

*A Lifetime
of Cooking
Teaching and
Writing from
The French
Kitchen*

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Introduction

It's more than 40 years since I started my cooking school The French Kitchen, in Melbourne, Australia. It's more than 30 years since I wrote my first book, and at least that since I started writing monthly, and then weekly, articles for magazines and newspapers. When I look back on all those years and try to put it all together, I find that the common thread is communication—whether that be through the written word, or the packed house in front of you taking down every hint you can give them when demonstrating. The enthusiasm you can impart in the intimacy of the practical classroom is what still enthuses me the most—it is the teaching, and the satisfaction that comes when imparting and sharing knowledge.

As a member of the press, I was part of a privileged group; doors opened into the kitchens of many a great chef; I received many an invitation to grand dinners or the opening of restaurants, where I was always on the first-night guest list; and as the magazines I wrote for were all national, I was flown from state to state to attend them all. As a French-speaking member of the press (I had trained first at Le Cordon Bleu School in Paris when I lived there in the early years of my marriage), major hotels invited me to liaise with some of the great chefs of France that they had invited to Australia for promotions in their dining rooms. I spent time with three-star Michelin chefs, like Charles Barrier, Roger Vergé, Alain Senderens and a number of others, so I could either translate their needs to the hotel brigade, translate for their cooking demonstrations, or occasionally travel with them for their appearances.

Dining at 'nothing but the best' was a tax deduction. Somebody had to report on the latest happenings of *nouvelle cuisine* and the movements over the years that created such a turn-around in restaurant cooking in French cuisine... And after lunch I'd knock at the kitchen doors, take pictures, ask for a recipe and, if I smiled enough, I'd often get an invitation to return the next day for service. I learned to press myself flat against the wall of kitchens run by all the great experts—Freddy Girardet in Switzerland, Paul Bocuse, Charles Barrier, Michel Lorrain and Henri Faugeron in regional France, and was invited back, time after time. When Vergé saw I was writing my first book on Provence, *Top 100 Recipes of Provence* (Simon and Schuster, 1993), he pointed me towards all the old grandmothers he knew that he felt still held the key to the true 'regional cuisine' of his area, then flattered me by writing the dedication to the book, as did the President of the French Gastronomic Press of the time, Georges Prade, for *The French Kitchen* (Methuen, 1983).

As it all snowballed, I had much to report, and much to excite my students with. The new 'lightening' of French cuisine, compared to the traditional methods of Escoffier by which I had been trained, gave me reason to make comparisons, to encapsulate the many differences and, much later, to analyse and try to put in words further movements like the advent of 'east meets west' (now 'fusion') cuisine, or the impact of Ferran Adrià's molecular cuisine. (I'll never forget the drive along the outside of the winding cliff road, from Rosas to elBulli, me at the wheel just one metre away from a 150-metre drop to the sea and with truck drivers hugging the hillside coming at me from the other direction at what seemed like twice the speed limit—people told you to go there; they never told you how terrifying it was to get there!)

Nowadays it's René Redzepi at Noma in Denmark and the zest for foraging and eating while leaving only the smallest possible imprint on the planet. Never underestimate the spread of influence of these men, nor of these new movements—I've seen and felt it as I drop in at Redzepi's protégé Blaine Wetzel at Willows Inn in Lummi Island, Washington, near the US-Canadian border; visit Adrià disciple Dominique Crenn's Atelier Crenn in San Francisco; or check out the latest on the menu of local ex-Redzepi apprentice Ben Shewry of Attica in Melbourne, currently making the San Pellegrino list of the Top 100 Restaurants of the World.

As I said, getting excited, travelling around the world, gathering recipes, building a repertoire of regional traditions, and controversial changes—and having to write articles on my experiences from no matter where I was on a Tuesday night at 9pm Melbourne time, meant I was constantly appraising, constantly querying, and constantly building on my own knowledge, my own methods.

