

SE Epicure  
HD **Wrap these: 21 best cookbooks**  
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books

It's been a big year for books about food, with new titles by everyone from big-name chefs to trusted home cooks. Here's our pick of a bumper crop.

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Think Christmas. Think cookbooks. Not Christmas-themed cookbooks - perish the thought. There is a special place in hell reserved for the next food writer who decides to reinvent the mince pie or who advocates eggnog as an acceptable festive beverage. No, think of the cookbook as the perfect present. There's one for everyone. Because everyone eats. And everyone ought to cook.

The brilliant thing about cookbooks is that they're a surefire gift, whether the recipient is a novice or an experienced chef. The right cookbook can spark a lifelong love of cooking (hello, Jamie's Italy) or provide an exciting new road for the dinner party show-off. So without further ado, here is Good Food's choice of the 21 best cookbooks for Christmas.

A warning: you could benchpress some of Christmas 2014's offerings. Peter Gilmore's *Organum*, for example, must weight a couple of kilograms. Santa best lift with caution.

#### CHEF BOOKS

*Organum*, Peter Gilmore, Murdoch, \$100

From the thick velour-finish cover to the moody portraits of producers who supply the Sydney glam-diner, the follow-up to *Quay: Food Inspired by Nature* is ambitious, exacting and an utterly engaging vehicle to explore chef Peter Gilmore's growing obsession with native ingredients, rare botanicals and the vexed idea of modern Australian cooking. There's no doubt about it: *Organum* is worthy of best coffee-table display, but it's also surprisingly accessible should anyone want to - gasp - actually cook from it.

SP: *A Cook's Story*, Scott Pickett & Rita Erlich, EBK, \$50

Scott Pickett has opened two of the most exciting restaurants in Melbourne - The Estelle and Saint Crispin - and completes the trifecta with his first book, which is more an autobiography with recipes than a traditional cookbook. Pickett's a natural storyteller and his co-author, respected food writer Rita Erlich, whips his material into a warts-and-all tale that doesn't shirk the dark stuff. There's a chapter on Pickett's stint in rehab for alcoholism - as well as a distinct flair for comedy.

Sepia: *The Cuisine of Martin Benn*, Martin Benn, Murdoch, \$75

File under the rubric of books too beautiful to risk splattering with sauces. *Sepia* is a gorgeous production that simply drips with the Sydney restaurant's three-hat status. The lush pictures of Martin Benn's ridiculously exact food might be a turn-off for anyone actually contemplating using his recipes, but it proves easy enough to plunder delicious building blocks such as **butter** dashi, celeriac cream and

beetroot sauce. The narrative of the little restaurant that could, which snatched success from the jaws of defeat, gives Sepia a beguiling layer of warmth.

Cooking All Over the World, Shannon Bennett, Penguin, \$45

So Vue de Monde's Shannon Bennett is a Miele "ambassador", and the **company** sponsored this jaunt through 19 cities in 70 days to promote its new ridgy-didge oven. It's a bit like a Race Around the World for Vue tragics, but plenty will thrill to Bennett's challenge of creating 19 nationally themed dinner party menus, plus visitors' tips for each destination.

## COOKBOOKS WITH CONSCIENCE

Urban Harvest, Oz Harvest, \$60

The second cookbook from surplus food saviours OzHarvest enlists 50 chefs including Neil Perry, Guillaume Brahimi and Matt Moran, for a total of 100 simple recipes, with a chapter from big-bearded gardening identity Costa Georgiadis who shares tips on creating an edible garden in the tiniest of spaces. It's the gift that keeps on giving: as CEO Ronni Kahn says, each copy **sold** allows OzHarvest to deliver 100 meals to those in need.

Suzy Spoon's Vegetarian Kitchen, Suzy Spoon, Plum, \$40

Suzy Spoon runs Australia's only vegetarian butcher in Sydney - true story - where she sells products such as vegan sausages and faux bacon. Mock meat is something of a controversial subject in the vego community but Ms Spoon is a staunch supporter of its flavour and texture. Thanks to the presence of seitan, TVP (textured vegetable protein) and oodles of tofu, Vegetarian Kitchen has a retro feel. It's a good introduction for the vegetarian newbie, and easily adapted to the needs of the vegan.

