

The Essential

JAMES

BEARD

COOKBOOK

400 RECIPES THAT SHAPED
THE TRADITION OF AMERICAN COOKING



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450 Recipes
That Shaped the Tradition of
American Cooking

JAMES BEARD

EDITED BY RICK RODGERS

with John Ferrone, Editorial Consultant

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  NEW YORK

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Elizabeth Beier at St. Martin's Press, for asking me to take part in this celebration of James Beard's work, and for introducing me to John Ferrone, the charming and erudite executor of Beard's estate. Thanks also to Michelle Richter and Elizabeth Curione, for keeping the project on track. Copy editor Leah Stewart, proofreader Jane Liddle, and designer James Sinclair are consummate professionals, and their invaluable contributions show on every page of this book.

My partner, Patrick Fisher, and kitchen manager, Diane Kniss, took on the unenviable job of managing hundreds of recipes. The nuts and bolts of transcribing photocopies into Word documents fell to a dream team of food lovers, some of whom are also cookbook writers who brought their own appreciation of Beard to the chore: Peggy Fallon, Judy Krelloff, Johnisha Levi, Charles Pierce, Carl Raymond, Debbie Schulman, and Dédé Wilson.

—Rick Rodgers

FOREWORD

COOKING WITH JAMES BEARD

“Don’t gussy up spareribs with all that gunk,” the chef boomed at us as we crowded around some naked ribs in the basement kitchen of his brownstone. “Just sprinkle with plain salt and pepper and half an acre of garlic.” At 6 feet 4 inches and three hundred pounds, the chef seemed to take up half an acre himself. He certainly took up most of the kitchen. This was thirty years ago, in the now revered “James Beard House” on Twelfth Street in Greenwich Village, where the owner gave cooking classes to small groups of amateurs over the decades. I knew in 1981 how lucky I was to be among them.

Thirty years before that, I’d opened my very first cookbook, which happened to be *The Fireside Cook Book* of 1949. I was a newlywed and knew nothing. It was James Beard who taught me how to boil water, in my own language. He spoke to me directly. He gave me confidence. This was decades before Americans got all “gourmetized” and learned how to cook French. Beard was as down-home American as “easy side up” and “a cuppa Joe.” He taught us to cook American, in our own kitchens, with the simplest of foods, like garlic and onions, and lemons and parsley, and bread. He taught us how to bake our own bread. This was new!

He wasn’t a schoolmarm like Fanny Farmer, uptight about thrift and nutrition. Nor a phony marketing brand like Betty Crocker. He was real, he was male, and he was big—he talked big, he thought big—American style. He spoke to guys outdoors at their grills and to gals indoors at their new electric stoves. He celebrated real food, what was fresh, and local, and growing anew after the deprivations of the Depression and the War. He celebrated our new sense of freedom, bounty, and largesse, both in his person and on the page. He was born to cook and to teach because he wanted to share his joy in being alive and savoring every sensuous moment, which is what food is for. Before Julia Child or Craig Claiborne or Jacques Pépin, or the hundreds of kitchen gurus who followed, Beard was the first to reshape the American palate at that moment of self-discovery when America found its new place in the world.

The place *he* came from mattered. Like Julia Child and M.F.K. Fisher, James Beard was a Westerner. Born thirteen and a half pounds on May 5, 1903, Beard learned to cook as he learned to breathe. His father, Jonathan, was “a Mississippi gambler type who wore a red carnation, smelled of fine soaps and colognes, and was loved by all the

ladies,” Beard wrote. His mother, Elizabeth Jones, was an English adventuress turned hotel owner, who paused briefly at age forty-two to birth a son. She brought her child up the same way she ran her hotel, which was sold a few years before James’s birth. Beard described her as “That incredible woman who was my father.”

