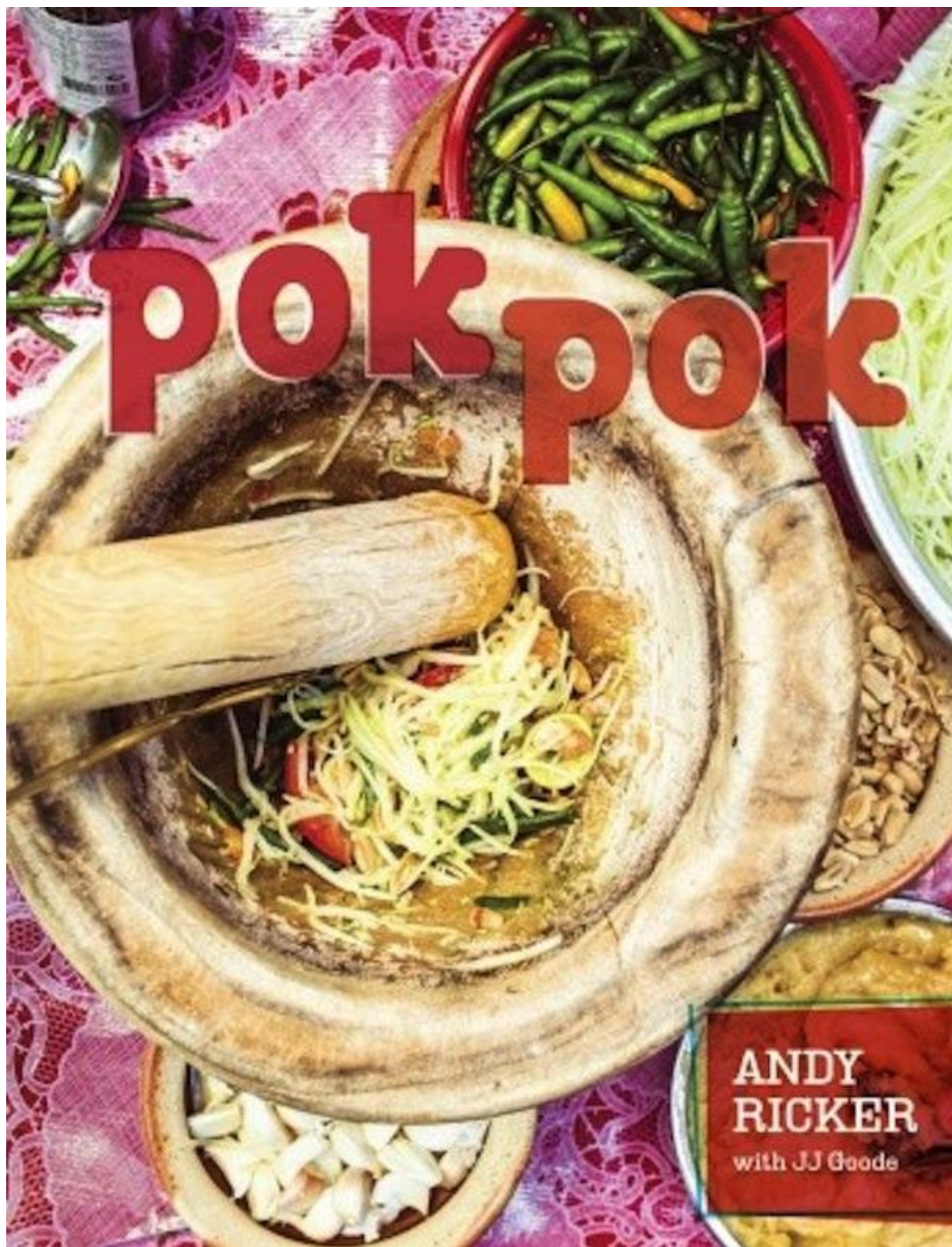


Cook the Book: Andy Ricker's 'Pok Pok'

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I moved to Southeast Portland, OR in the mid-aughts to go to college, right when the city was beginning to get national press for its food trucks, craft brewing, and gorgeous farmers markets. Portland's quickly growing food scene made for

what could have been a gloriously gluttonous four years. Alas, I was all-too-often stuck in the library, nerding out with stacks of books, unable to access the bounty of my temporary city.

But one thing I did have time for were occasional trips to a little chicken shack a few miles from campus. There, my friends and I would greedily grab take-out containers of sweet, lemongrass-scented, grill-roasted game hens, sticky rice, and papaya salad. We'd try to resist digging into the styrofoam boxes on our way back to school, but we'd inevitably succumb to the aroma and start eating on the ride back, sticky fingers and all.

We had little idea that this little shack, named **Pok Pok** after the sound of a pestle gently pounding at papaya in a mortar, would, by 2013, be part of a quickly growing mini-empire of Thai cuisine, all envisioned by a smart, talented, white guy. **Andy Ricker** has become a household name among food folks, simultaneously running an expanded version of that chicken shack, plus Whiskey Soda Lounge , Pok Pok Noi , and Sen Yai Noodles in Portland, along with East Coast locations Whiskey Soda Lounge NY , Pok Pok NY, and Pok Pok Phat Thai .

This past week, Ricker finally released a cookbook, written with powerhouse food wrier **JJ Goode** . Pok Pok 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, no substitutions manner of cooking. 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. Be sure to stay tuned for our interview with Ricker tomorrow morning!

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.

This week, we'll try a range of Ricker dishes, from Thai cucumber salad and stir-fried Brussels sprouts to green curry from scratch, ketchup-free phat Thai, and, of course, Ricker's game hens.

Win 'Pok Pok'

Thanks to our friends at Ten Speed Press, we have five (5) copies of Pok Pok to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win a copy is to tell us about **your favorite Thai dish** in the comments section below.