

WORKING SMART IN THE KITCHEN

GREAT COOKING IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

WHEN I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET HOME COOKS, or to “talk shop” with guests of my restaurants, I often get the sense that they’re making it more difficult than it has to be in the kitchen. It’s a natural and noble mistake to make: If you want to make a great meal, some believe, you have to spend a lot of time, effort, and money.

Not necessarily. My motto in the kitchen isn’t to work hard, but rather to work smart. There are a few basic rules I keep in mind whenever I plan to cook. Employing them as a decision-making template is at the heart of my cooking philosophy.

You’ll see examples of these principles throughout the book, but I wanted to take a moment to spell them out in one place. They all have one thing in common: Each one involves respecting a force greater than yourself, which sounds potentially daunting, but in fact makes life easier. When you adhere to the following guidelines, you’ll find that you have fewer decisions to make, that your food has a simplicity and order, and that you cook in harmony with the seasons.

USE THE BEST INGREDIENTS

There’s a reason I put so much emphasis on the quality of raw ingredients: I want to taste each of them clearly in the finished dish. This means cooking with integrity, respecting each ingredient at each stage of the cooking process, selecting the best one available to you, then cooking and seasoning it with care, and surrounding it with compatible accompaniments.

RESPECT THE SEASONS

I encourage you to respect the role of nature in cooking. The rewards of using organic fruits and vegetables and free-range or wild animals is a prime example of why nature should be obeyed in the kitchen. As we come to certain recipes, I’ll help you discover for yourself the superior quality of, say, wild salmon over the farm-raised alternatives. But the most essential advice I can offer, because it applies to everyday cooking, is the benefit of working with in-season ingredients. I use such seasonal touchstones as tomatoes, morels, figs, pomegranates, and chestnuts only when they are in season, and urge you to do the same.

HONOR TRADITION, THEN BE CREATIVE

Many of my recipes are founded in tradition, and for good reason: Time-honored dishes have been around for decades or centuries because they are structurally sound and produce delicious results. However, I truly believe that one can adhere to tradition in cooking and still find room to be creative and spontaneous. Throughout this book, I’ll show you how to balance the two, whether by using the confit technique classically associated with duck to make preserved tomatoes, garlic, or lemon, or by making a daube (stew) with a popular cut of beef like short ribs rather than the traditional bottom round or shoulder.

HONE YOUR SKILLS

Technique can make or break your success in the kitchen just as surely as it can buoy or undo an artisan who produces cheese or other culinary products. This is not to suggest that you need to become a master chef to produce good food, but employing efficient, skilled technique will make meal preparation more enjoyable and yield consistently positive results. Throughout the book, I'll explain the principles behind techniques, focusing especially on how to select an appropriate heat level and the benefits and applications of steaming, sautéing, roasting, braising, and other cooking methods.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I'M A TRADITIONALIST BY NATURE and this book is organized fairly traditionally, with chapters devoted to Hors d'Oeuvres, Salads and First Courses, Soups, Meats and Game, Desserts, and so on. But there are a few chapters and features that bear explanation:

The first recipe chapter, “The Artisanal Pantry,” features recipes that show you how to become an artisan in your own home by making your own chutneys, pickled vegetables, condiments, and such. These are largely optional—most of the recipes that call for these ingredients give you the option of using store-bought versions—but I hope you'll try at least a few. Not only will you be amazed at how much better they taste when you make your own, but it will give you an appreciation of what goes into these ingredients in shops and restaurants.

This chapter features a subsection on cheese, the food with which I'm most closely associated. Think of it as a primer for purchasing, serving, and storing cheese. It also spotlights some of my favorite cheese combinations. I hope it inspires you to make cheese a part of your everyday life.

As for the recipes themselves, most are preceded by a headnote that talks about the recipe's inspiration, offers cooking advice, or describes a particular ingredient and how to shop for, handle, and cook it. In addition, many of the recipes are supported by one or more of the following recurring features:

TERMS AND TECHNIQUES Here I'll define or explain words and phrases that might be unfamiliar to you, such as *al dente* or *court-boullion*, or describe a basic method such as how to juice a pomegranate or a neat trick for rolling dough over a tart.