But a home cook is a home cook, and, good as he or she may be, I believe it perfectly correct that the liquid nitrogen bottles and the ISI machines stay with the chefs and we stick to our home kitchens. There is nothing more satisfying than the expectation that a chef is a better cook than you, otherwise why go out and pay good money for their meals? For the most part, I write to excite and I teach for the same reason I always did—to enlighten and enthuse the ambitious amateur.

Home cooking is a mix of commonsense and application. As I wrote in my first book, "No family cook striving to prepare the nightly meal can ponder for hours over a recipe book. Nor can a recipe book hope to unfailingly produce recipes that fit a crazy mix-up of end-of-the-week ingredients. So often, as the home cook can best tell you, it is the leftovers that are your ingredients list. One needs to know how to make a casserole, not how to make a veal casserole with asparagus, or a pigeon casserole with chestnuts."

One needs to know the logic behind cookery—how to pan-fry well; a fail-safe technique for casseroles no matter what the ingredients; how to make generic soups to give the family warmth in winter; how to use whatever is in the fridge in great combinations to make a prettily plated salad; the best method for poaching a shrimp or scallop without it going rubbery, or an egg without it losing all its white. It is the logic and the technique behind the cooking that enables us to put a great meal on the table, and it is the understanding of the technique that allows us to know we are going to succeed, thus taking away the anxiety; it's the 'rationale' behind the trial and error.

This book came about when my publisher Geoff Slattery was searching through his library of cookbooks, and discovered the first edition of *The French Kitchen*. He rang me not long after and discovered there were something like 50 people on the waiting list in the best secondhand bookshop in town for a copy of the original, the 30th anniversary of which was earlier this year.

The first thing we did was to scan in the text of *The French Kitchen*, and this became the basis of this new book. However, as the project progressed Geoff and I got excited, and we looked at another book of mine, *The Clever Cook* (Nationwide News, 1994), written around 10 years later. We decided that these books were imbued with exactly the same kind of logic, but because *The Clever Cook* concentrated on a broader, more international, modern style of cuisine rather than just French it would be a shame not to include it, too. Every recipe bar two from *The French Kitchen* is in this book, although many without their French titles, and many sitting alongside a non-French one that uses similar methods or principles. Even when I cook fusion, my techniques always seem to come from the French; it's a strong bias, but in my years at the helm, we have kept up with fashion and taught what the students wanted. I'm proud to say there are more than 230 new recipes in this book that I hope you will feel keep it very up-to-date.

I have organised these recipes with the same 'demystifying' approach with which I wrote *The French Kitchen*, and which is very much the hallmark of my school. Since childhood, I had always discovered I could do something better if I understood the 'why'. Behind all cuisines is a pattern of logic, and it's all found in the techniques. I discovered as I kept teaching that every casserole was like another; only the ingredients changed. There was a logical method behind making pastry and once you could make one, you could make them all, providing the technique was in place. This push to demystify and simplify cuisine runs through all my books and is what I aim to teach in my school.

So if you haven't read anything I've written before, you'll find the structure of this book a little different from others. At first glance the reader in search of a chicken recipe might not know where to find one. Within the Poultry chapter, there are recipe sections that cover the techniques of pan-frying, roasting, casseroles, boiling and braising, with recipes interspersed among them. However, all the chicken recipes are listed in the index under 'chicken'.





PORTRAIT BY JAN OLDHAM

My rationale is twofold: with a chicken in hand, both the hurried cook or the dinner-party cook usually knows before starting what she or he wants to do with it. For a party, it must be dressy—why not a roast with a classy sauce? For the late-home cook, it may be pan-fried; for the family in winter, why not a braised recipe, or a casseroled chicken?

Once you've chosen the ingredient and the technique with which to cook, you realise how similar the methods for different recipes can be and how they can be quickly and easily altered to create new variations. With pan-fried recipes for all the different meats side by side, you will realise how similar the recipes are, even though the ingredients, and hence the flavour of each, vary enormously. The more familiar you become with the technique, the more you'll recognise the generalities, and there are hints and frameworks to make it an 'easy study'. In the end you'll come to realise that one does not need a recipe to turn a pan-fried chicken fillet dish with champignons and cream into a pork cutlet recipe with green peppercorns and cream. One just needs an understanding of the pan-frying method and the technique of scraping up the sediment at the bottom of the pan to make a good sauce; and one needs to know that pork cutlets need a little longer to cook than chicken fillets. It's that simple.

