

Gift Guide: Our Favorite Cookbooks of 2013

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Earlier this summer, after opening box after box of beautiful vegetarian cookbooks, I was ready to call effortless, vegetable-focused cuisine the cookbook trend of 2013. But as the weather began to chill, a coterie of excellent technical books emerged. Some were well-tested restaurant cookbooks, others were nerdy scientific tomes, while others tackled major DIY projects. This culinary juxtaposition between simple and complex cookbooks has led to an incredibly diverse year of cooking. Over the last 12 or so months, I've managed to cook from close to 50 new cookbooks—and I've not come close to repeating a dish.

I've done my best to capture the breadth of technique, flavor, and style we've witnessed over the past year of Cook the Book. It was tough to narrow down the list, but here it is—ten of our favorite cookbooks from 2013.

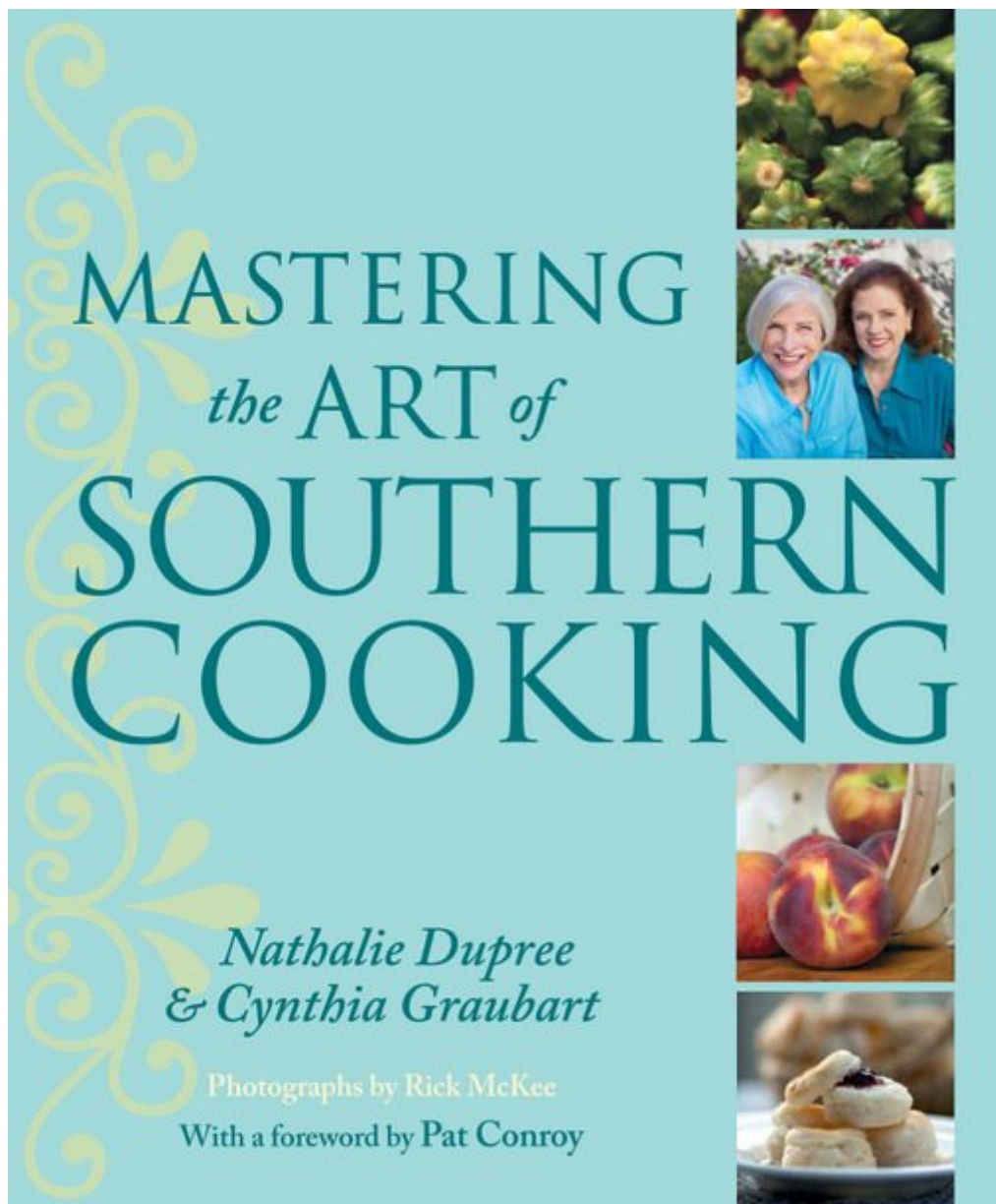
'Pati's Mexican Table' by Pati Jinich



Pati's Mexican Table is a lovingly written book from PBS cooking host **Pati Jinich**, featuring accessible yet intriguing, Mexican dishes that are easy to incorporate into typical American kitchens. Some of the dishes, like huevos rancheros and chicken enchiladas, are instantly recognizable. Others, like her yellow mole with masa dumplings, offer new tastes and textures for those who don't regularly step outside of the taco zone. These unfamiliar recipes are easy to tackle, given Jinich's detailed instructions—her experience teaching cooking classes shows itself throughout. Cook through a few recipes in *Pati's Mexican Table*, and you'll feel like a Mexican food expert in no time.

