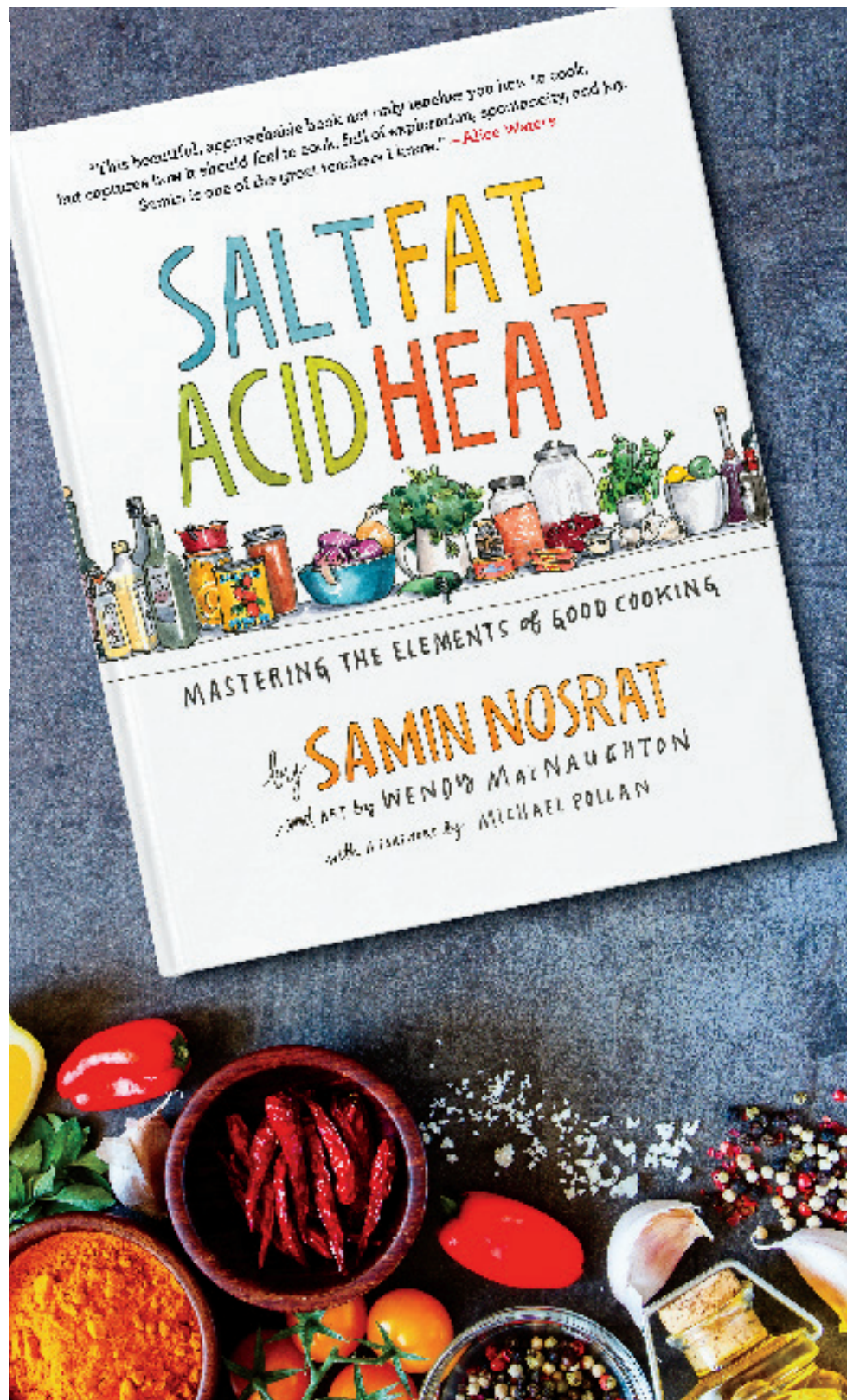


COOKBOOKS



Elements of Good Taste

Chez Panisse alum Samin Nosrat dishes on her new cookbook and divulges the one thing every home chef can do to make tonight's dinner better.

BY LEEANNE JONES

SAMIN NOSRAT believes anyone can learn to be a good cook. To start, you need to close the cookbook and turn off the kitchen timer. In her new book, *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, the 37-year-old Berkeley chef—a Chez Panisse and Ecoloco alumna who taught Michael Pollan how to cook—distills her philosophy into four basic elements, and encourages readers to start using and trusting their senses. It is a *New York Times* best-seller and is currently being adapted into a docuseries.

