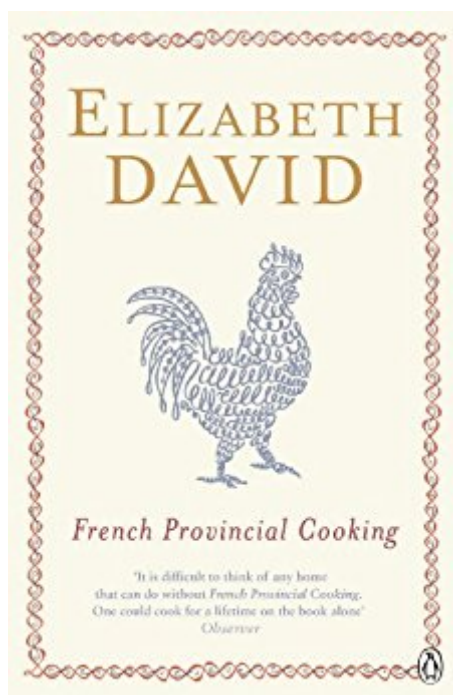


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French Provincial Cooking (Penguin Cookery Library)



Synopsis

'Brilliant reading, enthralling and exciting, as well as great cookery. The ultimate book in every way' Gary Rhodes, *The Times* French Provincial Cooking - first published in 1960 - is the classic work on French regional cuisine. Providing simple recipes like omelettes, soufflés, soups and salads, it also offers more complex fare such as pâtés, cassoulets, roasts and puddings. Readable, inspiring and entertainingly informative, French Provincial Cooking is the perfect place to go for anyone wanting to bring a little France into their home. 'A joy to read. David's descriptions of France are so wonderful you can almost smell the garlic' Jilly Cooper, *Sunday Express* Elizabeth David is the woman who changed the face of British cooking. She introduced post-war Britain to the sun-drenched delights of the Mediterranean and her recipes brought new flavours and aromas into kitchens across Britain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What I wanted was a book of unfussy French recipes to be done in 15 minutes. What I got was a book with no list of ingredients, no photos, no color, and "a useful dish for those who have to get a dinner ready when they get home from the office" taking 3 hours to cook (Daube de Boeuf

Provencale). Obviously, it seemed, I had made the wrong choice. On further reading, however, what unfolded was something beyond a "cookbook," and ultimately more useful. This is a superb book. French Provincial Cooking should be approached and read as a series of short stories, as well written and evocative as the best literature. The voice is highly personal and opinionated, sometimes sharp and catty, but always true and ultimately sympathetic. It is always entertaining. And the recipes, it turns out, are less intimidating than at first glance. Most importantly, they work if your aim is to produce the most excellent food imaginable. There is nothing slick here, no L.A. hype or N.Y. blah blah blah, and obviously, they have been tried and perfected; what initially seem to be annoying details (e.g., for omelettes, eggs "should not really be beaten at all, but stirred," whereas for scrambled eggs, they should be "very well beaten") are actually secrets not to be skipped, that elevate a good dish to a superb one. The lesson is that good food should be done simply, but it takes care, attention to detail, and frequently, time. I find these recipes don't stint on the butter, cream, and wine, making them seem a little frumpy, but every one I've tried has been delicious. Ratatouille, salade Nicoise, terrinee de porc, piperade are all the best I've had. It doesn't get much better than this.

Elizabeth David is one of the foremost writers on food in the latter half of the 20th century and this book has her most celebrated writing. For this reason, I was inspired to write this modest review when I saw feature the volume as an offering, 43 years after its first publication in England. It is a coincidence of no small meaning that this book appeared within two years before the publication of Julia Child et al's landmark 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking'. Child was even worried, when David's book appeared, that it may steal a lot of the thunder from Child and her colleague's effort. The fact is, the two books are very much like the Wittgensteinian 'duck rabbit' optical illusion in that they deal with the same subject but from different points of view. One distinction is that while Child's book is simply a cookbook of French recipes, David's book is a long essay on French cuisine, offering the sketches of recipes more as exercises to be completed by the reader than as true recipes. In fact, it is one of the most enduring legacies of Child's book that it redefined the detail to which a recipe writer should go in order to adequately communicate the process of preparing a dish. A second distinction between the two is that they deal with two different facets of French cuisine. As David recites from work by Curnonsky, there is haute cuisine, la cuisine Bourgeoise, la cuisine Regionale, and la cuisine Improvisée. David discourses on the third while Child, et al present the second. For many, including such luminaries as Jeremiah Tower and Alice Waters, Elizabeth David is the fountainhead of thinking on the French notion of 'la cuisine terroir',

sometimes interpreted by the notion 'what grows together goes together'.

The truly remarkable thing about Elizabeth David was not so much that she could write enthralling and compelling cookbooks ("Mediterranean Food", "French Provincial Cooking", "Italian Cooking"), but that she transformed a glum, drab post-war England by the beauty of her prose and her ability to evoke the sunshine and brilliant colours of the mediterranean. And, further north, the simple beauty of cuisine bourgeoise, home cooking french style. It was this book that got me started on a lifetime of home cooking. Like all great cookbooks, it can be read and savored without cooking at all. Her ability to evoke time and place is startling -- for example, her recipe for little courgette souffles is wrapped in the story of how she first enjoyed them. Of course, this was in a small country restaurant where the proprietor used his own recipe to make them for her. She talks vividly about La Mere Poulard and her Mont St. Michel omelettes, for which she offers the original recipe. Roughly translated from the french, it reads: "Monsieur, I get some good eggs, I put them in a bowl and beat vigorously. Then I put them into a pan with good butter and stir constantly. I will be very happy if this recipe gives you pleasure". I remember, over 30 years ago, the first time I made her recipe for pork chops "to taste like wild boar". They do indeed, and very good they are. Her recipes for classics like Cassoulet, and Bouillabaisse are vivid and provide the cultural context as well as precise directions. Her description of a bouillabaisse on the beach makes you want to catch the next plane there. She explains the environment of her recipes, their milieu, and their progenitors so that you get right inside the whole theory and practice of french cooking.

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