That incredible woman had arrived in America at age sixteen, under the guise of governess, to travel through America and most of Europe and Central America before she settled in Portland, Oregon, and bought the Gladstone Hotel in 1896. Despite the hotel’s dignified name, Beard remembers Portland as a raunchy port of waterfront hearties and sporting ladies with their pimps. There were plenty of French and Italian immigrants to hire as hotel cooks, but they would catch gold fever and head for the Yukon to leave Mother Beard fuming among her pots. She finally solved the help problem by hiring Chinese, men like Let, Gin, Poy, and Billy, immortalized now in Beard’s recipes.

If hotel life was a natural theater, the landscape was a work of art. The waters teemed with Olympia oysters, Dungeness crab, razor clams, and Columbia River salmon. The woods were blue with huckleberries and blackberries. Tables were loaded with terrapin stew and chicken sautéed with wild mushrooms. The Yamhill Street public market offered seasonally white raspberries, husk tomatoes, morels, lemon cucumbers, dozens of heritage apples. Italian truck gardeners brought in cardoons, fava beans, leeks, and Savoy cabbages.

With all this natural bounty at their command, Mother Beard and Let battled daily over the proper way to make aspic capon, or curries, applying the ancient arts of China, England, and France to the provender of western shores. Beard remembers Let brandishing a knife and Mother parrying with a stick of firewood. But such quarrels ended in laughter and renewed argument over the proper way to preserve a fig. They instilled in the wide-eyed child watching “a love for food ... the most varied gastronomic experiences any child ever had.” For an American child, it was a dream kitchen.

There was Let’s Wonderful Sweet Cream Biscuit and My Mother’s Black Fruitcake and My Father’s Favorite Pear Preserves. It was the great American amalgam, where Mother imported the muffin and crumpet rings of her youth so that Chinese Let could make perfect English crumpets, “dripping with butter and daubed with our strawberry jam,” as Beard wrote in his magnificent memoir, *Delights and Prejudices*. It was also a social amalgam of backyard, carside, and oceanside picnics. There were champagne parties, whist parties, bridge parties, fashionable luncheons and after-theater suppers. For a large fat boy, it was bliss.

He was so pampered, Beard recalls, that he became “as precocious and nasty a child as ever inhabited Portland.” His lifelong friend Mary Hamblet agreed that he was

a holy terror on occasion but always so generous that to admire a toy was to be given it to keep. She also remembers what may have been his first culinary dish, as they played on the beach at Gearhart and made a sand pie. They frosted it with a pink marshmallow whipped with salt water. “Eat it,” said James.”And I did,” said Mary. “Because I adored him—and he was big.”

Gifted with a taste memory as acute as perfect pitch, Beard remembers his first gastronomic moment: after he’d crawled into a vegetable bin, he bit into a giant onion, eating it up skin and all. At three, sick with malaria, he remembers being fed a superb chicken jelly. At four, his father took him to dine out in Portland once a week so that he could begin to discriminate among restaurants. At five, his mother—in a lapse of discretion—took him to “a palace of high living” called the Louvre, where he sampled French cuisine in a burgundy boudoir setting. And at all ages, his Chinese godfather Let took him to eat in Chinatown.

Still, even as a child prodigy of gustation, his first love was not eating but acting. He advanced from charades in his mother’s hotel to playing Tweedledum in the Red Lantern Players’ production of *Alice in Wonderland* and Mr. Fuzzywig in their annual performance of *A Christmas Carol*. At nineteen, he set forth to be an opera singer, traveling by freighter (*The Highland Heather*) through the Panama Canal to London and Paris.

