

STIR

**MY BROKEN BRAIN AND THE MEALS
THAT BROUGHT ME HOME**

BY JESSICA FECHTOR

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Please Buy an Oven Thermometer

(Some Thoughts on Cooking from This Book)

So, yes, this is a book about food. It isn't a cookbook, though there are recipes here. Because to follow the story where it went I had to follow it into my kitchen. The recipes in this book are for foods that connect me to myself and to my people. Foods that reminded me who I was when I felt least like myself. My recipes are, for the most part, simple and straightforward, because that's the way I like to cook and eat. They're recipes that show you how to make food that feels special not because it's fancy, but because it tastes so good. I'm excited to share them with you.

We all have our ways in the kitchen. Before we get started, I want to tell you about some of mine. Think of it as preemptive troubleshooting, reducing the variables so that at your house, things just work. Of course, over time, I hope you'll make these recipes your own, with whatever tweaks and changes you see fit.

First, let's talk about measurements. I like to cook and, especially, bake by weight because I find it easier and faster, with more consistent results. A basic digital scale will do the trick; you don't need any bells or whistles. You can pick one up for around twenty dollars. Most household kitchen scales are not sensitive enough to reliably measure weights under ten grams. Any ingredient that measures under ¼ cup, I've listed by volume alone, in teaspoons and tablespoons.

Flour is especially tricky to measure by volume, since even the same cook measuring the same flour with the same cup can get considerable variation from scoop to scoop. It all depends on how tightly you pack your cup. If you don't have a scale or prefer to measure by volume, here's how to do it so that your amounts are closest to mine: Stir your jar or sack of flour with a fork to aerate it, spoon the flour into your measuring cup, and, without tapping the measuring cup to settle its contents, sweep the excess flour from the top with the straight back of a knife. The recipes in this book were tested with both weight and volume measurements by a small army of home cooks, cookbook authors, professional bakers, food bloggers, and food magazine editors, so either way, you should be set.

While we're on the subject of flour: For all-purpose unbleached white flour, I use the King Arthur brand. It has a higher protein content than other national brands (and a consistent protein content, bag to bag, which I appreciate). Protein content is relevant because more protein means more gluten development, and more water absorption when you combine it with your wet ingredients. That affects texture. King Arthur all-purpose flour contains about 12 percent protein. If you bake the cookies in this book using a brand that contains only, say, 9 percent protein, you can expect a wetter dough that will result in flatter, paler cookies with less chew. A higher-protein all-purpose flour like King Arthur is nice to have around because it also works well in breads. Convenient if you'd rather not purchase an additional sack of bread flour or don't have any on hand.

I use large eggs and unsalted butter when making the recipes in this book. I bake with fine-grain sea salt. You can use table salt instead, if that's what you've got. A few of the recipes in this book call for Diamond Crystal brand kosher salt. The brand is important because the size of the crystals varies among kosher salt brands. Morton's, for example, has a finer grain, so a teaspoon will be considerably saltier than a teaspoon of Diamond Crystal. If you swap in fine-grain sea salt or another brand of kosher salt for the Diamond Crystal, you'll need to use less. Taste as you go and trust your preferences.

A few of the recipes call for canned tomatoes or sauce. My preferred brand is Muir Glen. I always have a can or two of their organic whole peeled tomatoes in the cupboard, the tomatoes that, incidentally, beat out even the celebrated San Marzano tomatoes in a *Cook's Illustrated* taste test.

Last but not least, please buy an oven thermometer. Ovens, even shiny new ones, run hot and cold all the time. Some, like mine, overshoot by fifty degrees before settling back down to the temperature on the dial. It's not only a matter of under- or overbaking. Cakes, cookies, and breads baked at the wrong temperature will have issues with texture, too. It's the simplest thing, but an oven thermometer can make all the difference in what comes out of your kitchen.

Onward.

Recipes

Chapter 2: A Cake

Marcella's Butter Almond Cake

This is the almond cake that met me that night in Ohio. It's my secret weapon in the kitchen, one of those cakes that comes together in no time from practically nothing, but is so pretty and tastes so good that no one ever believes you. Amy got the recipe from her friend Patricia, who clipped it from *The Columbus Dispatch*, and I've adapted it here. For short, Amy and I call this cake "Marcella's" after its creator, Marcella Sarne, who entered it in a baking contest sponsored by C&H Sugar and won, to the tune of a grand-prize custom kitchen.