The Whole Pantry, Belle Gibson, Lantern, \$35

Belle Gibson's The Whole Pantry is not just about eating for health, it's about eating yourself healthy. It's a wellness philosophy more than a series of recipes: Gibson is a young cancer sufferer who rejects gluten, **dairy**, meat, preservatives and sugar. Sound grim? Not when the recipes are so vibrant (and guilt-free). The desserts section is worth the price of entry alone. For the health nut in your life.

## FAMILY FOOD

Made in Italy, Silvia Colloca, Lantern, \$50

OK, so she's annoyingly telegenic, an actress, married to Richard Roxburgh - but I'm prepared not to hold that against Silvia Colloca, because her second book of her native Italian food (what, another one?) is disarmingly good. She sticks to the rustic, simple, ingredient-driven brief of real Italian food with a regional flavour. Even a committed Italo-phile might find something new with recipes such as crepes in broth (scrippelle 'mbusse).

Food Babies Love, Emily Dupuche, Plum, \$30

Society's most mercurial eaters are the target of Melbourne mother-turned-blogger Emily Dupuche. Along with recipes catering for the baby starting solids and the seasoned over-12 months set (quesadillas and lamb tagine, no less), her book contains meal planners, a guide on introducing foods and a winning conversational style. I'll quibble with some of the advice ("always smile as you are feeding your baby" - ha!) but even if junior keeps throwing her bolognese on the floor, you'll know you're not alone.

Home, Karen Martini, Plum, \$40

Karen Martini's cookbooks are the equivalent of a favourite TV series or a beloved novel: something to turn to again and again. This alone makes them stonking good value if you're the kind of person who judges cookbooks on a cost-per-use basis. Her latest missive, Home, sticks to the Martini brief of simple, uncomplicated but delicious Italian-leaning food for everyday, with a few extras (including her wonderful-looking Christmas chicken) worthy of the special occasion. File under: comfort.

Kitchen by Mike, Mike McEneaney, Penguin, \$50

Kitchen by Mike has set a new pace in Sydney with its easygoing canteen approach and its convincing seasonal, market-based mantra. It's well worth the pilgrimage to semi-industrial Roseberry, and the first book from the former Rockpool head chef captures the ethos. There's nothing too overcomplicated or exotic, yet the veg-centric recipes - the "summer" chapter bursts with beauties such as chilled asparagus and basil soup - put a sparkle into the everyday.

## BLOCKBUSTERS

The Real Food of **China**, Leanne Kitchen & Antony Suvalko, Hardie Grant, \$69.95

Lemon chicken? No. Not here. These two respected food writers have parlayed a 20-year attachment to **China** into an encyclopaedic whirl around the provinces, with their antennae set to home cooking. The recipes lionise gutsy flavours over the more familiar niceties of Cantonese cooking: think northern lamb shanks, southern-style roasted quail in honey, and Hakka salt-baked chicken. The authors don't resile from some of **Chinese** cuisine's more challenging ingredients, either, such as preserved eggs and chicken feet.

The Cookbook Book, Annahita Kamali and Florian Bohm, Phaidon, \$75

The cookbook goes meta with this gorgeous publication: 125 cookbooks, each chosen for their design, impact or concept and given a double-page spread to strut their stuff. A mix of the classic and contemporary, the seminal and the obscure, The Cookbook Book is an anthology that tracks the years and fashions, from the handwritten screeds of the early 1900s to the rockstar-like arrival of Marco Pierre White. At its essence it's a book about the beauty, the warmth and the humanity of cookbooks. What a brilliant idea.

Plenty More, Yotam Ottolenghi, Ebury Publishing, \$50

Is there anything more to say about our unofficial Man of the Year, the wonderful (and recently here) Yotam Ottolenghi? Plenty more, as it turns out. Tish-boom. The eagerly anticipated follow-up to his 2010 blockbuster Plenty, Plenty More is as vivid, fresh, and invigorating as its predecessor, with the Israeli chef conjuring beauty out of the vibrant flavours of the Middle East. And they're mostly vegetable-based, too. Check out page 258 for his cauliflower cake, my new eating obsession. Can this man do no wrong? Apparently so.