When a vocal ailment derailed that ambition, he sailed back to New York, played *Cyrano* and *Othello* at Walter Hampden’s Theater, and went on to radio in San Francisco, broadcasting food commercials. But when it was clear, after more than a decade’s trial, that he could not both act and eat, he chose to eat. He came back to Manhattan to become what he called a “gastronomic gigolo.” In 1937 jobs were scarce but hunger was not. So he cooked for his supper at the houses of friends, and still he went hungry. He went hungry until, with a pair of friends, he opened a catering shop on 66th Street and Park Avenue and went after the carriage trade. At last he had found his destiny. With his first book, *Hors d’Oeuvre & Canapés* in 1940, Beard spoke in a new voice for a new audience of both men and women. He revolutionized the feminine canapés of the time, those dabs and “doots” of cream cheese on soft white bread. Instead, he offered he-man highball stuff, like artichokes stuffed with caviar, smoked salmon rolls, brioche-onion rings. A year later, he hacked out the Real-Men-Eat-Good trail with *Cook It Outdoors* and later expanded it with cookery books on fowl and game, barbecue and rotisserie, and fish.

World War II interrupted his promising beginning with the draft. After a stint in a cryptography school, Beard was released from the Army to join the United Seamen’s Service. It was back to the boards and he directed shows at USS clubs from Marseilles to Rio. “Get him to take his teeth out and sing ‘Sylvie,’” said one of his oldest

Portland friends, who remembered dying with laughter at Beard's tales of entertaining servicemen abroad. Veteran traveler that he was, Beard also picked up tips on food, like a dessert made with avocado, lime, and sugar whipped up by a cook in Brazil.

At the war's end, he found a new theater for food when NBC asked him to do the first major network cooking classes on television. "At last," he thought, "a chance to cook and act at the same time." Unfortunately, he had to share billing with a cow, fashioned by Bill Baird and produced by the Borden Company: *Elsie Presents James Beard in I Love to Eat*. A new medium inaugurated new "cuisines of advertisement" and a new age for the theater of food, but in 1946 Beard's cooking show was way ahead of its time. It would be decades before television's mainstream audience embraced the image of a man in an apron wielding an iron skillet and shouting, *Bam!*

Even without television, however, by the 1950s the Beard image of a bald man wearing a big grin and bow tie was as iconic as the ever-happy Green Giant. The Beard name branded American food the way *I Love Lucy* branded American comedy. In 1954 *The New York Times* dubbed Beard the "Dean of American Cookery," but that was too pompous a term for such a genial man with such a democratic message: "If I can cook it, you can too." His name became a household word through the continuous outpouring of his articles and books, and particularly his mass-market paperback in 1959, *The James Beard Cookbook*. It is still and forever my quick-reference kitchen bible, even though half the pages have fallen out. From then on he was the majordomo of the food establishment, a grinning Gargantua beaming over platters of fat sausages and hams and chops that fit the American mood in our heady decades of post-war affluence.

To those who carped that he worked too closely with the food industry promoting commodity products like Omaha Steaks and Camp Maple Syrup, Beard replied, "People take food too damn seriously. It's something you enjoy and have fun with, and if you don't, to hell with it." He expressed the same credo in his *Theory & Practice of Good Cooking* in 1977: "In my twenty-five years of teaching I have tried to make people realize that cooking is primarily fun and that the more they know about what they are doing, the more fun it is."

Of course, like our other food mavens after the war, Beard spent a lot of time eating and drinking in France, soaking up the pleasures of French cuisine in Paris and Provence. But unlike many, he translated them fully into an American idiom and put them squarely on an American table. He reveled in the riches of America's cooking tradition when the French sniffed there was no such animal. In 1972, he revealed our riches like a horde of gold in his groundbreaking *American Cookery*. Knowing firsthand the power of women in the kitchen, he attributed the strength of America's culinary tradition to a trio of strong women in the nineteenth century: Mary Randolph

of *The Virginia Housewife*, Miss Eliza Leslie of *Directions for Cookery*, and Mrs. Thomas Crowen of *Every Lady's Book*. "I would like to have known all three," he says. Like them, he understood the strength of American home cooking and the power of focusing on fresh ingredients, simply prepared, with flavor and fun first.