My friend Janet suggests sprinkling a pinch of salt over the batter together with the toasted almonds and sugar. My friend Janet, by the way, is a genius. Covered and stored at room temperature, this cake keeps well for several days.

- Butter and flour for the pan
- 3 heaped tablespoons sliced almonds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (1½ sticks; 170 grams) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled
- 1½ cups (300 grams) granulated sugar, plus 1 tablespoon for finishing
- 2 large eggs
- 1½ teaspoons pure almond extract
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1½ cups (188 grams) all-purpose flour
- A pinch of sea salt flakes, like Maldon, if using

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and butter and flour a 9-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom.

Spread the sliced almonds in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast them in the preheated oven for 5 to 7 minutes, until fragrant. They should color only lightly.

Whisk together the melted butter and 1½ cups sugar in a large bowl. Add one egg, whisk until fully incorporated, then add the other and whisk some more. Add the almond extract, vanilla, and salt, and whisk well, until smooth. With a rubber spatula, fold in the flour until just combined.

Spread the batter evenly in the prepared pan and scatter the toasted almonds, sea salt flakes, if using, and 1 tablespoon sugar over top. Bake for 35 minutes, until the cake peeking through the almonds takes on a faintly rosy color (this cake blushes more than it browns), and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool on a rack until nearly room temperature, then ease the cake out of the pan and cool the rest of the way.

Serves 8 to 10.

Chapter 4: At the Table

Eli's Oatmeal Cookies

Eli doesn't like sweets—nobody's perfect—but he does have a soft spot for a few select things, oatmeal cookies being one of them. These are his favorite. They're big, chewy saucers, crisp around the edges, with just enough whole wheat flour to warm up the flavor. To scoop the dough for these, I use a 1½-tablespoon cookie scoop, piling two level scoops, one on top of the other.

- 1½ cups (135 grams) rolled oats (not instant)
- 1 cup (125 grams) all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (57 grams) whole wheat flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup (2 sticks; 226 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup (100 grams) dark brown sugar
- ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon fine-grain salt
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Mix the first six ingredients (the oats through the cinnamon) in a medium bowl. Combine the melted butter, the sugars, and salt in a large bowl and whisk well. Then add the egg and vanilla and whisk until smooth. Add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture and stir with a rubber spatula or wooden spoon until just combined. Do not overmix. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for 20 to 30 minutes, until the dough is cool and firm but still scoopable.

While the dough is resting, heat the oven to 325 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Using 3 level tablespoons per cookie, scoop the dough onto the prepared baking sheet. The cookies will spread as they bake, so leave 2 to 3 inches between each mound of dough. I fit 8 cookies, staggered, per pan.

Bake for 18 to 22 minutes until golden brown. Slide the parchment paper with the cookies onto a rack and cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough, making sure to begin with a room temperature baking sheet.

Makes about 16 cookies.

Chapter 6: Z-i-t-i

Saucy Baked Ziti

Don't tell my mother-in-law, or for that matter my husband, but for a long time I just didn't get baked ziti. It seemed like the no-man's-land of pasta dishes, lying somewhere between pasta with sauce and lasagna, and less delicious than both. This ziti changed my mind. It is its own terrific thing, saucy and full flavored with a bit of heat. (If you're not into spicy, reduce the crushed red pepper in the tomato sauce by half a teaspoon or so.) I like the crisp bread-crumbs topping and the hint of nutmeg, which may sound like a strange addition, but you'll be glad it's there. Don't let the béchamel sauce intimidate you. Just be sure to warm the milk and add it slowly to the pot to keep the sauce from breaking.

Despite the name of this recipe, Eli and I have discovered that we like it best with rigatoni, another tubelike pasta that's larger than ziti and ridged along the surface. Oh, and use the best canned tomatoes you can find for this dish, which, of course, is a matter of taste. I like Muir Glen.

This recipe is adapted from one that chef Mario Batali shared with Dana Cowin for her book *Mastering My Mistakes in the Kitchen*. It's great at the center of a casual dinner party, with a big salad, a bowl of olives, and a couple bottles of wine.

For the tomato sauce:

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper, plus more to taste
- 2 28-ounce cans whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt, plus more to taste

For the béchamel:

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole milk, warmed (but not boiled)
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt, plus more to taste
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg, plus more to taste

For the rest of the dish:

- 1 pound dry ziti or rigatoni
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 cup (50 grams) freshly grated Parmesan
- 1 cup (50 grams) panko bread crumbs
- A pinch or two of nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper (optional)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- A handful of fresh basil leaves, sliced or torn into small pieces

Position a rack in the top third of the oven, and preheat to 375 degrees. Brush a 9-by-13-inch ceramic or glass baking dish with olive oil.