Favorite Recipes: *Rodrigo-Style Fish*, *Yellow Mole with Masa Dumplings*

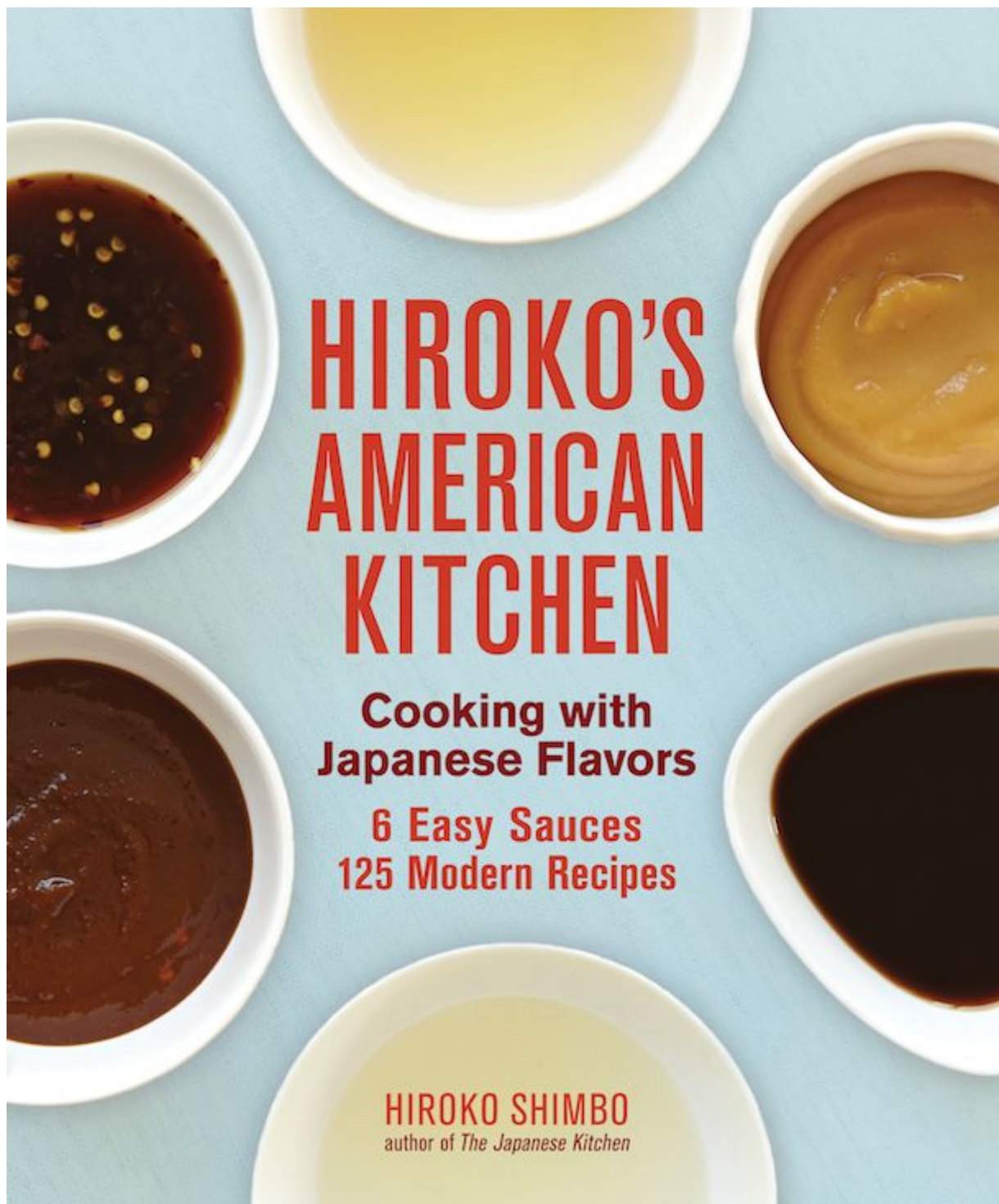
'Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking' by Nathalie Dupree and Cynthia Graubart



For those of us still basking in the Southern food renaissance, **Nathalie Dupree** and **Cynthia Graubart**'s James Beard Award-winning cookbook, *Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking*, is a perfect companion. Taking cues from Julia Child's masterpiece, this book covers just about every element of Southern food you (and your grandmother) could think of. Everything from grits to chitlins gets a mention, and more often than not, a detailed description of history and proper technique. Not surprisingly, there is incredible amount of butter listed throughout the pages as many of traditional Southern dishes are rib-sticking, sideboard-warping fare. However, *Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking* is not only a love letter to the wonders of butter and bacon grease; as befits book on a region with impressive farmland and a cornucopia of local produce, much of it takes a close look at local veggies.