To learn from Beard is to toss diet books out the window as dreary and depressing and the wrong way to go about food. Forced into a no-salt, low-cal diet a few years before his death, Beard looked for new ways of flavoring that he hadn't imagined, just as he discovered new intensities of old friends like strong rooty vegetables, a saltless baked potato, a soothingly creamy yogurt.

To learn from Beard is to learn good cooking, whether its cultural roots are French, Italian, English, Asian, or just-folks American. In his recipes, as in his classes, he shows us the virtues of simplicity and the excitement of discovery. "Be bold," he tells us. "Taste for yourself. Taste things half-done, done—and overdone, if that happens; mistakes are to learn from, not to pine over."

Beard's voice is as American as Whitman's as he sings the body electric, knocks over old categories, and insists that we improvise, experiment, shake up old ideas to discover and to pleasure our own individual taste. Like Whitman, he celebrated America first. "I can assure you," he wrote, "that the smell of good smoked country ham sizzling in a black iron skillet in the early morning is as intoxicating and as mouthwatering as the bouquet of a fine Château Lafite-Rothschild or an Haut-Brion of a great year."

Like P. T. Barnum, he had the gift of gab and a sense of the grand gesture. Chicken with Forty Cloves of Garlic is an understatement compared to his Game-Stuffed Turkey, in which a turkey is stuffed with a goose, which is stuffed with a capon, which is stuffed with a partridge, which is stuffed with a quail. But his gamey version of "Turducken" is also thoroughly practical: fat birds baste drier ones as they cook, and with all the birds deboned, slicing and serving is a dramatic snap. "Put on a fine show!" he commands us. "Like the theater, offering food and hospitality to people is a matter of showmanship, and no matter how simple the performance, unless you do it well, with love and originality, you have a flop on your hands." Beard knows that imagination, rather than money, is the secret ingredient of a hit.

When Beard died in 1985 at age eighty-one, he had no idea that his house would be bought by friends like Julia Child and Peter Kump to provide a showcase for chefs from all over America in the continuing food revolution that he pioneered. He had no idea that his legacy would be maintained and honored by the vital work of the James Beard Foundation. But he surely saw that America was coming into its own in the kitchen and that in the twenty-first century cooking and eating and talking about it would connect young and old, celebrity chefs and novice bloggers, sports fans and

video gamers, races and genders and classes and kinds as we sit together at the American Table and celebrate real food, food for flavor, food for fun. Thank you, Jim, for this great gift.

—Betty Fussell

INTRODUCTION

AN AMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD FOOD

I grew up in a kitchen, and I guess the scent of food is like a perfume. It has stayed with me all my life. My mother ran a small residential hotel in Portland, Oregon, and eating was an experience in our family. We were three distinct personalities, my mother, my father, and I, and we all liked food cooked in a different way. Let, our Chinese cook, spoiled us, really, because he'd take a dish and do it separately for each of us.

Let was originally my mother's chef when she ran the Gladstone Hotel. At the turn of the century, she had an international approach to food that would be revolutionary even by the standards of the last ten years. She was of English and Welsh background, and the majority of her kitchen staff was Chinese, with intermittent French head chefs. Portland was clearly too small to contain the Gallic temperaments of the latter, so after a few months they'd leave, but their technique and style would have been perfectly mastered by the Chinese. The food was sort of the precursor of our "new cuisine," a combination of quick sautés, French sauces, and American ingredients.

My father loved food, too. His family, over a period of sixty years, had trekked from the Carolinas to Oregon, and he had what I think of as old southern—closely related to Scottish—ideas about food. He felt that spinach should cook for about four hours with a piece of hog jowl and that string beans needed about three hours of the same treatment.

But he also loved game, and among my earliest memories is the row of brilliantly colored ducks and pheasants that would hang in the larder. There were always teal, too, and I developed a great love for them because they are delicate and small enough to eat whole at one sitting.

