

October 2021  
New York, NY

Dear Marielle -

Consider this your shower gift despite the lack of a shower in these odd times. A bit of a sentimentalist, I wanted to give you a little something special as you and David embark on this next chapter. Knowing how much you guys cook from Zahav, my mind went to cookbooks, and I started to consider which of the many that line my shelves might be ones I would want to share with you for various reasons.

There are obviously no lack of amazing cookbooks in the universe - but each one in this stack - numbering 18 as a nod to the significance of "chai" - was gathered with love and much thought, books that have and continue to be particularly special to me for one reason or another - a little food-related history for you and David to take into your life together as you build on the histories of all those who love you and came before. And I apologize for this lengthy explanation that follows. I just didn't want the choices to seem totally random.

The Silver Palate cookbook was my second-ever cookbook (the first being Moosewood), and buying it felt like a splurge, which is so funny to say now. I was living in the West Village, but had been to their tiny store on Columbus Avenue, one of the first gourmet shops (also so funny to say now!). I read that book from cover to cover, and then again and yet again, marveling over what I could make, but even more than that, thinking about the kind of food life I wanted to have as an adult, freshly on my own. It was a magical time where anything seemed possible. Truthfully, I still feel that way about food - that anything is possible. Silver Palate Good Times organized recipes around entertaining, which again to me back then, was novel. Both these books take me back more than 30 years every time I crack them open (and I still do!) which is crazy.

I love that Max and Abby gave you a copy of the amazing Ruffage - but more than that, that you all share a love of food: planning for it, making it, enjoying it together. Mom and Dad too. Some of my own happiest memories over the years are cooking with my brother, Peter, and sitting down to relaxed, animated and delicious meals together. Those moments are precious, and not to be taken for granted. Many years ago, Peter gifted me a copy of his favorite (and most dog-eared) book - Marcella's Essentials Of Italian Cooking - the first of many cookbooks we have given one another, so in addition to being an incredible resource, this book is included to remind you to share this love of food with those you love. And to always treasure those moments.

The more you read and learn about food, the more people emerge who change how you go about making food. In Appetite, Nigel Slater asks, "So what do you want to eat today?" and then goes on to provide loads of ideas and pairings rather than recipes and measurements. Nigel's book is like having a friend with unbelievable kitchen/food instincts living in your apartment. Who you turn to upon opening the fridge or pantry when you're trying to figure out what you can make with what you have. Mark Bittman employs a similar kind of approach with ideas like a "classic Moroccan thing," from his amazing 2009 NYT article 101 Simple Salads for the Season, which quips: "Thinly slice carrots, or grate or shred them (the food processor makes quick work of this). Toss with toasted cumin seeds, olive oil, lemon juice and cilantro. Raisins are good here, too. There is no better use of raw carrots." Bittman's Kitchen Express, published the same year, addresses all kinds of food and dishes in a similar manner. Bouncing back to Nigel - Real Food Fast is more recipe based, but simple-simple and fast. This is a book I grab when I need easy dinner ideas and it's small, so I often used to throw it in my bag and bring it to work when I needed to come up with what to stop and get/make for dinner on the other end of the day. I'm going to include Simon Hopkinson in this company because Roast Chicken And Other Stories always reminded me a little bit of Nigel's work - sort of a cross between Appetite and Real Food Fast. See what you think.

I met Sally Schneider during my Martha Stewart years. A food writer (as well as a friend of one of my colleagues), her food knowledge was vast and healthy. Towards the end of my tenure at Martha, Sally published the amazing "A New Way To Cook," which was nothing short of groundbreaking - the idea that you could eat whatever you wanted if you thought about how you were going to prepare it: a new way to cook. It's a bit of a tome, but so worth the effort. That slow baked salmon recipe you and I talked about months back? you can find it on p. 224. A book I continue to reference 20 years in - and apparently, I'm not alone! Just last week, I was reading a favorite food blog, where the writer referenced A New Way To Cook and Ottolenghi in the same post! It made me happy that it still has a place amidst such a crowded field - mostly because the information is really just that amazing and helpful!! There's a copy of Sally's second book in your "pile," too - The Improvisational Cook, which continues the approach of her first book, but then like Bittman and Nigel tries to get you to think beyond exact recipes.