Make the tomato sauce:

Pour the 4 tablespoons olive oil into a 3- or 4-quart saucepan and warm over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Stir in the garlic and crushed red pepper and cook for a minute or so, until fragrant. Add the tomatoes, smooshing them up with your hands as you drop them into the pot. Dump in any juices left in the cans, stir in the salt, turn the heat up to high, and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes, until the sauce thickens slightly. Taste, and add more salt and crushed red pepper, if you'd like. Remove the pot from the heat and set aside.

Meanwhile, make the béchamel:

Melt the butter in a 3- or 4-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and stir for a couple of minutes, to form a pale brown paste. Very slowly pour in the warm milk while whisking continuously. Bring the sauce to a boil and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring the whole time, until it thickens. Remove the pot from the heat, stir in the salt and nutmeg, and taste. If you prefer more salt or nutmeg, stir it in, and set the sauce aside.

Make the pasta and assemble the dish:

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and toss in a few hefty pinches of salt. Add the pasta, and cook until it's 3 or 4 minutes short of done. (It will cook the rest of the way through in the oven.) Drain the pasta and transfer it to your largest bowl.

Add the tomato sauce, béchamel, mozzarella, and about three-quarters of the Parmesan to the ziti and mix well. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish and scatter the rest of the Parmesan over top. In a small bowl, toss the bread crumbs with a nice pinch of nutmeg, plus another ½ teaspoon or so of crushed red pepper if you want some extra heat, mix with the 2 tablespoons olive oil, and sprinkle over the ziti.

Bake until the ziti is bubbling and the top is brown, about 15 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest for 10 minutes, then scatter the sliced basil over the top and serve.

Serves 6 to 8.

Chapter 7: The Moon Out of the Sky

Pan-Roasted Salmon

This is the simplest and best salmon preparation I know. I love how the skin crisps and the pink meat browns along the surface. It's the closest thing to grilled salmon, without the grill. When you purchase your fish, ask for center-cut fillets that are more or less the same thickness from end to end. And make sure to dry the salmon well before you brush the fillets with oil.

- 1 tablespoon flaked sea salt, like Maldon
- 2 pieces of salmon fillet with skin on, 1/3 pound each
- Olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper and lemon wedges, for serving

Scatter the salt evenly over a dry, well-seasoned 10-inch cast-iron pan. A stainless steel pan will also work. If you're using a stainless steel pan instead of cast iron, brush the pan lightly with oil before adding the salt. Place the pan over medium-high heat for 3 minutes.

While the pan heats, dry the fish fillets well with paper towels and lay them flat on a large plate. Brush with olive oil on both sides.

Place the fish into the hot pan, skin side down. Turn the heat down slightly if the crackle sounds too loud and sputtery. Cover with a lid. If you don't have a lid that fits your pan, a metal baking sheet will do the job. Cook without moving the fillets for 3 to 5 minutes, until the skin is brown and crisp, and releases easily from the pan. Flip the fillets and cook them uncovered for another 2 to 4 minutes, depending on their thickness. The fish is done when the flesh deep inside is still faintly translucent and the internal temperature reads 125 degrees.

Serve with freshly ground black pepper and lemon wedges.

Serves 2.

Chapter 8: Just in Case

Kale and Pomegranate Salad

My mom still pokes fun at me for a phone call she received one night that week, after Eli and I made a salad together for dinner. “Mom,” I said, “he cut the mushrooms just right.” I had found a guy who shared my salad aesthetic, and while I admit that salad compatibility does not necessarily correlate with romantic compatibility, there is something to be said for standing at the counter together, rinsing, drying, slicing, talking about whatever, and ending up with a big bowl of salad that suits you both to a T.

Here’s a salad we make as often as we can each fall while pomegranates are in season. The dressing gets its zing from pomegranate molasses, something I first tried at a Seattle restaurant called Sitka and Spruce, where they drizzle the sweet-tart syrup over yogurt and sautéed dates. The dish was genius, and I was hooked. I bought a bottle of pomegranate molasses when I got home—you can find it at Middle Eastern markets and a lot of mainstream grocery stores—and I’ve kept some on hand ever since. I brush it with oil over carrots and beets before roasting, add it by the tablespoon to glasses of sparkling water, spoon it over hot oatmeal, swirl it into yogurt, and whisk it into dressings like the one here.