When we had teal, it was always reserved for the household, never served to guests. These tiny members of the duck family are devastatingly good when roasted simply and quickly—basted with butter and seasoned with only salt and pepper—and like squab, eaten with the fingers. As an accompaniment, we often ate braised celery or tender raw celery, and potatoes cooked in the oven with broth. Several years ago, when I was staying in Yucatán, I had teal served to me—it migrates there from the Northwest—and it was the most sentimental meal I ever had eaten. I relished each bite. In France, too, one occasionally finds teal. It is called *sarelle* and it is as good

there as it was in Oregon in my youth.

Little did I think, back in those days before the First World War, that food would become the foundation of my career. I started out wanting to be a singer and an actor—I'm not quite sure what kind of actor—and my family encouraged me to pursue these interests. For the most part, I'd have to say I succeeded. I got in at the beginning of radio, and I did a stint on the New York stage in the late thirties. To make ends meet, I taught at a country day school in New Jersey, where I got the first grade going on bread making.

It was around this time that I had a real identity crisis. I decided I was never going to earn enough money working in the theater and radio to keep my life going in the manner which I would have it. Noël Coward did not seem to be rushing to write plays for me, after all, and the only thing that matched my love of the theater was my love of food. I'd always been exposed to good food. My mother had several friends in the restaurant business who ran really excellent establishments, and I learned early in my life to appreciate them.

And then there was New York. New York in the late twenties and the thirties teemed with wonderful restaurants and restaurant chains—Schrafft's, Longchamps, and Child's—where a little bit of money bought a lot. At six foot four, I always had an appetite, and it usually took more than three “squares” to make a whole.

As luck would have it, around this time I met a man named Bill Rhode and his sister, Irma. As we were all in search of a career, we hit on the idea of capitalizing on America's mania for cocktails. The repeal of Prohibition had set the cocktail party into full swing, and in America the *cinq-à-sept* was reserved for drinks and finger food. Something, we agreed, should be done about the food. We had eaten too many pieces of cottony bread soggy with processed cheese, anchovy fillets by the yard, and dried-up bits of ham and smoked salmon. The ghastly potato-chip dip invention had only begun to spread across the country. So we opened a small, exclusive catering shop called Hors d'Oeuvre, Inc.

There were, we gauged, at least 250 cocktail parties every afternoon on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and we felt certain that all we needed was a better mousetrap. I remember Mother's saying that a good sandwich at teatime was hardly to be found anywhere. It would be a fine idea, I thought, to offer New York perfect tea sandwiches, also larger ones for evening entertaining—“reception sandwiches,” I believe they are called officially. We called them “highball sandwiches.”

Now we had to decide on our bill of fare. We discovered the trick of using various smoked sausages and meats as cornucopias and developed a dozen stunning ways to offer stuffed eggs. For the cornucopias, we used salami, bolognas, hams, smoked salmon, and the specially cured pork loin called *lachsschinken*. We also made rolls of

salmon, tongue, and the rarest roast beef, and there were sandwiches of veal.

The fillings we created were appetizing and varied. For the most part, the base was a mixture of cream cheese and sour cream. This, with various additions, could be forced through a pastry bag, which speeded the work considerably. The salami filling contained *fines herbes*, with the addition of dill and sometimes a bit of garlic; the *lachsschinken* filling included horseradish and perhaps a little mustard, if customers liked their food piquant; the salmon filling was flavored with a combination of onion, capers, freshly ground black pepper, and a touch of lemon juice. For the rolls, the beef was spread with a very hot kumquat mustard and the ends dipped in chopped parsley, while the tongue was spread with a Roquefort or mushroom butter and sometimes garnished at either end with a sprig of watercress. Our veal sandwiches—two thin slices of veal cut in rounds—were filled with anchovy butter or a herring butter, both of which were tremendously popular.

Incidentally, I wrote my first cookbook, *Hors d'Oeuvre & Canapés*, during this time, and thirty years later, when I went back to revise it, I was surprised to see how little needed to be updated and by how many of our selections had become caterers' standbys. Not infrequently, when I'm at a cocktail party, a tray of canapés is passed before me, and I see old friends.