I'm going to jump a bit in the timeline to It's All Good, mostly because in this offering, like Sally, Gwyneth (with the not-insignificant-help of the extraordinary Julia Turshen) looks at healthier ways to put food on the table. There are tons of great ideas and recipes in here - and they are often simple, always doable. When Lucie came home from school last spring, she requested the Mexican Chopped Salad (p. 57) as her first meal!

On the basics front, no collection would be complete without Alice Waters of Chez Panisse fame, as it was Alice whose relationships with farmers changed the ingredients that restaurants (and people like you who shop at the farmer's market!) are able to cook with. And though it's not really a cookbook detail, I might also tell you that it was Alice Waters who created Edible Schoolyard at a Berkley public middle school back in 1995: a program that was designed to change the way people ate by teaching kids about gardening and healthy food preparation that they would take home with them and recreate with their families. A lot of people you've probably heard of came out of the Chez Panisse kitchens including David Tanis (who, as you might remember, has that teeny tiny East Village kitchen I'm in awe of! ha!). David writes for the NYT, and I have always loved his food sensibility. Market Cooking looks at vegetables (ask Colette about his mushrooms!), along with a host of preparation possibilities, in a similar way that Ruffage does.

Jumping back to the San Fran/Berkley connection for a minute, there's also a copy of the gone-too-soon inimitable Judy Rodgers' Zuni Cafe cookbook. Called a "chef of refined simplicity" by the NYT, quite simply, Judy made the BEST. ROAST. CHICKEN. EVER. PERIOD. The recipe is daunting. 5 pages long starting on p. 342.

The final "basics" book is Canal House, which is a collab between Melissa Hamilton and Christopher Hirsheimer, who worked together many years ago at Saveur, where Melissa was the test kitchen director and Christopher a founding editor. Christopher lives in PA and Melissa NJ; Canal House was the midway point between both their homes. Initially the spot was intended to serve as a food studio for freelance projects when the two left Saveur, but when work was slow, days were spent planning, making and photographing lunch - all of which eventually led to the self-publication of a number of books designed to help people embrace the basics of cooking.

Nadine Levy Redzepi is the wife of René Redzepi, chef of Noma (Copenhagen), which might possibly be the most famous restaurant in the world currently, but her book Downtime is all about home food. The ingredients (and recipes) are simple and straightforward, and there is a beauty on these pages that is transporting. If Silver Palate helped me to imagine the possibilities at 22, Downtime is helping me do that now in a different time. I am reminded when I page through this book, how beautiful food is, what a gift it is to love it, to cook, to share it, all of it.

OK, home stretch. Thanks for your indulgence. I'm sure you're like "OMG is she really still talking?!"

3 more ethnically based titles. Straightforward French that (unlike Julia Child) you might not discover right away and everyone should have a great basic French cookbook like Simple French, a lesser known but fabulous Diana Kennedy cookbook, The Cuisines of Mexico, and last but not least, Madame Wong's Long-Life Chinese Cookbook.

I can not take credit for discovering Madame Wong. Auntie Honey loved this book but for many years couldn't remember the title or the author's name. So in the last year of her life, this was one of our projects - figuring out what book she had loved and lost. And find it we did. Honestly, I'm not sure how - it's long out of print - but it was a mission and when we figured it out, she ordered a replacement copy for herself and a copy for me. So now you have a copy of the coveted title as well. A piece of me, perhaps, but more even, a piece of Auntie.

Your love of food runs deep - it comes from Mom, from Mimi, from Auntie - and maybe a little bit, from me. One of the millions of things I love about you.

So use these with the love with which they are given to you. Today. And always.

Much love,

*Susie*