Favorite Recipes: *New Orleans-Style Barbecue Shrimp*, *Social Circle Macaroni Pie*

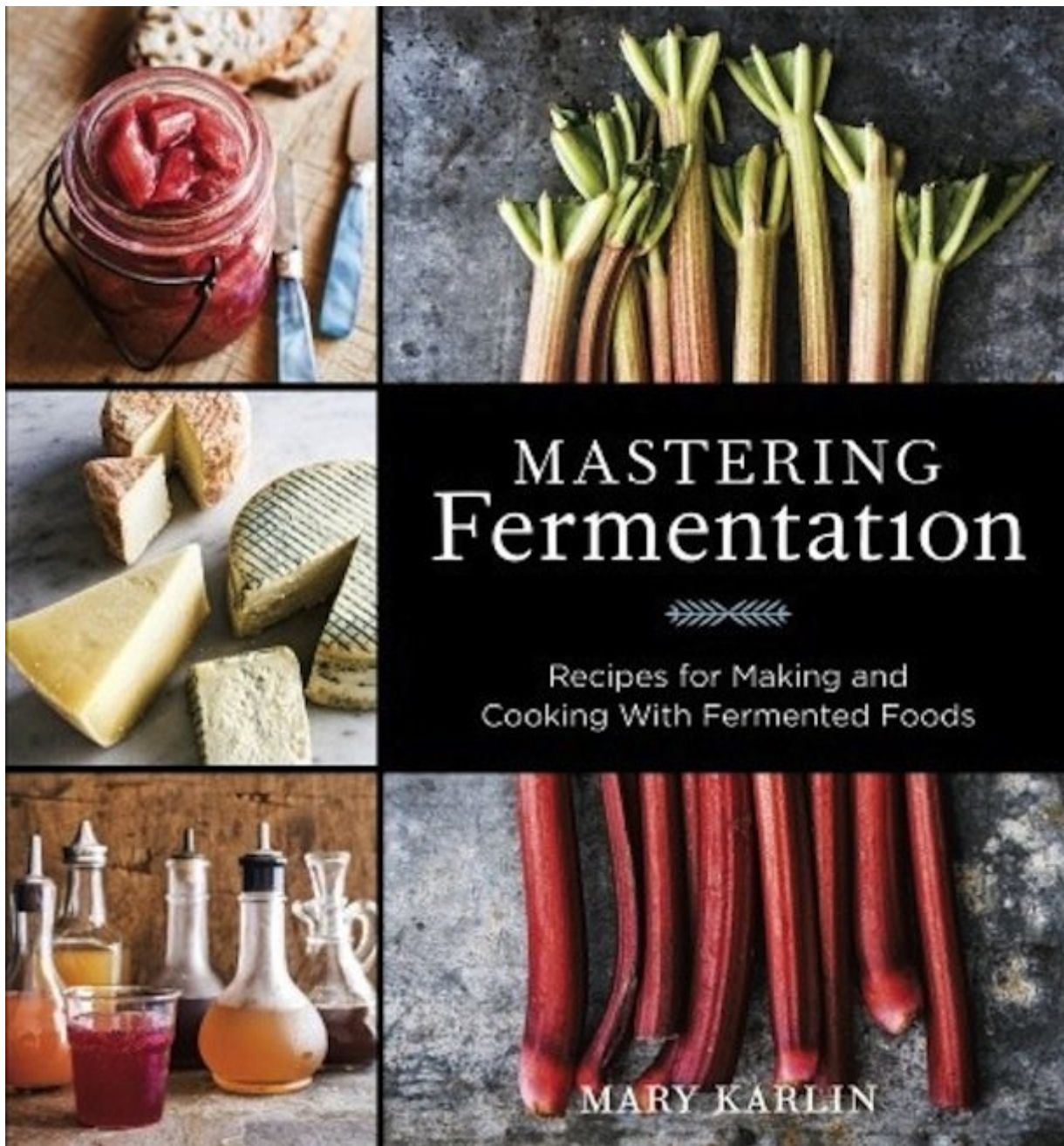
'Hiroko's American Kitchen' by Hiroko Shimbo



Much of the focus in new Asian cookbooks is on teaching brand new skills and ideas to broaden the scope of American home kitchens. Cooking from these books requires a big shift in thinking, as well as a major shopping trip for all kinds of new ingredients. There's nothing wrong with such culturally-specific books, but sometimes a gentler transition between cuisines is welcome. Enter *Hiroko's American Kitchen*. Author **Hiroko Shimbo** offers an all-inclusive approach to Japanese-American cuisine by focusing the book on six basic Japanese stocks or sauces. Each sauce serves as the anchor for a broad set of recipes—some are rooted in Japan, while most are twists on American favorites. But just because Shimbo's recipes are a fusion of cuisines doesn't mean that she wants us all to cook mild, hokey food. Instead, the book extends the Japanese tradition of sharing and blending food cultures melding into a new, harmonious plate.

Favorite Recipes: *Chicken Namban*, *Vegetables with Sumiso Bagna Cauda*

'Mastering Fermentation' by Mary Karlin



Most books on fermentation seem geared towards laid-back ("hippie," if you will) cooks that don't care for specific recipes. They'll offer guidelines and suggestions, but will rarely explain with confidence how to successfully ferment produce, dairy, meat, and beverages. *Mastering Fermentation*, by **Mary Karlin**, is decidedly different. It's a thorough (and gorgeous) book with actual recipes for just about any ferment you might want to make at home. Beer, salami, and yogurt are all there, along with recipes for several Asian ferments, like soy sauce, ponzu, and bran-fermented pickles, that are a rarity even today in American cookbooks. Karlin delves just enough into the science behind each ferment to ensure that you're learning something new without getting too bogged down in the minutiae. It also makes it possible to use her recipes as launching pads for later experimentation.

