is the base that a good bakery starts from. Culinary students for 30 years have kept this at hand for the simplicity and professionalism of the recipes and methods.

The Professional Chef, Culinary Institute of America

This book is the mainstay of the culinary student, and has been the textbook, in several variations, for generations. No serious culinary library should be without this volume. It is comprehensive in its recipes and methods, with a professional air that

The New Enchanted Broccoli Forest, 1977, Mollie Katzen

Strange name, but this book began a serious study of vegetarian cooking by professionals. There are thousands of vegetarian cooking books on the market today, including dozens by this same author, under the titles "Moosewood Restaurant". This book, however, was pretty revolutionary in it's day, and holds up well to modern cooking.

John Griffin

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