I like my dressing on the sharp side, especially in a salad with such strong, sturdy ingredients. If you want to tone it down, add more olive oil by the teaspoon, whisking and tasting between each addition, until the balance is right for you.

One more quick note: This salad calls for dinosaur kale, the flat, dark green kind also known as lacinato or Tuscan kale. I prefer it in its raw form over curly kale, which can be tougher and harder to chew.

For the salad:

- 12 leaves dinosaur kale, stripped of their stems and thinly sliced
- ½ head of radicchio, thinly sliced
- 4 radishes, thinly sliced
- Seeds from half a large pomegranate (about ½ cup)
- A handful or two of roasted and salted pistachios, shelled

For the dressing:

- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil (plus more to taste)
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard

Put all the salad ingredients in a large bowl. Shake or whisk together the dressing ingredients in a jar or mixing bowl. Depending on how heavily dressed you like your salad, you may end up with more dressing than you need. Start with half, toss, taste, then add more, as needed.

Serves 4.

Chapter 9: A Home Run

Sweet and Clear Chicken Soup

With all due respect and deepest gratitude for Aunt Leslie's chicken soup, the soup I make at home is my mother's. There are two defining features of her soup, both oft discussed around my childhood table: sweetness and clarity. The sweetness is thanks to the parsnip. The clarity, well, it depends whom you ask.

My mother begins by washing her chicken under cold water and plucking out visible feathers. She then plunges the chicken, a couple of pieces at a time, into a pot of boiling water to remove any remaining blood. Next, she plucks out more pinfeathers, the little ones that are now sticking up from the heat. "I don't take the time to remove *all* the feathers," she insists. That would be excessive. (Her mother, she says, removed every last one.) My mother then empties and cleans the pot and . . . starts the soup.

Honestly, my mother's soup is so good that if all these steps were the only way, the effort would be worth it. But I certainly wouldn't make it very often. Fortunately, I've found another, abbreviated route to a soup that's just as clear. (Really. My mom has given it her blessing!)

For a clear, golden soup my way, all you have to do is cook it uncovered, at a very low simmer, and skim, skim, skim. Never let it boil, which would cause the fat and blood remnants to emulsify and cloud the broth.

Growing up, we always ate this soup with fine egg noodles and matzo balls. Today I'm just as likely to spoon in some of whatever cooked grain I have left over in the fridge: rice, farro, barley. They all do the trick.

- 1 yellow onion, peeled
- 6 carrots, peeled
- 2 parsnips, peeled
- 5 celery stalks
- 1 3- to 4-pound chicken, cut up into pieces, giblets removed (you may buy a cut-up chicken, if you prefer)
- 1 tablespoon Diamond Crystal kosher salt, plus more for cooking the vegetables
- A few extra carrots, parsnips, and celery stalks (3 to 4 of each to serve 8 people)
- 2–3 cups cooked egg noodles, rice, farro, or barley

Slice a deep X into the top of the onion, but don't cut all the way through. You want the onion to remain whole. Cut the carrots, parsnips, and celery into 1-inch pieces. Put all the vegetables into an 8-quart stock pot, add the chicken pieces, and sprinkle with the tablespoon of salt. Cover with cold water (about 4 quarts), and slowly bring to the barest possible simmer. Do not cover the pot. Do not let boil.

Start skimming the surface of the broth with a spoon as soon as there's something to skim, and keep skimming as foam, fat, and blood rise to the surface. You want to catch what comes up before it has a chance to sink back into the soup and emulsify. For 20 to 30 minutes, you'll be skimming like crazy, then just every so often until the soup is done. Cook at a low, low simmer for 2 hours total, then remove the pot from the heat.

Transfer the chicken from the pot to a plate. Line a fine-meshed sieve with cheesecloth and place it over a large bowl or container. Ladle the soup and its vegetables into the bowl through

the cloth-lined sieve. You can skip the sieving if you want and simply remove the vegetables. The broth will still be beautiful and delicious. (Just don't tell my mom.) Discard the vegetables. Cover and refrigerate the broth overnight.