Favorite Recipes: *Farmhouse Cream Cheese*, *Water Kefir*

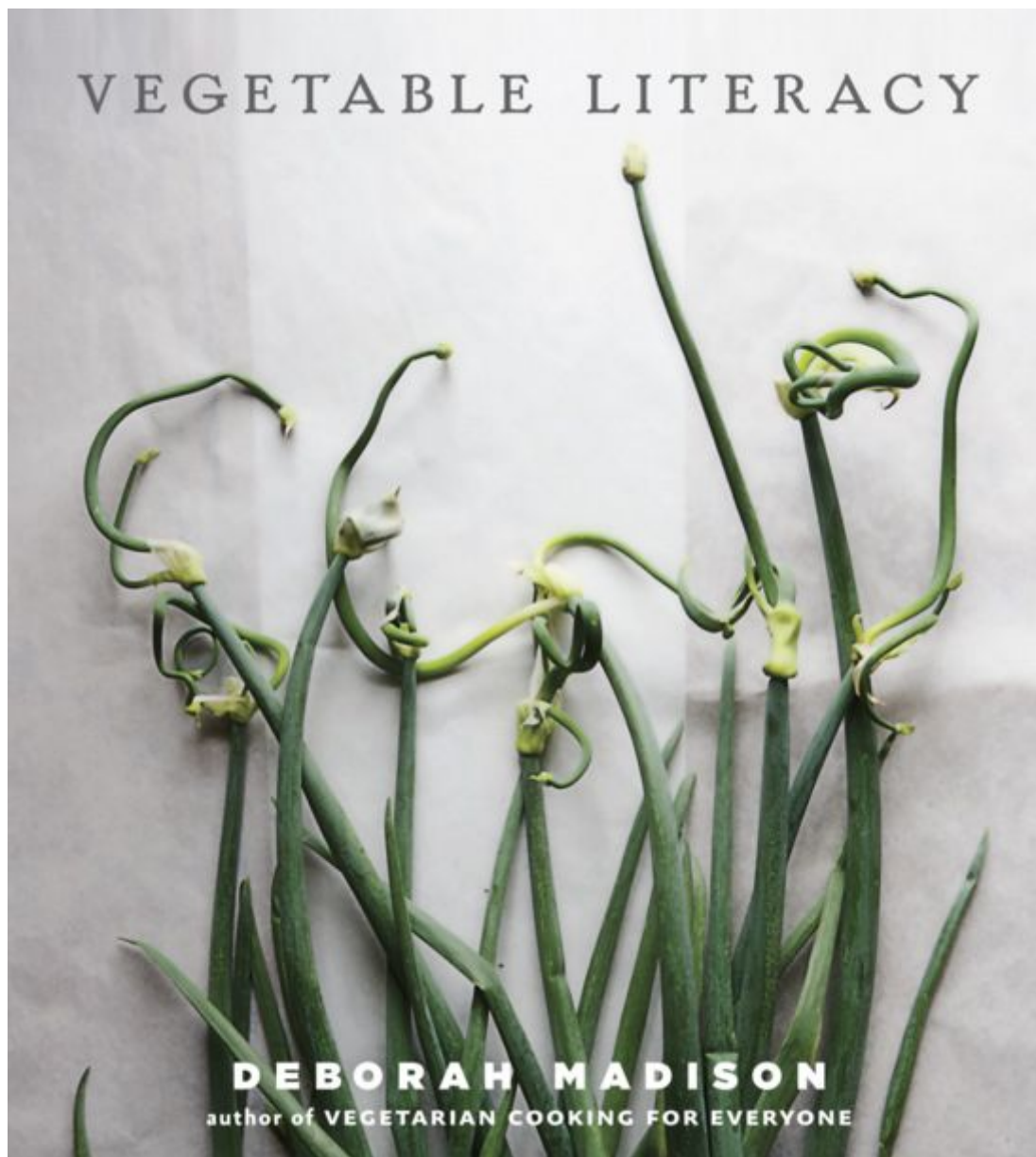
'Little Jars, Big Flavor' by the editors of Southern Living Magazine



A wonderful new resource for home canners is **Southern Living Magazine**'s *Little Jars, Big Flavors*. Like many newer canning cookbooks, *Little Jars, Big Flavors* focuses on small-batch preserving instead of the massive homesteader-sized projects in books from our parents' generation. Preserving small amounts of jams, jellies, and pickles keeps canning manageable, even in small kitchens with negligible counter space. While canning can be daunting to the novice, *Little Jars, Big Flavors* does a great job quelling water-bath anxieties. Between the warm, welcoming tone of the recipes and no-nonsense, information-packed canning intro, the book could put even the biggest hypochondriac at ease. The recipes themselves cover a wide range of preserves, from simple berry jam and dill pickle spears to Southern scuppernong jelly and pickled cherries. In addition, there are recipes that make use of the preserves scattered throughout the book, for those of us who need a little nudge to get through the last jar of jam.

