



THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA COOKBOOK

RECIPES FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. REALLY.

by Bren Herrera

The Culinary Institute of America, “The CIA Cookbook” is a thick, colorful, yet simple hardcover that sets the standard in food information. On initial review, one can be intimidated. Plain white pages with lots of black writing make up most of the 311 pages, so you might conclude it’s just another book. But when you really get into the thick of it, you find yourself walking toward your kitchen and scanning it with one eye, taking mental note of what’s in your fridge or what

distinct utensil you’ll have to go buy. I instantly flipped to the index in search of anything avocado. A fruit I’ve been heavily incorporating into dishes for my clients and students of late, I wanted to see what the geniuses at the CIA came up with.

Their rendition of guacamole was very basic. Hoping to see something more gourmet or even more discriminating, theirs lacked additions that really make this simple, everyday dip pop. Like pineapple! I add pineapple to one of my versions of guac. So I moved on over to the next avocado recipe and found peace. A roasted corn and tomato salad with this Mexican fruit would have been ordinary except they include a chipotle sherry vinaigrette and aged cheddar cheese. With super simple instructions and very accessible ingredients, I’d make this all year long. The crisp and vibrantly colored picture was an added touch.

Still looking for that wow page or even recipe (after all, most cookbooks sell on the basis of their colorful pictures), I did a quick game card shuffle and landed on page 193. Against a very solid background and accompanying napkin, the chunky oxtail stew sits perfectly on a white plate, just begging to be devoured. I was particularly intrigued by this recipe because oxtail is one of my personal favorite dishes. Rabo ensendido (peppered oxtail in tomato and red wine sauce), as we Cubans prepare it, of course is far different than how the CIA does, but this one works! The inclusion of honey was perfect

for this robust dish. Make this during crisp fall evenings, and your family and friends will be bragging about your culinary knowledge.

This book is now the 10th in my very slim collection. And in stark comparison to the other nine, this one serves as an exceptional kitchen reference, even for myself. Surely the everyday home cook could benefit from the thorough description of basics, such as how to filet a round fish or how to prepare creamy soups, which is timely for the season.

Make sure to spend time in the back of the book. There, you’ll find charts and graphs of relevant cooking temps for various foods. We all could use a bit of help every now and then. Especially since burnt toast is never agreeable, even with the most forgiving of taste buds!



“The CIA Cookbook” is available on amazon.com. Bren Herrera is a freelance food and travel writer based in Atlanta. Visit her Web site at www.flanboyanteats.com.

There are some things you just can’t learn from a friend or a manual, perhaps. You have to try it, get your hands dirty and mess up, even. Much is left to the old adage “Practice makes perfect.” I’m still working on perfecting my cello skills. I’ve been playing for 20-plus years, but I still have to make time to practice. I wish a textbook would make my challenge a bit easier.

Fortunately, I have moments when I don’t have to subject myself to the painful agony of making mistakes and spending even more time fixing it. This seldom gimme is found in well-written, detailed and beautifully pictured cookbooks! Did you think it was going to be as easy as a new desk assembly instruction sheet (the ones from Ikea come to mind)? Not at all. What I’m talking about here is something far more interesting, interactive and ultimately very tasty.

In my last cookbook review as published in this magazine, I mentioned not being a cookbook collector. In two short months, that has dramatically changed. Thanks to the wealth of new books, whose authors range from personal chefs to cheftectomy analysts to major academia food scholars, I have been doing a lot of perusing and tasting of other peoples’ food.

And that makes me happy.

I’m not a creature of habit, but when it comes to tried-and-true dishes that just work, I’m with it all the way. I recently acquired *the* cookbook. Produced by