Ideally understanding the method should help broaden your repertoire tremendously, limit you less to specific ingredients and eventually free you from endless searching in recipe books each time you want to cook something new. Know the technique, invent the recipe. Such is the continuing theme of this book.

Scattered through the pages of this book, you'll find recipes from all the regions of France—recipes of the *haute cuisine* (the cuisine of restaurants), French regional cuisine, and the *cuisine bourgeoise* (traditional family cuisine), together with many suggestions for spring-boarding from the recipes to variations of your own making, and that spring-boarding will include many a recipe from another cuisine—a Southeast Asian here, Chinese there, Middle Eastern, many a Moroccan offering, and even my mother's very English corned beef. You will find simple soups and intricate ones like the puréed fish soup of Provence. You'll find regional French dishes such as *moules marinière*, the famous *beurre blanc* sauce of the Loire Valley, and the renowned *bouillabaisse*. There are recipes for all common pastry-making techniques, flatbreads from Tuscany and Morocco, and recipes for making aspic or deboning

and stuffing chicken. Most sections have at least one recipe illustrated with step-by-step drawings.

Understanding is the key to success. Throughout the book I have always maintained there are no difficult techniques, only longer ones requiring more patience and as a teacher, I wanted the longer ones here, too. I want you to be able to find simple recipes or ideas for family meals, more intricate dishes for your dinner parties, and even make technical masterpieces if you want to enter competitions, as many of my students do. There are manual skills to acquire—piping rosettes, boning a bird without piercing the skin, rolling pastry with a light hand—but most skills are obtained with practice. My duty is to guide you, to take you as far as you want to take your learning.

And to allow you to relax a bit, interspersed throughout are travel essays from my book *Postcards from Kitchens Abroad* (New Holland, 1999)—so you have reason to lay on the bed with my book, too!

One final plea: every cookery writer suggests you read a recipe in full before you cook it. As this book is more than a recipe book, I have to ask something further. It is the introductions to each section that hold the key to how much you can learn from this book. Spend a little time with them outside the kitchen, outside the stress time of meal preparation. Only then will you be able to answer your own 'whys'.

Diane Holuigue

Diane Holuigue, October 2012



Figs Poached in Red Wine and Raspberries

Serves 6

500g (1lb) raspberries
160g (5½oz) caster sugar

750ml (1¼ pints) red wine,
preferably a light, soft red
18 figs

Garnish

peel of 1 orange, cut in julienne

Purée the raspberries in a food processor or blender and strain out the seeds. Place the purée in a saucepan with the sugar. Bring to the boil and stir until the sugar dissolves; add the wine.

Poach the figs in this mixture over low heat, uncovered, for 5 minutes, turning them. Remove figs with a slotted spoon and place in a shallow bowl. Reduce the sauce to about 300ml (½ pint) and cool.

To serve Spoon the red wine and raspberry sauce over the cold figs. Decorate with a julienne of orange zests, cooked in a light sugar syrup until softened (they keep for a year if covered in the syrup).

Figs Poached in White Wine and Honey

Serves 6 **Substitute** Pears

450ml (¾ pint) fruity white wine
3 tablespoons honey

juice of 1 lemon
¼ teaspoon cinnamon

12 figs

Bring the wine and honey to the boil with the lemon juice and cinnamon. Add the figs, reduce the heat and simmer just 2-3 minutes, depending on the ripeness of the figs. Transfer the figs to a bowl. Reduce the liquid,

by boiling down, to about 6-8 tablespoons. Pour over the figs. Refrigerate and serve cold, with or without cream, as preferred.