Favorite Recipes: *Pickled Japanese Turnips with Shiso*, *Cardamom-Plum Jam*

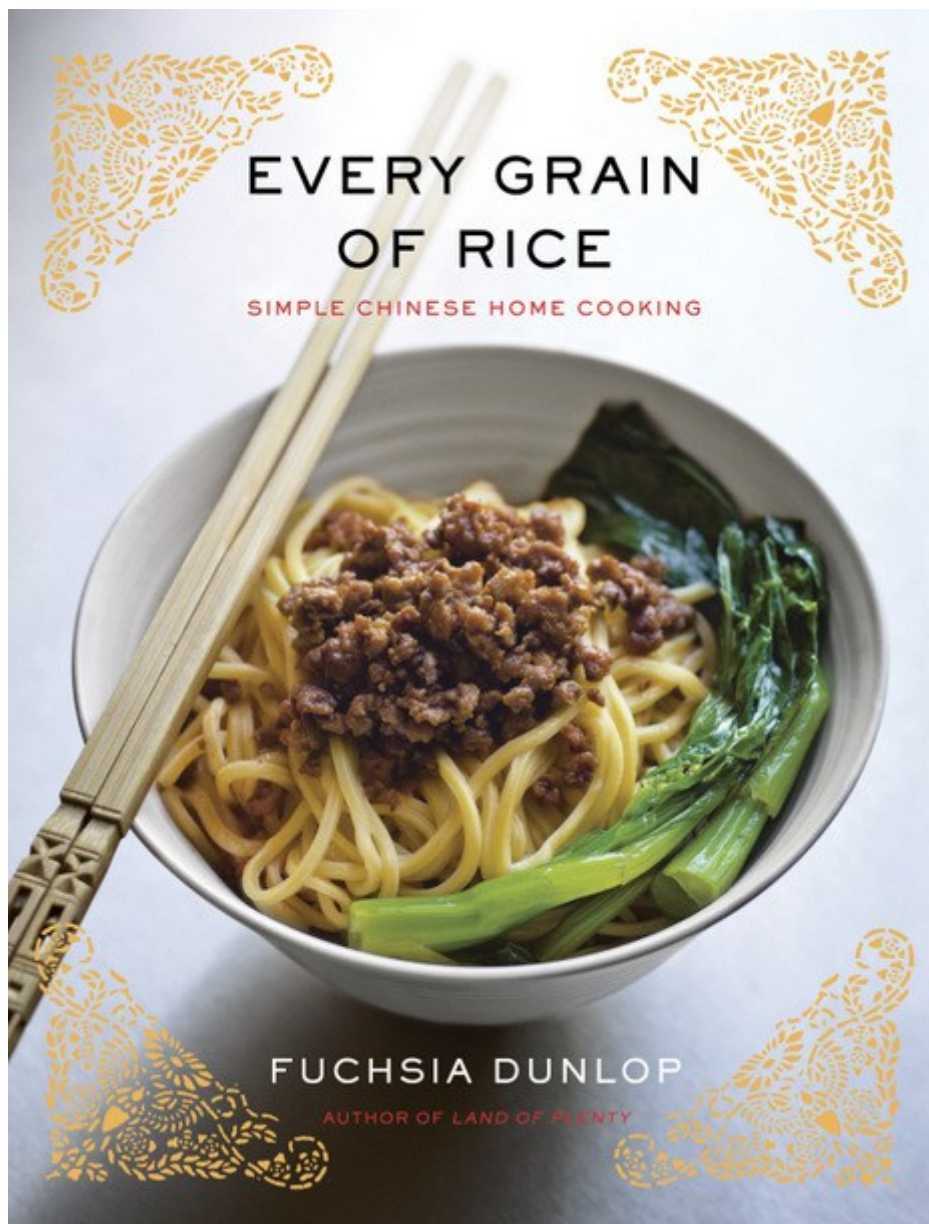
'Vegetable Literacy' by Deborah Madison



Every once in a while, a cookbook will come along and completely shift the way one thinks about cooking. Sometimes a book will offer new, vibrant flavor pairings, while other times a cookbook will be so filled with rustic, thoughtful food and photography that it'll inspire weeks upon weeks of dinner parties. But the most useful muse is one that blends culinary know-how with practical recipes and resourceful technique. **Deborah Madison**'s gorgeous cookbook, *Vegetable Literacy*, does just that. Here Madison delves deep into the plant kingdom—each chapter is dedicated to one of twelve plant families and includes gardening advice in addition to cooking techniques. While her recipes are relatively simple, they are designed to bring out the best in each vegetable and family. Madison's explanations of how vegetables "interact in the kitchen" help the curious cook develop his or her own style and encourage experimentation, while at the same time providing instruction. Cooking through each recipe is a calming, meditative process, and each resulting meal is delightfully wholesome.