At this time, too, Americans were becoming more exposed to foreign foods, through luxurious ocean liners and the grand hotels that dotted the country. It was with the dawning of the New York World's Fair in 1939 that food in all its extraordinary variety was set before the American public in ways they had never seen before. A window opened on the food world that even the dreadful war could not close. The scents from those international kitchens—the Swiss Pavilion, the Belgian, the Italian, the Russian (where caviar cost practically nothing), the Swedish, and, of course Henri Soulé's French Pavillon—would eventually lead us to what we've come to know as the American attitude toward food. Even now it's not fully realized.

Well, when the war came I had to give up the catering business because rationing made it impossible. We couldn't buy enough butter or enough meat, but the incredible exposure to all those cuisines I'd sampled at the Fair sustained me through the bleak years until peace returned.

I have to say I was lucky, though, because I spent the war years working for the United Seamen's Services. Basically, we provided the same duties as the USO and the Red Cross, but entirely for the Merchant Marines. We had clubs all over the world, and given the circumstances, we served really top-notch food. I traveled a great deal for the USS, starting in Puerto Rico and going to Brazil, Peru, and the Canal Zone, then on to Morocco, Italy, and France. I never ceased to marvel at how people could make do. They learned to conserve and substitute—for example, making eggless,

milkless, butterless cakes. Those were the years, too, when frozen foods began to take hold. They seemed like a miracle. (Mr. Birdseye, who had very particular ideas about food, would set his freezing equipment right out in the middle of acres of strawberries and freeze them on the spot.) And of course, all the meat and poultry that was served in Europe was shipped in refrigerated containers.

By the late forties, in a sprint to recoup all those lost years, people seemed to rush into the future, trying to rebuild their lives, their careers, and their families. Food reflected this sense of urgency. Along with frozen foods, there were fast foods in nascent form. Pizza was beginning—there were about three places in New York that were very good. Soda fountains everywhere produced milk shakes and malteds. Another staple of this time, still popular today, was the clubhouse sandwich, a meal in one course. I have particular ideas myself about this dish. To me, it's two slices of toast, not three; sliced breast of chicken, not turkey; bacon; sliced ripe tomato; and mayonnaise.

When you look back, you see periods of time inextricably linked with some person, some place, some thing. For me it was often food. The twenties, for instance, were the era of hot dogs and speakeasy food, some of it very good indeed. Hamburgers really didn't become popular until the forties and fifties, although I can remember being in Los Angeles around, oh, 1930, when there was a string of absolutely sensational hamburger stands. They would put everything on the burger, wrap it in a diaper of paper, and put it in a little bag. This magnificent construction cost fifteen cents. It was a full meal, because in addition to the hamburger, lettuce, tomato, onion pickle, mustard, and relish, this would be followed by a serving of hot apple pie with melted cheese. Deadly, when I think about it now, but good it seemed to me then.

By the fifties, there I was right in the midst of this burgeoning interest in food. People were taking the time to cook complex dishes, international dishes. Don't get me wrong—people had always taken the time to cook good food, but it was only now that the general public began to realize the varieties and possibilities of food. With this sophistication came a quest for diversity. No longer was eating simply a necessity; it became a pleasure. It seems at this time I found material for cookbook after cookbook and—wonder of wonders—people were buying them. Suddenly I was in demand to teach cooking classes (I was one of the first to do it—for NBC—on the infant medium television), and corporations sought me out as a consultant to elevate the quality of their goods for consumers who were more demanding than ever before. All this, combined with the boom in technology, helped to channel as well as unleash my own attitudes toward food in America.

