

The Best Food Books of 2009

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From less meat to more meat, our picks for the year's best books about food

By Lynn Andriani -- Publishers Weekly, 11/9/2009 10:27:00 AM

Last week's issue of *PW* listed [our editors' picks for the best books](#) of the year. Five out of the 100 were books about food: *Ad Hoc at Home* by Thomas Keller (Artisan); *Born Round: The Secret History of a Full-time Eater* by Frank Bruni (Penguin Press); *Gourmet Today: More than 1000 All-New Recipes for the Contemporary Kitchen*, edited by Ruth Reichl (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); *Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy: A Feast of 175 Regional Recipes* by Lidia Matticchio Bastianich and Tanya Bastianich Manuali (Knopf); and *Momofuku* by David Chang and Peter Meehan (Clarkson Potter). While we're the first to agree those books deserve props, here are 10 more (plus 10 honorable mentions) from this year that also warrant attention.

Best "meat isn't everything" cookbook



Almost Meatless: Recipes That Are Better for Your Health and the Planet by Joy Manning and Tara Mataraza Desmond (Ten Speed)

Manning and Desmond want to help Americans compose meals that are both tasty and filling without having a slab of meat as the overbearing star ingredient. They do an admirable job, with a burger recipe wherein black beans and bulgur are mashed together with a minimum of ground beef to make a patty that is full-size, fully delicious and less meaty; a recipe for gyros using a small amount of lamb amped up with tzatziki sauce and fava beans fragrant with lemon, garlic and fresh herbs; and other great dishes.

Honorable mention: *Hudson Valley Mediterranean: The Gigi Good Food Cookbook* by Laura Pensiero (Morrow)

Best "what do you mean, less meat?" book

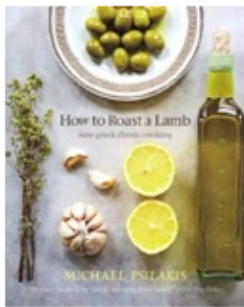


Lobel's Meat Bible: All You Need to Know about Meat and Poultry from America's Master Butchers by Stanley Lobel, Evan Lobel, Mark Lobel and David Lobel (Chronicle)

Lead us into temptation, indeed. The Lobels magnificently explain the difference between shell steak and tenderloin, hanger steak and skirt steak; lay out the proper way to make steak tartare, beef jerky and carbonade of beef in Belgian beer; and give recipes for Alsatian pork-and-potato casserole, Kansas City-style baby back ribs and more.

Honorable mention: *Morton's The Cookbook: 100 Steakhouse Recipes for Every Kitchen* by Klaus Fritsch with Tylor Field III and Mary Goodbody (Clarkson Potter)

Best book for cooks who don't already own a Greek cookbook



How to Roast a Lamb: New Greek Classic Cooking by Michael Psilakis and Barbara Kafka (Little, Brown)
Psilakis, chef and owner of New York City's Kefi and Anthos, honors Greek cuisine in this nostalgic and charming book. More than a collection of recipes, it's a celebration of Greek culture and its extraordinary effect on the author. Each section begins with a **personal story** demonstrating how Psilakis's love of food was ingrained in him, followed by wonderful recipes.

Honorable mention: *Vefa's Kitchen* by Vefa Alexiadou (Phaidon)

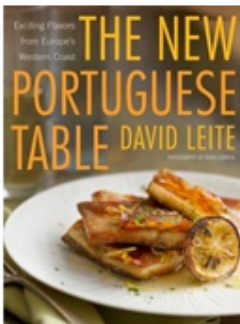
Best virtual trip to the Big Easy



My New Orleans: The Cookbook by John Besh (Andrews McMeel)
Besh's book is a charming tribute to the roots and rituals surrounding such iconic dishes as crawfish and rice, muffaletta sandwiches, café au lait and beignets, fried chicken, po'boys and even snow cones (they were invented at Hansen's in 1939). It's also a beautiful compendium of artful photos of foods like crumbly lavender madeleines with thick Louisiana citrus pots de crème.

Honorable mention: *DamGoodSweet: Desserts to Satisfy Your Sweet Tooth, New Orleans Style* by David Guas and Raquel Pelzel (Taunton)

Best book about a not-so-obvious cuisine



The New Portuguese Table: Exciting Flavors from Europe's Western Coast by David Leite and Nuno Correia (Clarkson Potter)

Whatever your stance on salt cod, Leite, a three-time James Beard-award winner and proprietor of LeitesCulinaria.com, has a recipe for it you'll like. In this gorgeous book, he highlights ingredients and techniques that define Portuguese cooking today. Stone soup enlivened with spicy chouriço sausage; simple-yet-elegant duck breasts sauced with white port and black olives; a dip made with anchovies, green olives, cilantro, and whole milk are just some of the other gems here.

