

# Cook the Book: 'Family Table'

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Ever since the publication of *Staff Meals from Chanterelle* over a decade ago, cookbook readers (and writers) have been fascinated with the concept of restaurant staff meal pre-service, or "family meals." What do cooks, servers, and host(esses) eat before service? Anything from a prep cook's lovingly simmered marinara sauce to a salad made of leftover bits from last night's dinner rush. A friend recently recalled her favorite ever family meal: rich macaroni and cheese filled nuggets of blood sausage.

Blood sausage mac not your thing? The family meals described in **Danny Meyer's** *Union Square Hospitality Group's* new cookbook, *Family Table*, are a little more tame. Primarily written by chef **Michael Romano** and journalist **Karen Stabiner**, the book contains a vast collection of beloved recipes from line cooks, sous chefs, and executives throughout Danny Meyer's empire. Given the diversity of the cooks' backgrounds, *Family Table* offers a cornucopia of techniques, flavors, and cooking styles; recipes for spring pea risotto and lasagne sit alongside Dominican beef, arepas,

and brisket with red eye gravy. Photographs show cooks working with care and eating with joy. And as befits a book on feeding large groups with kitchen leftovers, most of the recipes are simple affairs that creatively utilize pantry staples.

Lest the reader assumes that such happy meals are the exception to the rule, essays by Romano, Meyer and Sabiner help demonstrate the company's dedication to providing a good meal to and warm conversation with its employees. To Romano and Meyer, family meal is an important morale booster not to be taken lightly. The recipes they've chosen for the book are enticing, homey, and (mostly) straightforward. Some require a bit more work, as the staff works in kitchens full of things like leftover marinara and braised pork shoulder. Others call for multiple types of vinegar or a couple tablespoons of chopped onions or carrots. These slight annoyances come along with cooking from a restaurant book; simply shrug your shoulders and eat the rest of the carrot. In the end, cooking through the book has made me want to break into **Union Square Cafe** around 4:45 p.m. and beg to be included in family meal time.

This week we'll sample a range of family meals from **Italian-inspired yellow bell pepper panzanella** and **lamb bolognese** to **spicy short rib lettuce wraps** and **springy roasted asparagus with tomato relish**.

## Win 'Family Table'

Thanks to the kind folks at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, we have five (5) copies of *Family Table* to give away this week. All you need to do to win a copy is tell us about your most memorable family meal, whatever "family" means to you.