THE REASON In this feature, I'll detail why recipes call for taking certain steps, such as letting meat rest to give its juices a chance to redistribute after cooking or adding a dash of lemon juice to mushrooms to coax out all of their natural flavor.

VARIATIONS This is where I'll explain how to alter a dish to adjust for personal taste and ingredient availability, or to stay true to the current season. The Wild Mushroom and Duck Risotto (page 219), a perennial favorite at Picholine, is

offered with the same adjustments we make at the restaurant: adding fava beans in the spring, corn in the summer, pumpkin in the fall, and squash in the winter. I even offer ways to adjust desserts for the seasons; for example, the Profiterole Sundae with Cherry Ice Cream and Cherry Compote (page 301), can be varied in the cooler months to incorporate pistachio ice cream and be finished with pecans or walnuts rather than fresh cherry compote.

EMBELLISHMENT This is where I'll show how to build on a recipe with additional ingredients, perhaps expanding a sauce with olives, capers, and diced tomatoes, or by adding another component, such as an oil or chutney, to the plate.

READING RECIPES

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO WORK SMART IN THE KITCHEN is to thoughtfully and thoroughly read every recipe before you begin cooking, then get your ingredients and equipment organized accordingly.

I'm a big proponent of the concept of *mise en place* (having everything in its place), so much so that I suggest cooks line up their ingredients and equipment in the order in which they'll be used so that they can focus all of their attention on the actual cooking process when they get down to it. I think this is one of the most important lessons home cooks can learn: to make yourself fully attentive to what is happening on the stovetop or in the oven so that you can be aware of the often infinitesimal changes in ingredients that are the cue to move on to the next step of a recipe; if you're looking around for, say, a strainer when it's time to move on in a recipe, you lose time and perhaps cause items to overcook.

ACCOMPANIMENTS, GARNISHES, SAUCES, AND OTHER FLOURISHES

THROUGHOUT THE BOOK, there are a number of condiments, dressings, sauces, side dishes, and other recipes that are presented as a component of a main recipe but which can be used to enhance many dishes in your own day-to-day cooking. Here's a guide to where to find them:

CHUTNEYS AND COMPOTES

(see also "The Artisanal Pantry," pages 10 to 49)

Apple-Walnut Chutney *(page 155)*

Cranberry Compote *(page 149)*

Mint Chutney *(page 167)*

CROUTONS, TOASTS, AND TUILLES

Anchovy Toasts *(page 96)*

Cheddar Croutons *(page 157)*

Parmesan and Black Pepper Croutons *(page 165)*

Parmesan Tuille *(page 100)*

DRESSINGS AND VINAIGRETTES

Basil Aioli *(page 187)*

Citrus-Soy Vinaigrette *(page 111)*

Lemon Vinaigrette *(page 105)*

Harissa Vinaigrette *(page 115)*

Mustard Dressing *(page 130)*

Parsley Pistou *(page 248)*

Pomegranate Vinaigrette *(page 119)*

Sherry Vinaigrette *(page 100)*

Tahini Dressing *(page 133)*

Walnut Vinaigrette *(page 108)*

GARNISHES, MISCELLANEOUS

Marinated Scallops *(page 162)*

Parmesan Flan *(page 140)*

Raw Tomato Coulis *(page 187)*

Red Gazpacho Granité *(page 160)*

SAUCES

Béarnaise Sauce *(page 232)*

Horseradish Cream *(page 235)*

Morel Sauce *(page 128)*

Mustard Sauce *(page 195)*

Red Wine Butter *(page 189)*

SIDE DISHES

(see also Side Dishes and Accompaniments, pages 256 to 274)

Comté-Scallion Polenta *(page 212)*

Orange-Cumin Carrots *(page 239)*

Red Cabbage Confit *(page 253)*

Rutabaga "Sauerkraut" *(page 251)*

Vanilla Sweet Potato Puree *(page 227)*

Tabbouleh *(page 114)*

DESSERT TOPPINGS AND SWEET TOUCHES

Candied Almonds *(page 316)*

Chocolate Sauce *(page 315)*

Crème Chantilly *(page 299)*

Pecan Shortbread Cookies *(page 317)*

Raspberry Marshmallows *(page 280)*