Gratinée of Raspberries or other Summer Fruits

Unfortunately, it is not easy for the home cook to serve a warm *sabayon*, since it requires last-minute cooking, but a very light *crème pâtissière*, using a little cornflour rather than flour, and not thickening too much, is an excellent alternative, and with it the dish can be prepared in advance. Chefs tend to have a very high heat ‘salamander’—only the Canon grill and grills (broilers) of the gas stoves of years ago radiate this well in the home kitchen, so you will need to commandeer your own tool-shed blowtorch. It’s become a much-used tool in kitchens for instantly caramelising the tops of tarts, custards, *crème brûlée*, Béarnaise sauces, and so on.

Serves 4 **Substitute** Fresh strawberries, mulberries, loganberries or other berry fruit; mixed fruit salad, unsweetened so it does not render juice.

1 punnet raspberries

3-egg *sabayon* (page 649)
or 300ml (½ pint) *crème pâtissière*

légère (page 568)

Equipment Very strong gas grill (broiler) or a handheld blowtorch. Individual ovenproof dishes

Divide the unwashed raspberries, or mixed berries, among 4 serving dishes. Make the *sabayon* or *crème pâtissière* according to the recipes. Pour a little over each dish of raspberries, taking care not to mask all the fruit. Place under a very well heated grill until there is a slight browning on the custard. Serve immediately. The contrast in colour, texture and temperature is stunning.

Note Domestic grills are not as strong as the commercial salamander. If your grill does not radiate enough heat, even when well heated, don’t overlook the handyman’s blowtorch. Read the text for *crème brûlée* to better understand the technique of using a blowtorch, but this dish needs only a light ‘lick’ to give the skin a little colour, and no sugar is added to get the heavy ‘mirror’ effect of the *crème brûlée*.

To prepare in advance The *sabayon* cannot be made in advance when it is to be served hot. The *crème pâtissière* may be made in the late afternoon, and poured onto the raspberries. Never disturb it after it is poured; let it

set where it falls, leaving some of the wonderful colour of the fruits visible. The thin skin that develops will be masked by the slight browning.

Summer Berries in Apple Jelly

Easy and effective, this jelly uses commercial apple juice as its base. In a loaf-shaped mould, it is dressy enough for a dinner party, and can be made up to two days before serving.

Makes 10-12 slices

1 punnet strawberries
½ punnet blackberries or
raspberries, depending on

availability
10 leaves gelatine or 9 rounded
teaspoons powdered gelatine

750ml (1¼ pints) apple juice

Equipment 1 litre long thin pâté mould, nut loaf or bread tin

Hull the strawberries. Place blackberries or raspberries, if using, on paper towelling to blot up moisture.

Place your mould in a large baking dish filled with water and lots of ice blocks. Add the gelatine to 2 cups of the apple juice, then stir over heat until melted. Pour into a jug with the remaining apple juice, stir, then allow to cool.

Pour apple juice into the base of the mould to a depth of about 1cm (½in). When it is nearly set from the cold of the ice, scatter some of the mixed berries over it and pour a little more apple juice in to hold the layer in place.

Continue placing the berries and topping up with the juice until all is used. Make an effort to stand some of the berries so the layered effect is not only of fruit that

is lying down. Wait until each layer is nearly set before continuing, otherwise you will have little control over the placing of the fruit. Make sure the top layer of fruit is not too high in the mould, there should be as much apple jelly above the fruit as there is on the base, that is about 1cm (½in).

Refrigerate 3-4 hours before serving, or make the day before. To unmould, run a knife around the edge, place a serving dish or board on top and invert. If it doesn’t fall (because of vacuum), wet a tea towel with very hot water, ring out well and hold around the edge of the mould. Cut into 1cm (½in) thick slices and serve with mixed berries on the side.

Pyramid of Strawberries in the style of Michel Guérard

Served on each table with the coffee at calorie-conscious French chef Michel Guérard’s spa restaurant, Les Prés et Les Sources d’Eugénie, is the simplest pyramid of strawberries. It is highly decorative and easy to do if you have one specialised piece of equipment, the chinois, a large conical strainer (see Equipment).

The pyramid is assembled carefully in the chinois with the choicest red, medium-sized strawberries, unhulled. Build to the height required, lay a doily on the strawberries, place a coffee saucer upside-down on top, and invert the strawberries onto the saucer to serve. It is pictured on page 562.