Honorable mention: *Save the Deli: In Search of Perfect Pastrami, Crusty Rye, and the Heart of Jewish Delicatessen* by David Sax (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Best "quick, homemade bread!" book

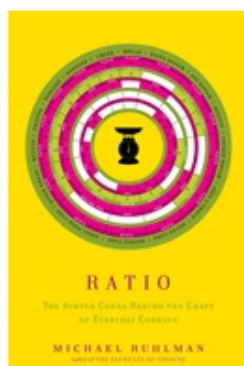


Peter Reinhart's Artisan Breads Every Day by Peter Reinhart (Ten Speed)

Here is master bread baker Reinhart's answer to the artisan bread-in-no-time revolution. His 50 recipes for bread, bagels, pizza and pastry really are foolproof. He also shares shaping tricks, oven techniques and ways to make great bread without expensive bakery tools.

Honorable mention: *My Bread: The Revolutionary No-Work, No-Knead Method* by Jim Lahey with Rick Flaste (Norton)

Best handy reference

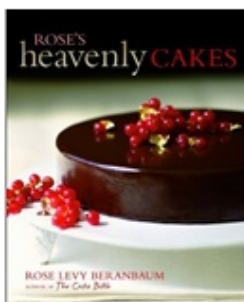


Ratio: The Simple Codes Behind the Craft of Everyday Cooking by Michael Ruhlman (Scribner)

Ruhlman explains that when you know a culinary ratio, it's like instantly knowing a thousand recipes. For instance, when making cookies, all you need to know is 1-2-3 (1 part sugar, 2 parts fat, and 3 parts flour). Biscuit dough is 3-1-2 (3 parts flour, 1 part fat, and 2 parts liquid). Vinaigrette: 3-1 (3 parts oil to 1 part vinegar). The truth shall set you free!

Honorable mention: *Notes on Cooking: A Short Guide to an Essential Craft* by Lauren Braun Costello and Russell Reich (RCR Creative Press)

Best reason to get flour all over the kitchen

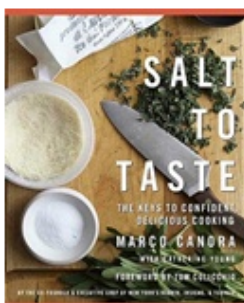


Rose's Heavenly Cakes by Rose Levy Beranbaum (Wiley)

From towering creations for weddings and other special events to baby cakes for bite-size indulgence, from the simplest apple upside-down cake and yellow butter cupcakes to the elegant rose-shaped genoise and the stunning holiday pinecone cake, Beranbaum goes into great detail yet still manages to keep her guidelines friendly, accessible and unintimidating.

Honorable mention: *All Cakes Considered: A Year's Worth of Weekly Recipes Tested, Tasted, and Approved by the Staff of NPR's All Things Considered* by Melissa Gray (Chronicle)

Best very useful cookbook

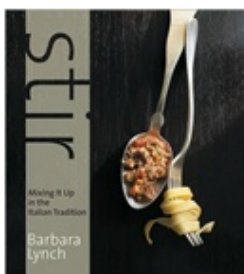


Salt to Taste: The Key to Confident, Delicious Cooking by Marco Canora with Catherine Young (Rodale)

Like Ruhlman in *Ratio*, chef Canora is of the mind that confident cooking is a result of mastering a select handful of straightforward recipes. Once you have them down, then you can experiment and improvise based on season and palate. It's a terrific approach, and Canora lays it out with 100 smart recipes for green bean and potato salad, chicken liver crostini and other simple, delicious dishes.

Honorable mention: *New Classic Family Dinners* by Mark Peel (Wiley)

Best elevation of a classic cuisine



Stir: Mixing It Up in the Italian Tradition by Barbara Lynch (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

James Beard Award-winning Lynch, chef-owner of Boston's famed No. 9 Park and several other notable restaurants, offers a gorgeous, mouth-watering book that includes recipes for such treats as prune-stuffed gnocchi with foie gras sauce and pan-fried cod with chorizo and clam ragout.

Honorable mention: *Pintxos: Small Plates in the Basque Tradition* by Gerald Hirigoyen with Lisa Weiss (Ten Speed)

The story originally appeared in [Cooking the Books](#), PW's e-newsletter for cookbooks.