

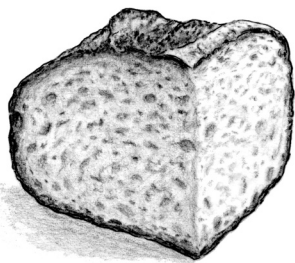
*“I think we really do want to gather. But it’s so much easier when the food on the table is homemade and delicious.”*

#### SUBCHAPTERS

Awaken Your Senses

Gather Around Homemade  
and Delicious Food

Setting the Table for Company



#### CHAPTER REVIEW

When Alice went to France for the first time, at age 19, she fell in love with the culture and food of France. French families shopped in their local markets every day, made meals out of whatever was ripe and delicious from nearby farms, and spent hours gathering together around the table, talking about politics and sharing stories from their days. For Alice, slowing down to enjoy the experience of food and the friendships that form around the table is an essential part of life.

Alice grew up in suburban New Jersey, and her upbringing was like many children’s in the 1950s. What formed some of Alice’s earliest food memories was the victory garden her parents had planted as part of President Roosevelt’s war effort. Much of Alice’s childhood was spent outdoors sampling fruits and vegetables from the victory garden. While Alice’s mother believed in feeding her daughters healthy food and gathered her family around the table every evening for dinner, her mother wasn’t a very good cook; she had been indoctrinated in the fast food culture of the time that championed frozen dinners, canned foods, and other so-called “modern” conveniences for housewives.

Although fast food culture has promoted the idea that people are too busy to come together around the table, Alice believes that we do want to gather and to form a connection with our food—how it was made and where it comes from—and with each other.

When Alice makes dinner for friends she sets the table in the afternoon so that it looks inviting when her guests arrive. She sets her table with a mix of dishes that have meaning to her—plates from Mexico, silverware and wine glasses from the flea market, and etched Chez Panisse anniversary glasses from different years. Dark, cotton napkins don’t show the fingerprints of a guest’s meal and feel absorbent and comforting. Alice cuts and sews retired Chez Panisse tablecloths down into napkins and dyes them indigo to hide stains. The combination of all of your choices begins to tell a story for your guests and should make them feel cared for.

Alice endeavors to keep the experience accessible, opting for simple wine glasses and only a fork and knife (rather than a formal silverware spread). It’s better to put dishes to use than to hand them down to live on a shelf, unused, for generations. Alice likes to place the forks tine side down—a tradition in France that conveys respect—and encourages you to discover your own rituals for your table for friends.

## COMING BACK TO THE TABLE

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Keep a big pitcher of water on the table and choose music that is relaxing for mealtime—and then, if you like, adjust it for washing dishes or dancing in the kitchen. At Chez Panisse, Alice plays classical jazz at a background level to allow for conversation throughout dinner.

### LEARN MORE

- ♦ In Alice's memoir, *Coming To My Senses: The Making of a Counterculture Cook*, read the chapter "C'Est Si Bon!" (pages 95–119) about her first trip to France and her awakening to French food culture.
- ♦ Explore the history and philosophy of the international Slow Food movement.