Q: You first dined at Chez Panisse as a student at UC Berkeley. Would you tell that story?

A: My family is from Iran, and I grew up in San Diego eating delicious, home-cooked Persian food. My experience of restaurants was mostly Round Table Pizza. During college orientation, someone said, 'There's this famous restaurant in Berkeley. You should have your parents take you when they visit.' The concept of a famous restaurant seemed completely foreign. The next year, I fell in love, and my boyfriend had always wanted to go to Chez Panisse, so we saved our money for seven months and ate downstairs.

It was an enchanting experience. It was good food, but what was really stunning and new to me was this feeling of being attended to and cared for. Our dessert was chocolate soufflé, and when the server asked how it was, I said, 'Oh, it's really good, but I think it would be a lot better with some cold milk.' She laughed, and I had no idea that it's unsophisticated to ask for milk in a fancy restaurant at night. She brought me milk, and she also brought us each a glass of dessert wine to sort of teach us the refined accompaniment. I was so inspired. I went home, wrote a letter, and made a résumé, and brought it to the restaurant, asking for a job. Turns out, the floor manager was the soufflé lady. And she was like, 'Can you start tomorrow?'



Q: What was the first thing you did in the kitchen of Chez Panisse?

A: I was the lowest person on the ladder. I was the helper of the unpaid intern. It was kind of thrilling for her, I think, to have someone to boss around. The first thing they had me do was

to peel and halve about 50 onions. It's something that should take 15 minutes, but I think it took me three and a half hours.

Another time, probably the next week, I was asked again to do the onions. The intern asked if I needed to review anything. And I said, 'Oh, no. I've totally got it.' And then, I proceeded to halve all of the onions the wrong direction. You're supposed to cut it through the root so that it holds together when you dice it and slice it. When the chef saw what I had done, he lost his mind. He made this huge deal about having to restructure the menu and turn the onions into French onion soup because under no circumstances would anyone see those onions cut the wrong way. It was a really intense shaming. And I will say, I've never cut an onion wrong again.

Q: What are some common mistakes you see among novice chefs?

A: People think a recipe is going to tell them what to do. But it's easy to forget—and maybe a lot of people don't know—that a recipe is the capturing of one experience at one point in time, in one geographic location. Our food is always changing, depending on what time of year you're making it, where you are, or if the sun is shining in your kitchen. There are a million different things that affect our food. It's good to keep your senses on

the forefront. If you smell burning, but the recipe says to keep going for another 12 minutes, maybe heed your senses, you know?

Q: Your new book, *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, focuses on four basic elements of cooking. What do each bring to good food?

A: Salt enhances flavor. Fat carries flavor and allows us to achieve five distinct textures. Acid balances flavors. Heat is the mechanism that allows us to achieve all the different textures. They are what make food taste good, and once you understand a few basic things about each, you can make anything taste good.

Q: Do you really believe anyone can cook good food?

A: A lot of people take issue with this. There are a couple things that need to be in place: You have to be open-minded and curious, and you have to be willing to practice and fail. But man, I really think anyone can do this.

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Since I spend so much of my time cooking and eating with other people, one of my great pleasures is eating by myself.”

—SAMIN NOSRAT

myself a beautiful salad, and I take the time to make a nice vinaigrette. That's the nicest thing I can do for myself.

Q: Is there one thing someone can do after reading this to make tonight's dinner better?

A: Add salt to your food. Salt is a mineral that plays a chemical role in our cooking. It changes texture and flavor. Your food will be better if you add salt earlier—your meat, especially. And by earlier, I often mean the night before. So get up right now, go get the chicken out of your fridge, and put salt on it.

To read an extended interview with Nosrat and to get her recipes for pasta cacio e pepe and other dishes, visit diablog.com/nosrat-recipes.



An Apricot Adventure

Another Chez Panisse alum has a new book, but author Carrie Glenn wasn't a chef—she was the floral arranger at the restaurant.

Retired after 35 years (she was known for incorporating fruits, weeds, and vines into the restaurant's statement pieces), the 77-year-old Glenn has turned to writing and painting children's books. Her first, *Clever Cybèle*, is inspired by her garden and tells the story of a beautiful apricot that tries to keep a group of hungry snails at bay.

“I would put the snails in position, and they would move. And I'd reposition them, and they would move,” says Glenn about her challenging models. “After a few tries, they gave up and went into their shells. I got very attached to them in a way.”

Clever Cybèle is available at *Chez Panisse and The Gardener in Berkeley*, and online at apologuepress.com.