King of the Grill, Ross Dobson, Murdoch, \$40

Ross Dobson's "bumper book of no-nonsense barbecuing" is indeed that - a no-bloody-nonsense guide to the pure, elemental pleasure of cooking food, mostly meat, on hot iron (Dobson's definition, although the southern-US pitmasters might chase him down for betraying the true meaning of barbecue). Whatevs. This is a very Australian approach to barbecue - all you need is a Weber, and Dobson leaves all that messing around with different fuels to the professionals. And there are enough Asian influences to remind us we're not in Mississippi any more, Toto.

MoVida Solera by Frank Camorra and Richard Cornish, Lantern, \$60

The fifth MoVida book skips to Andalusia - the Moorish south of Spain, where MoVida's Frank Camorra and food writer Richard Cornish practised immersion journalism for this collection of more than 100 robust recipes. Solera takes their signature historiological approach, so it's no mere collection of recipes, rather a captivating book that sings with the traditions of the people who shared their culinary lives. And its indispensable dining-out guide to the region means you can throw the travel guidebook away.

## NICHE

Never Trust a Skinny Italian Chef, Massimo Bottura, Phaidon, \$90

The cooking world's answer to Marcel Duchamp, Bottura brings a splendidly offbeat mind to the heavily tilled ground of Italian cookery. The chef-patron of Modena's Osteria Francescana impishly reimagines the canon, with some of his greatest moments including "memories of a mortadella sandwich" and "tortellini walking on broth" examined in the space between cooking and philosophy. A collection of recipes is corralled in small type at the back; better to approach this book as a sweeping intellectual treatise on Italian food traditions. And also: it's a blast.

Donuts, Tracey Meharg, Murdoch, \$30

OK, so it's not the most ambitious book on the market, but with a subtitle of "50 sticky-hot donut recipes to make at home", this self-limiting publication is sure to find an audience. Fifty recipes for fried carbohydrate rings might seem a stretch but it makes a sterling effort for variety. There are sweet doughnuts; savoury doughnuts; sweet-and-savoury doughnuts; cronuts. Even paleo-nuts and - eek - raw superfood doughnuts. A hard-back with cute doughnut cut-outs in the front cover, Donuts shows a little design can go a long way.

Food Truck Feasts, Erika Budiman, Hardie Grant, \$34.95

Melbourne graphic designer and photographer Erika Budiman convinced more than 50 Australian food trucks to provide their signature recipe for her arresting fluoro-wrapped anthology. Trucks are grouped together thematically: there's American Roadtrip, Cheeky Aussie Bites, Tuk Tuk Tuckshop (that'd be Asian), European Passport and Flavour Fiesta (South American), and biographical notes about each truck (as well as a code to scan to track that truck down - ah, the wonders of modern technology). The perfect gift for the dude or she-dude in your life.

Chop, Sizzle, Wow, The Silver Spoon Comic Cookbook, Phaidon, \$22.95

Here's a first: a graphic cookbook. This funky Phaidon offering takes 50 seminal Italian recipes (minestrone, caponata, bolognese - you know the drill) culled from the pages of Italian food bible The Silver Spoon and jazzes them up with the full comic-strip treatment. Holy toledo, ribbolita! It's a hip and happening alternative for anyone weary of text-dense recipes; astoundingly easy to follow without missing any of the vital bits needed to make your ragu a raging success. This one has "perfect for kids" written all over it.

365 Country Women's Association Favourites, CWA, Murdoch, \$30

The CWA had a publishing blockbuster on its hands in the early 1930s when its Cakes and Afternoon Tea Delicacies shifted 35,000 copies. Eighty years later this hardback celebrates the spirit, and the recipes, of the original. Set out in the recipe-a-day format, 365 CWA Favourites is an historical document (taste the Depression era in the Hard Times Cake) as well as a timeless purveyor of Mrs W.M. Hammond's chocolate cake.

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