Once the chicken is cool enough to handle, remove the meat from the bones, shred with your fingers, and store in the fridge separate from the broth. When you're ready to serve the soup, remove the shredded chicken from the fridge and bring a medium-sized saucepan of water to a boil. Add a few pinches of salt to the water. Peel the extra carrots and parsnips, slice them and the celery into 1-inch pieces, and cook in the boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes, until they're soft enough to pierce easily with a fork, but still firm. Meanwhile, remove the broth from the fridge and skim off any fat floating on the surface. Reheat the broth in a pot. Add some shredded chicken, vegetables, and whichever rice, noodle, or grain you prefer to individual soup bowls, ladle in the broth, and serve.

Serves 8.

Chapter 10: The Most Beautiful Things

Sarah's Cholent with Kugel

The nuts and bolts of this cholent are Sarah's mother's. When Sarah got married and moved to suburban New Jersey, she made some changes, following the lead of her neighbors. "We added the American stuff," Sarah explained when I asked her for the recipe. "The tomato sauce." (I nodded.) "The beef bouillon." (I wrote it down.) "The onion soup mix." *The what?* It's true. This cholent is a mere whisper of itself without a packet of Goodman's onion soup mix (I've tried), so don't skip it.

Like Sarah, I make this cholent in a 6-quart slow cooker. While everything in the pot will be cooked through and very likely delicious after 5 to 10 hours, you need the full 18 to 24 hours for the flavors and texture to come together as intended.

For the cholent:

- 1 large yellow onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 pounds flanken (bone-in short ribs) or stew meat
- 1 packet Goodman's onion soup mix
- 2 potatoes (I use 1 baking potato and 1 sweet potato)
- 1/3 cup each dried pinto beans, red kidney beans, and navy beans
- 1/2 cup barley
- 1 15-ounce can tomato sauce, preferably Muir Glen
- 1 beef bouillon cube, preferably Telma, dissolved in 2 cups hot water

For the kugel:

- 5 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 large onion
- 2 1/4 cups (281 grams) all-purpose flour
- A generous pinch of fine sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Assemble the cholent:

Put the chopped onion into a 6-quart slow cooker and cover with the olive oil. Turn the pot on to its lowest, slowest setting. (It's the ten-hour setting on mine.) Lay the meat on top of the onion, and cover evenly with the onion soup mix. Peel the potatoes, cut each one into eighths, and arrange them on top of the meat in a ring against the sides of the pot. Fill the center of the potato ring with the beans and the barley, and dump the can of tomato sauce on top. Pour in the water with the dissolved bouillon cube, then add water until the ingredients are just barely covered. Be sure to leave enough room at the top of the pot for the kugel. Do not stir. Cover the pot.

Make the kugel:

Two to three hours into cooking, once the cholent is quite hot, whisk together the eggs, oil, and water in a large bowl. Coarsely grate in as much of the onion as you can without hurting your fingers, add the salt, a few grinds of black pepper, and stir. Add the flour, a little at a time, and stir until a loose dough forms and pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Pour the kugel dough into the center of the cholent. It will spread some as it cooks. If you notice that your water level is low, add some more. Cover, and cook for 18 to 24 hours.

To serve, lift the kugel out of the pot and slice it into squares. Spoon the cholent with its juices into a large casserole dish, then pile the kugel squares on top.

Serves 8 or more.

Chapter 12: Plotting, Together

Cream of Asparagus Soup

I like crème fraîche as the “cream” in this soup for its extra tang, but heavy cream here is also lovely. The soup improves after a night in the fridge, so I recommend making it in advance. Reheat it before adding the lemon juice.

- 1 large yellow onion
- 2 pounds asparagus stalks, their tough bottoms snapped off
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Diamond Crystal kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4–5 cups vegetable broth
- ½ cup crème fraîche or heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon fresh-squeezed lemon juice

Coarsely chop the onion. Cut the asparagus into 1- to 2-inch pieces.

Melt the butter in a 4-quart pot over medium-low heat, add the onion, and cook, stirring, until softened. Add the asparagus pieces, a couple of pinches of salt and a few grinds of black pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Add 4 cups of vegetable broth and simmer, partially covered, until the asparagus is very tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

Purée the soup in batches in a stand blender, or use an immersion blender to purée it in the pot. (If you go the stand blender route, wait for the soup to cool a bit and fill the blender only one-half to three-quarters of the way full with each batch. Return the puréed soup to the pot.) Stir in the crème fraîche or heavy cream, then add up to another cup of broth, if necessary, to thin the soup to the consistency you prefer. If you refrigerate the soup overnight, you’ll likely want to add the additional broth before reheating.