Favorite Recipes: *Cauliflower with Saffron, Pepper Flakes, Plenty of Parsley, and Pasta; Peas with Baked Ricotta and Bread Crumbs*

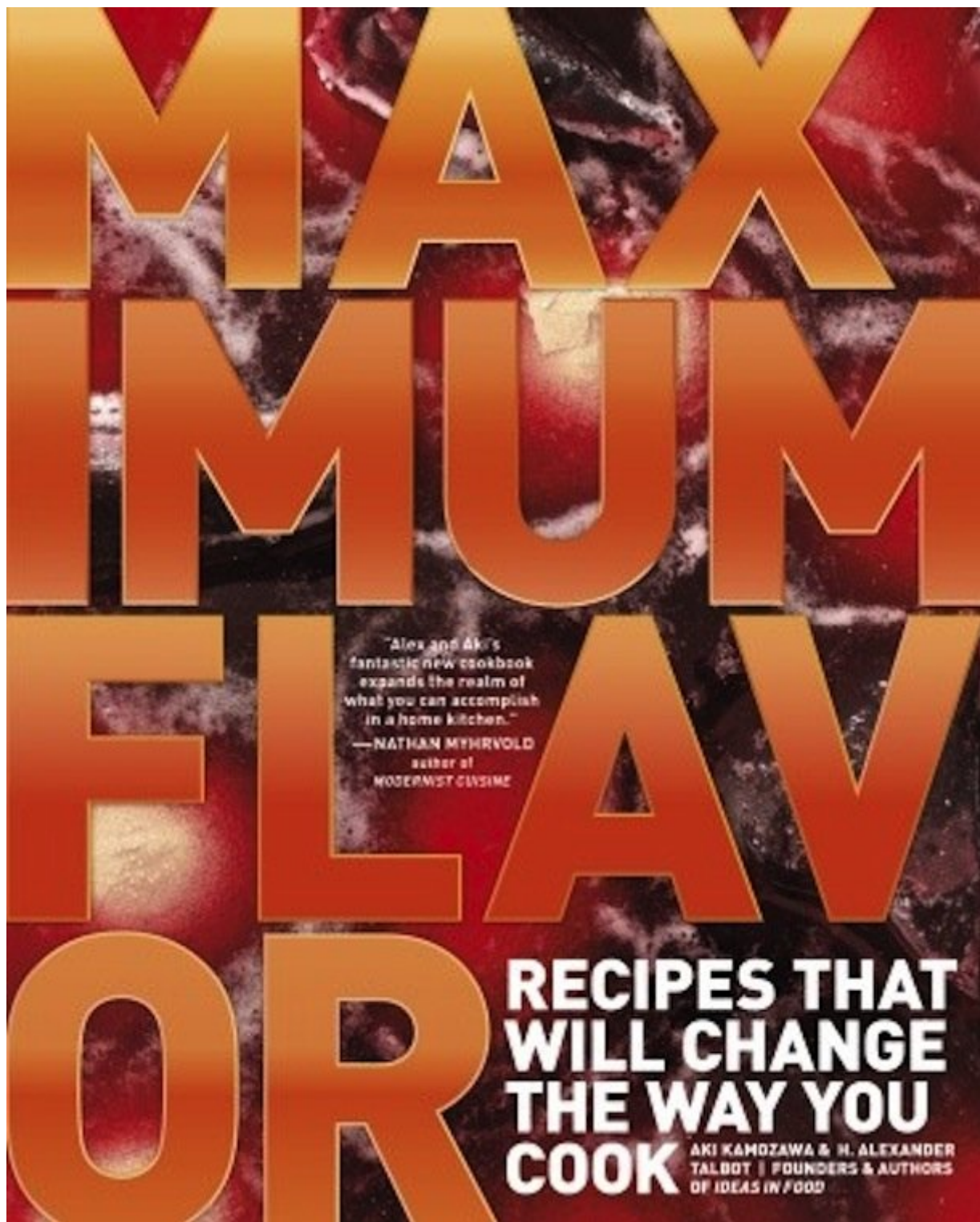
'Every Grain of Rice' by Fuchsia Dunlop



Fans of **Fuchsia Dunlop**'s earlier cookbooks will recognize many of her staple recipes in this year's *Every Grain of Rice*. Yet two things set this book apart from the others: its streamlined recipes and its absolute embrace of vegetables. In fact, take out the brief meat and chicken chapters and you'd have an almost entirely vegetarian book on your hands. The bulk of the book is devoted to leafy greens, eggplants, mushrooms, tofu, garlic, and beans, with slimmer sections on cold appetizers, noodles, rice, and dumplings as bookends. For those who need a primer on Chinese pantry ingredients and equipment, there are photographs and detailed descriptions for anything out-of-the-ordinary you'll need to buy—super helpful when combing the aisles of a Chinese supermarket. And yes, you will need to make that trek for many of the recipes in the book, but the transformation a few fermented black beans and a scoop of chili bean paste will make on your everyday cooking is totally worth it.

Favorite Recipes: *Cold Chicken with a Spicy Sichuanese Sauce (Liang Ban Ji)*, *Twice-Cooked Swiss Chard (Hui Gua Niu Pi Cai)*