In a way, though, it wasn't until the sixties that some of the jigsaw puzzle of my life came together. That was when I met Joe Baum, president of Restaurant Associates. I

worked with him, and the association, on a number of restaurant projects, but most of all on New York's the Four Seasons. It proved an ideal collaboration: my sixty years of experience, Joe's enthusiasm, and the excitement of using all-American seasonal products. Our ideas and approach seemed as fresh as the ingredients we sought out. For example, baskets of freshly picked vegetables would be brought to your table so you could pick out the ones you wanted. In asparagus season, there were perhaps twenty different ways you could have asparagus prepared. We had fiddleheads and wild mushrooms and many other things both weird and wonderful.



It was Joe Baum's premise that this was a restaurant for New Yorkers. Certainly it proved to be a complete change from everything we'd seen before. If for no other reason, the fact that our menus and format were copied so much convinced us we were right. We had an inimitable group, with Joe Baum, of course, Albert Stockli as executive chef, and Albert Kumin as first pastry chef. I worked a great deal at the Four Seasons. Apart from being consultant on the food, I did the wine list and held wine classes for all the captains every week for two or three years. I've gone through several beginnings in my life, and this is the one that I am most proud of.

I sometimes wonder if my being just one generation from the covered wagon makes me feel so allied to this country's gastronomic treasures. The pioneers lived off the land they traveled, and necessity sired invention. I'm always asked what the dominating factor in American cuisine is, and my reply is that it's the many ethnic groups, each of which brought its own ideas of food to this country. When they first settled here, they often could not find the ingredients they were used to, so they adapted their dishes and invented new ones, using whatever was available.

As people became neighborly and exchanged ideas about all sorts of things, they exchanged ideas about food, too. If you go back into the cookbooks written by the Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church or the Hadassah, or by any such organization, you can almost trace the history of American food. In some books, you find a recipe done three different ways, and you can pretty well choose the original.

There are many dishes that could be considered completely American. Indian pudding is one, and it's coming into vogue again. Then we often forget that layer cakes—particularly baking powder layer cakes—are our invention. And while the Europeans have always had tarts, and the English originated apple pie and many deep-

dish pies, the cream pies, and what I think of as “gooey” pies, along with a lot of fruit pies, were certainly developed in this country. And we have many hot breads, like muffins, biscuits, popovers, and baking powder coffee cakes.

Every country near an island developed a fish stew, and ours are New England clam chowder and California’s cioppino. And what could be more American than a clambake? I remember splendid ones from my childhood, and you never see them in Europe.

Chili has become virtually an American creation. I don’t think I could possibly choose just one kind, because part of the charm of this dish for me is that I can always make it differently, and it never disappoints. I must not forget to add barbecues either—the real southern kind that are smoke-cooked—for although they were first introduced by the French settlers in Louisiana, they are surely an American classic. The original idea was to feed a large outdoor gathering by roasting an animal, perhaps a whole sheep, goat, or pig, in front of an open fire on a homemade spit that pierced the tail from *barbe à la queue*—literally, from whiskers to tail. Thus the word barbecue came into our language and spread all over the world.

My father was able to tell me something of the pioneer culinary tradition, which he remembered from his trip in covered wagon from Iowa to Oregon. As a child of five or six, together with his brothers and other boys of the same age, he would shoot birds while his elders hunted small animals. These were usually cooked on wooden spits over a wood fire. According to my father, there was invariably a dispute among the members of the wagon train as to how the cooking should be done. I can only imagine that the dispute was settled by dividing the food so each group could cook in its own fashion—in other words, this was regional cooking standing up for its rights.

As outdoor cooking developed throughout the country, there were great chicken fries for church benefits, and in the South there were the famous fish fries, where the meals were prepared by servants or slaves after a hunting or fishing party returned to the plantation. Those fries were supplemented by enormous hampers of food from the main kitchen. Although lavish barbecues still flourish, outdoor cooking is generally done on a small scale these days. The custom has grown to the point where anyone driving through the suburbs on a summer weekend can smell more beef and chicken being charred, scorched, and burned than in all previous history.