Taste, and season with salt and pepper. Stir in the lemon juice just before serving.

Serves 4.

Chapter 13: The Everywhere Light

Crispy Rice and Eggs

Crispy rice and eggs was at the top of the breakfast list I made that day at Fletcher Allen. The recipe is a plan of action for any rice you may have left from the previous night's dinner. I usually add whatever other leftovers I find lurking in the fridge: sautéed greens, roasted carrots or Brussels sprouts, chickpeas, anything that looks as though it would be at home on a bed of crisp rice beneath a runny fried egg. I eat my rice and eggs with hot sauce and a big spoonful of tangy yogurt on the side of the plate.

- Olive oil
- ½ cup cooked brown rice (Go ahead and use white if that's what you've got.)
- 2 large eggs
- Diamond Crystal kosher salt and black pepper
- Plain, whole milk yogurt and hot sauce for serving, if you'd like

Pour a generous slick of olive oil into an 8- or 9-inch cast-iron pan and place over medium-high heat for 3 minutes. Scoop the rice into the hot pan and spread evenly across the surface with a spoon or rubber spatula. Reduce the heat to medium and cook for 60 to 90 seconds. Do not stir. While the rice is frying, crack the eggs into a small glass.

In the center of the rice, dig two holes, each one a little larger than an egg yolk. Pour one egg into each hole—some of the whites will seep into the surrounding rice—and cook for 2 minutes. Still, don't stir. Season with a generous pinch of salt and a couple grinds of black pepper. Turn on the broiler, and slide the pan beneath it for 1 to 2 minutes, until the whites are set and the yolks are warm but still runny.

Shimmy the rice and eggs onto a plate, helping it along with a spatula, if necessary. The whole thing will transfer like a pancake. Top with a few shakes of hot sauce and a generous dollop of yogurt, if using, and serve immediately.

Serves 1.

Chapter 15: Becoming Home

Hi-Rise Almond Macaroons

When I asked René Becker of Hi-Rise Bread Company if he would share his almond macaroon recipe for this book, I had no idea that his own father had died of a ruptured brain aneurysm more than three decades ago. René's father experienced symptoms for years before finally seeing a doctor. By then, the aneurysm had grown too large to repair in surgery. He died four months later, when the aneurysm burst. René's recipe appears here in memory of his father.

For this recipe, you'll want to get your hands on Solo brand almond paste. Other popular brands are higher in sugar, which causes the macaroons to spread in the oven. With Solo, your macaroons will turn out nice and plump, just like René's.

One more thing: An oven thermometer is especially important when you're baking at a low temperature. Even ovens that are spot-on at higher temperatures can struggle to hit the mark at 300 degrees. Trust the thermometer and adjust the temperature accordingly.

- 1 pound Solo brand almond paste
- 1½ cups (300 grams) granulated sugar
- ¾ cup (90 grams) confectioners' sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon almond extract
- 3 large egg whites
- About 30 whole almonds
- Confectioners' sugar for dusting

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the almond paste, sugars, and almond extract on low for 2 to 3 minutes, to form a crumbly, pebbly mixture. The largest almond paste pieces should be the size of small chickpeas. Add the egg whites and mix on medium-low for 3 minutes, pausing once to scrape down the sides of the bowl. Cover the bowl tightly with plastic and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Using 2 level tablespoons per macaroon, scoop the dough onto the prepared baking sheet, 1 to 2 inches apart. A cookie scoop comes in handy here because the dough is sticky. (I use a 1½-tablespoon scoop because it's all I have and it's close enough.) If you're using a measuring spoon instead of a cookie scoop, roll the dough into balls between your palms before placing them on the baking sheet. Press one almond into the top of each macaroon, and sift a generous amount of confectioners' sugar over top. Return the remaining dough to the fridge until you're ready to scoop the next round.

Bake for 28 to 33 minutes, rotating the baking sheet halfway through, until the macaroons are rosy on top and lightly brown on the bottom. Slide the parchment paper with the cookies onto a rack and cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough, making sure to begin with a room temperature baking sheet.

Makes about 30 cookies.

Chapter 17: Badass

Roasted Chicken

In *The Zuni Café Cookbook*, Judy Rodgers tells you everything you need to know about how to roast a chicken: Start with a small bird so that it will cook quickly and evenly. Dry it well, salt it early, and roast at high heat. No trussing—you want as much skin as possible exposed in the hot oven—and no rubbing down with butter or oil. In return, you get the perfect roasted chicken, juicy throughout with crisp, golden skin.