'Maximum Flavor' by Aki Kamezawa and H. Alexander Talbot

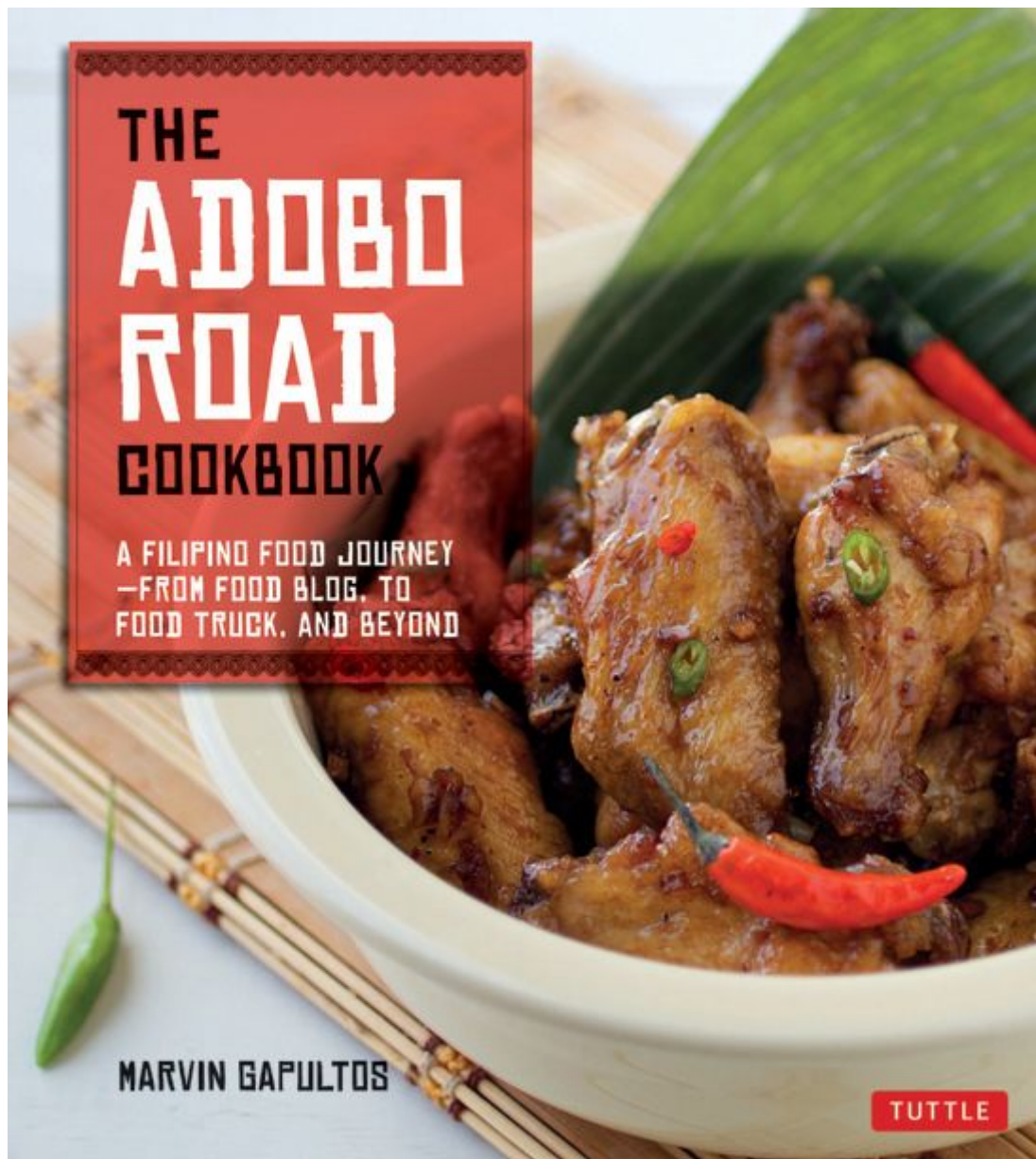


Much has been made of the trend towards nerdy, scientific cooking. Some cooks, like our own [Kenji Lopez-Alt](#), embrace the liberal use of science in the kitchen. Others may take the opposite track, aiming for simplicity above all else. [Aki Kamozaawa](#) and [H. Alexander Talbot](#) of [Ideas in Food](#) are here to convince all of us that using science in the kitchen can be a wonderful thing. Their new cookbook, *Maximum Flavor*, is filled with specific recipes for steaks, cakes, breads, pickles, and soups, but the book is exciting if each recipe is used as a jumping-off point for experimentation. There's a technical trick embedded in just about every dish in the book that not only helps improve the recipe itself, but it also can be read as an idea on its own. Take the deviled eggs and bacon, for example. As a traditional recipe, it is a multi-day process for a quirky take on an American classic. But if you don't care to candy bacon

or embellish your eggs with pepper jelly, you can still learn how to steam eggs instead of hard boiling them, or how to brine them for a boost in flavor. Whichever path you take, there is still plenty to learn.

Favorite Recipes: *[Creamed Spinach with Citrus Kosho](#)*, *[Bacon and Deviled Eggs](#)*