—1983

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

James Beard was a born cook who literally cooked at his mother's knee during his childhood in early twentieth-century Oregon. Yet his first book wasn't published until 1940, when he was thirty-eight years old, giving him plenty of time to soak up culinary experience around the world. His cookbook career spanned over forty years. Even in today's media-centric world, there are few food professionals who have constantly been in the public's consciousness for such an extended period. For many years, Beard was the only immediately recognizable face in American cooking. Did anyone know what Irma Rombauer (author of *The Joy of Cooking*) looked like? But Beard, with a figure nurtured by cream and butter, topped off with a jaunty bow tie, was the personification of an outsized chef, straight out of central casting.

The Essential James Beard celebrates this truly unique pioneer of American cuisine through more than four hundred of his best recipes, from the dishes that were served at his mother's Portland hotel to the ones that he shared with his coterie at his Greenwich Village row house. They are eclectic—French, Italian, Chinese, American, and even Persian—because Beard's curiosity about food was as insatiable as his physical appetite.

Imagine how much cooking evolved during the four-decade span of his cookbook writing, and then consider the enormous changes that have occurred since his death in 1985. In collecting the recipes for this book, the goal was to retain Beard's voice, exuberant and authoritarian in equal parts. However, I also made some changes for today's cooks. Chickens were much smaller then (just try to find a two-pound chicken at your local supermarket today), so some of the poultry recipes required adjustments. A meat thermometer was an oddity in many homes, and recipes gave other ways to test meat for doneness; I have provided temperatures where helpful. When the food processor was in its infancy, Beard was an early and quick convert to its conveniences. [My Editor's Notes to the reader are in brackets.]

Beard's gargantuan life force of a personality illuminated everything he wrote, but he changed the format of the recipe depending on the venue. Teaching recipes, such as the ones in *Theory and Practice of Good Cooking*, were necessarily long and detailed, and reflect the influence of his good friend Julia Child's precisely tooled cookbooks. Especially when he was writing what one might call autobiographical recipes, Beard used a narrative form, and the formula is relayed as if he were speaking directly to the

reader, without the benefit of an ingredient list at the beginning of the recipe. And there were recipes that were necessarily brief when he was writing for a newspaper or magazine article with limited space. Rather than force a universal style on all of the recipes, an effort was made to keep them as intact as possible, with a few words here and there to gently update, embellish, or clarify. Editor's Notes are there to give historical context or to elaborate when need be.

The historical reference is an important one. The James Beard Foundation confers awards of excellence to American culinarians in many fields from cookbook author to food writer to television cooking show host. Beard was all of these things, and more (you can add restaurant consultant and cooking teacher to the list), and whatever he tackled, it was with a joie de vivre that lives today in these marvelous recipes.



A Note on Ingredients

When Beard was writing, cooking oil was usually vegetable oil of some kind, flour was always bleached, and there was no such thing as reduced-fat milk (although skim milk was around, only the most desperate dieters bought it). We have many more choices today, and, based on Beard's opinions found in his books and anecdotally through his friends, the following ingredients are recommended.

OLIVE OIL: Extra-virgin olive oil was not readily available, although Beard certainly cooked with it during his many visits to Provence and would have been able to buy it around the corner from his house at that Manhattan bastion of midcentury gastronomy, Balducci's. Use high-quality French, Italian, or Spanish oil, but taste it first to choose one with a fruity flavor and not-too-heavy body so it can be used for a variety of cooking chores, from sautéing meat to making vinaigrette.

HERBS: Fresh herbs, beyond parsley and dill, were just beginning to be sold in specialty markets at the end of Beard's career. Until then, fresh herbs had to be grown in your backyard or on your windowsill. If you want to use fresh herbs, a general rule of thumb is to use twice as much chopped fresh herbs as dried herbs. But remember, dried herbs have their place, as the dehydration does intensify flavor.