A word about salting: Rodgers advises “salting early,” one to three days before cooking, to tenderize and flavor the meat. Kosher chickens have already been salted and have thus already reaped the tenderizing benefits of salting early, but for flavor, I season it with a bit more salt, as indicated below. A kosher bird still benefits from sitting a day or two uncovered in the fridge. The skin will turn out especially crisp. I serve this chicken with crusty bread and a simple salad.

For the chicken:

- 1 3- to 4-pound chicken, giblets removed
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme, rosemary, or sage
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon Diamond Crystal kosher salt per pound of chicken ($\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon per pound if you're using a kosher chicken)
- About $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Pat the chicken very dry, inside and out, with paper towels. Slip a finger beneath the skin on each breast near the edge of the cavity to form a couple of pockets, then do the same on the thickest part of each thigh. Slide an herb sprig into each of the four pockets.

Season all over with the suggested amount of salt and black pepper, and sprinkle a bit of each just inside the cavity. Refrigerate, uncovered, for 24 to 48 hours. Remove from the fridge half an hour prior to roasting, and give it another few pats with a paper towel to get rid of any excess moisture.

Preheat the oven to 475 degrees.

Place a 10-inch cast-iron or stainless steel skillet over medium heat for 4 minutes. Set the chicken breast-side up in the pan. You should hear it sizzle. Transfer the pan to the oven. If the skin doesn't begin browning within 20 minutes, raise the temperature to 500 degrees until it does. If, on the other hand, the skin begins to blacken or smoke (blistering is fine and welcome), lower the temperature to 450 degrees.

After about 30 minutes, turn the bird over and roast for another 15 to 20 minutes, then flip one last time and roast breast-side up for another 5 to 10 minutes to re crisp the skin. The chicken is done when a thermometer inserted into the hip meat (between the leg and the breast) reads 165 degrees. Transfer the bird to a large plate or carving board, and let rest for 15 minutes before cutting it into pieces.

Serves 3 to 4.

Chapter 18: A Certain Kind of Best

Whole Wheat Chocolate Chip Cookies

While I will never turn down a Toll House cookie, a new chocolate chip cookie came into my life a few years back that instantly became my go-to. The cookie's defining feature is that it's made exclusively with whole wheat flour. That sounds annoyingly virtuous for a chocolate chip cookie, but the whole wheat's not there to be healthy. It's there because it tastes good. When I first discovered these cookies, I baked them for everyone I knew. My friends all had a guess about what was different in these cookies, but very few called out the whole wheat flour. They asked instead if I'd put ground walnuts in there, or oats, or an earthy spice of some kind. One person insisted I'd browned the butter. Nope. It was just the whole wheat talking.

These cookies bake up fat, with a crisp, crustlike exterior. On the inside, they're soft, even borderline flakey. The genius behind them is Kim Boyce, who published the recipe in her cookbook, *Good to the Grain*. Her specialty is taking whole grains, figuring out their particular powers of flavor and texture, and harnessing them in the service of baked goods that are astoundingly delicious. (If you ever visit her Bakeshop in Portland, Oregon, please have one of everything for me.)

The only thing better than a Kim Boyce chocolate chip cookie is a Kim Boyce chocolate chip cookie made from dough that's been aged for a day or two. I like to prepare the dough, scoop it into individual cookies, and store them in the fridge on a baking sheet wrapped in plastic. Then, when the mood strikes, I bake them off, a cookie or two at a time.

- 3 cups (340 grams) whole wheat flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks; 226 grams) unsalted butter, softened to cool room temperature and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup (200 grams) dark brown sugar
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 8 ounces (227 grams) bittersweet or semisweet chocolate (I use something in the 62–72 percent range), roughly chopped into ¼- and ½-inch pieces
- Sea salt flakes, like Maldon

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and fine sea salt in a large bowl. Put the butter and sugars in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, and mix on low speed until just blended. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a spatula. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Mix in the vanilla.

Add the flour mixture to the bowl, and blend on the lowest speed until the flour is just barely incorporated. Add the chopped chocolate, and mix with a rubber spatula. If there are any small pockets of flour lurking in the dough, rub them in with the spatula or your hands. (Better to leave off using the mixer at this point so that you don't overwork the dough.)