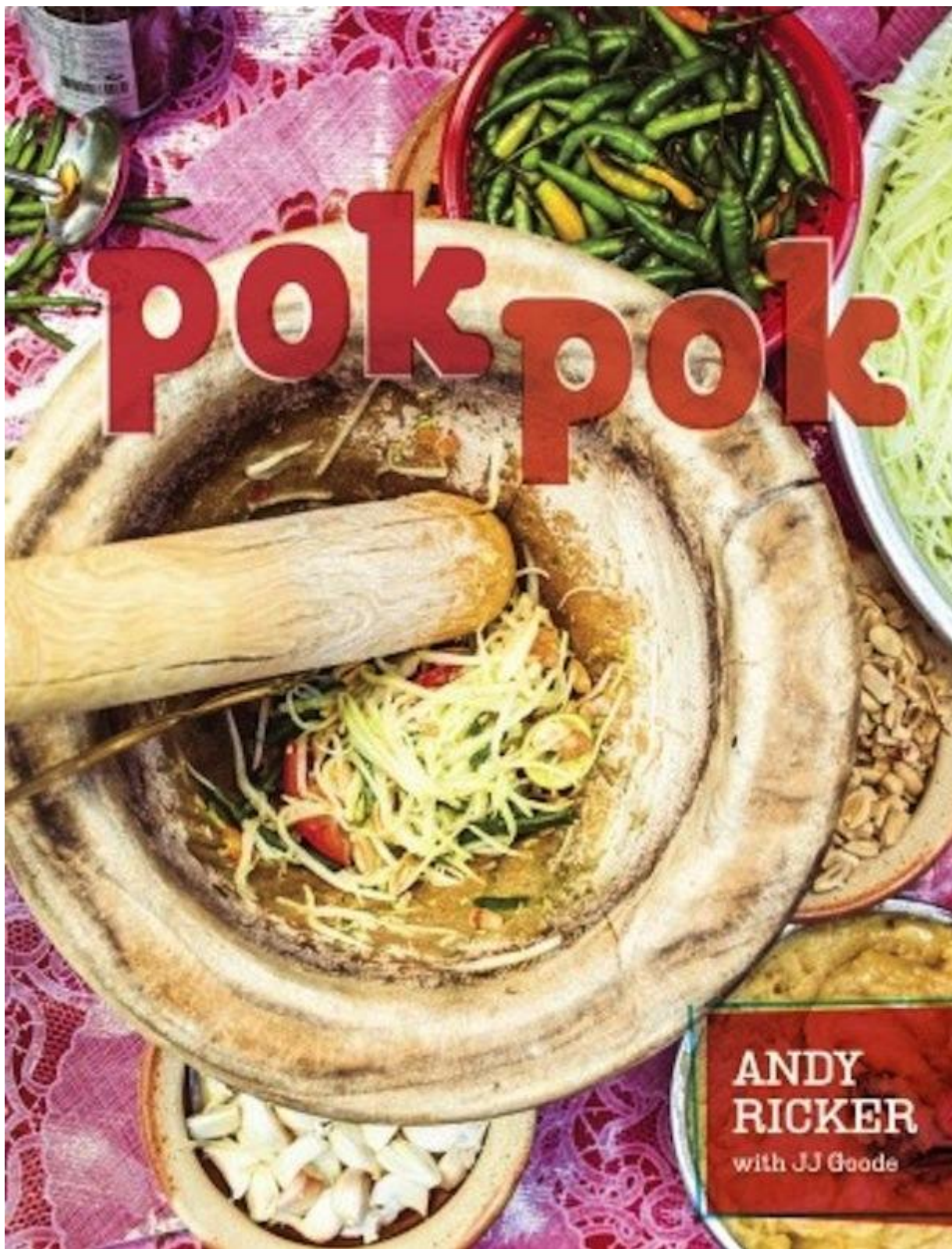
'The Adobo Road' by Marvin Gapultos



Filipino cuisine is far from common here in the U.S. If anything, most of us know that Filipinos cook adobo and that their cooking style draws from the cultures of many different colonizing countries. That's about it. So **Marvin Gapultos**'s cookbook, *[The Adobo Road](#)*, is a true eye-opener. Many of the flavors should be familiar to anyone with a taste for Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Spanish cuisine, but the ways in which ingredients are joined results in a whole new array of tastes and textures. Gapultos writes recipes with care, precision, and clear exposition. Anything remotely complicated comes with sidebars filled with pictures and detailed directions, and there is a detailed index (including pictures) of all foreign ingredients. Yet the best part of *[The Adobo Road](#)* is in Gapultos's storytelling. He takes us along on his journey from a hungry teenager who could barely hold a knife, through learning his family's specialities, to finally, making a career out of sharing the traditional foods of his childhood.

Favorite Recipes: *Classic Chicken Adobo*, *Pork and Vegetable Lumpia*

'Pok Pok' by Andy Ricker with JJ Goode



Andy Ricker 's *Pok Pok* cookbook is one of the most exciting ethnic cookbooks to come out in the past few years, and one of the first since David Thompson's *Thai Food* to fully commit to a hands-on, take-no-prisoners cooking style. In other words, Ricker expects a lot of you, the reader. His approach should come as little surprise to anyone who

has eaten in his restaurants; Ricker's rigorous approach to replicating Thai cuisine can be challenging, thought-provoking, and downright exciting for anyone used Americanized takeout. Cooking from *Pok Pok* is time consuming. It will likely require a trip (or two, or three) to Asian supermarkets for obscure bottles of unpronounceable sauces. It'll force you to get comfortable with a mortar, a pestle, and a wok. Yet nothing in the book is particularly difficult to make, and the results from even a half-ass job at his recipes will likely be far better than most Thai dishes you tossed in a skillet. Pick a recipe, pick a weekend, and take the time to learn. You won't regret it.

Favorite Recipes: *Kai Yaang (Whole Roasted Young Chicken)*, *Phat Thai (Stir-Fried Rice Noodles with Shrimp, Tofu, and Peanuts)*