Choose slightly elongated strawberries rather than round ones. Buy more strawberries than you need so you are able to choose the precise size of each so it locks into place with the ones below it.

Start by placing one perfect, fatter strawberry pointing downwards in the base of the chinois, then 3 pointing outward. Build upwards in horizontal layers, ensuring each strawberry is cornered into its space. Keep each row flat, point all green stalks inwards; do not press or squash. When putting the saucer in place, it must fit snugly onto the strawberries so that there is no drop as you invert the pyramid onto the saucer. A flat coffee

saucer is ideal. Hold the saucer firmly, turning everything upside down, then carefully lift off the chinois.

To serve The pyramid may be served with whipped cream, but Guérard serves it with a small bowl of brown sugar and a very soft, fresh cream cheese. One dips first in the cream cheese, then in the sugar. To replace this French *fromage frais*, blend creamed cottage cheese with a little cream, heavy sour cream or yoghurt to taste. With the pyramid, Michel Guérard serves the little *feuilleté* biscuits on page 684.

Chocolate Stacks with Summer Berries
(page 563) and Michel Guérard's
Pyramid of Strawberries
(page 561)



Chocolate Stacks with Summer Berries

Serves 6

350g (12oz) dark chocolate
1½ punnets mixed summer
berries, for example
strawberries, raspberries,
blueberries, loganberries,
blackberries, mulberries

300ml (½ pint) cream with 35%
milk fat, whipped and flavoured
with a few drops vanilla
essence or sweetened with icing
(confectioners') sugar if desired
icing sugar, to dredge

To serve

optional: berry coulis (recipe below)
made from remaining fruit (omit
blueberries)

Equipment Small icing pocket with tiny round nozzle, or a couple small 'cones' made out of greaseproof paper, or simply a small, strong plastic bag with the corner snipped out (see below for explanation), 3 sheets of baking paper

To make the piping cones Cut 2 right-angle triangles of 18cm x 30cm (7in x 12in) from greaseproof paper. Fold each into a cone by wrapping them around your hand, to form a closed 'point' at the section directly opposite the apex of the right angle. Fold in the overhanging section at the point of the right angle to hold the cones closed firmly. Only when they are filled with chocolate and ready to pipe, should this point be cut with scissors to make the tiny hole through which you push the chocolate to pipe it. Alternatively, you may use a small piping bag with a 1.5mm nozzle. Or you can pour the chocolate into a small, strong plastic bag, press the chocolate toward one corner of the bag and, when ready to pipe, clip this corner with a tiny hole and pipe from this corner.

The chocolate Trace the pieces of baking paper with 18 circles of around 9cm (3½in) in diameter. Melt the chocolate in a bowl floating over hot water on the stove. Stir until gently melted, but not hot, making sure no drips of water get into the mixture. Pour into the cones you have made from the triangles

of greaseproof paper, or plastic bag.

Take each sheet of baking paper in turn and lay on a flat wooden board. Pipe in a zigzag, then again in the opposite direction across the traced circles to make attractively latticed discs of chocolate. Refrigerate the chocolate on the sheets and peel off when ready to use or store. (They may be made in advance and stored in tins.)

The fruit Pick over the fruit, removing stems and stalks where necessary, and mix in a bowl.

To assemble Take 1 disc of chocolate per person and arrange in the centre of 6 serving plate as a base. Pipe or spoon some whipped cream on this. Scatter with mixed berries. Lightly place a second disc over this and repeat the cream and fruit. Top with a third disc and dredge with icing sugar. Serve, with berry coulis drizzled around the edge of the plate if desired.

To make the coulis (optional) Purée the berries in a blender or food processor, sweetening to taste with either icing sugar or, better, redcurrant jelly, which tends to give it texture.

Variation Depending on availability in the market, don't hesitate to use other fruits. Mango pieces and blueberries go well, and kiwi and stone fruit wedges are also fine. For a lower fat alternative, I have also used creamed ricotta folded with whisked egg white dotted with chopped glacé peel, and sometimes mascarpone or *crème pâtissière* instead of the cream.