Scoop the dough, 3 level tablespoons per cookie, onto the prepared baking sheet. I use a 1½-tablespoon cookie scoop and pile one level scoop on top of another. You can crowd the mounds of dough shoulder to shoulder on the single sheet so that they won't take up too much room in the fridge. (You'll move the cookies to a separate sheet when you're ready to bake them.) Wrap the dough in plastic and chill for 24 to 48 hours.

When you're ready to bake, heat the oven to 350 degrees and line another baking sheet with parchment paper. Place 6 to 8 mounds of prescooped dough onto the prepared pan, leaving about 3 inches between each cookie. Press a few sea salt flakes into the top of each mound.

Bake for 16 to 20 minutes, rotating the sheet halfway through, until nicely brown but still soft. Slide the parchment paper with the cookies onto a rack and cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough, making sure to begin with a room temperature baking sheet.

Makes about 20 cookies.

Chapter 20: Three Mushrooms

Lemony Pasta with Morel Mushrooms and Peas

The dish I set out to make that night was inspired by some pasta with morel mushrooms and fresh peas that I ate on my twenty-seventh birthday. Eli and I were living in San Francisco at the time while I was a visiting graduate student at UC Berkeley. With the birthday, the semester coming to an end, and our return home to Cambridge approaching, we were feeling celebratory and up for a splurge. We made a reservation at Chez Panisse, Alice Waters's restaurant on Shattuck Avenue.

Morels are difficult to describe because of how singularly delicious they are. They're woodsy and wild, you might say, arboreal in the way of hazelnuts and pine, succulent like meat. I'd never tasted one until that night, and I was thrilled by how much there was to taste. I did my best to recreate the pasta dish at home and it became part of our permanent rotation. It's best in the spring with morels and fresh peas, but we make it year-round with cremini or shitake mushrooms and frozen peas. If you use cremini or shitake mushrooms, you'll need to cook them for a few extra minutes to get them brown and crisp around the edges.

- ½ pound morel mushrooms (or cremini or shitake mushrooms; see above)
- 1 teaspoon Diamond Crystal kosher salt
- ½ pound (227 grams) dry linguine
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Sea salt flakes, like Maldon, to taste
- 1 cup (150 grams) fresh or frozen peas
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme, chopped
- Zest from 1 lemon
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Juice of ½ lemon, plus more to taste

Fill a large bowl with cool water and prepare the morels: Slice them in half lengthwise, swish them around in the water for a few seconds to loosen any grit—not too long; you want them to absorb as little water as possible—fish them out, pat them dry, and lay them out in a single layer on a dry towel. (If you're substituting cremini or shitake mushrooms, skip the bowl of water and wipe them clean with a damp paper towel instead. Then cut them into ¼-inch slices.)

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and add the kosher salt. Add the linguine to the boiling water and give it a stir to keep the strands from sticking. Cook until just shy of al dente. (The pasta will finish cooking in a hot pan later on.) Drain the pasta and set aside.

Meanwhile, melt the butter over medium-high heat in a 12-inch pan. When the butter foams, add the morels, taking care not to crowd them in the pan. If your pan is small, you may need to work in two batches. Sauté the morels for six minutes, stirring occasionally. Sprinkle with a pinch or two of sea salt flakes, and cook for another 1 to 2 minutes, until lightly brown, crisp around the edges, but still tender. Transfer them to a bowl and set aside.

Turn the heat down to medium, add the peas to the pan, and cook for 1 to 2 minutes (3 to 4 minutes if your peas are frozen), stirring once or twice. Return the mushrooms to the pan, stir in

the thyme and lemon zest, and cook for 30 to 60 seconds. Add the boiled pasta and mix gently with the morels and peas, scraping up any brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Pour in the heavy cream, swirl it around the pan, and remove the pan from the heat. Add the olive oil, some sea salt flakes and freshly ground black pepper, to taste, and lemon juice, and mix gently. Taste, and add more lemon juice, if necessary. Serve immediately.

Makes enough for 3 to 4.

Chapter 21: Home Is a Verb

Amy's Potato Salad

Until I met Amy, potato salad meant mushy peeled potatoes, maybe some celery and onions, and lots and lots of mayonnaise. Amy took a different approach, mixing skin-on red potatoes with crisp green beans and tossing them with scallions, chopped basil, and a mustardy vinaigrette. Over the years, I've tweaked things here and there: radishes instead of scallions; some combination of parsley, chervil, chives, and tarragon in place of basil. I've added hard-boiled eggs, too, which make me feel entirely justified in helping myself to a big bowl of this potato salad and calling it a meal. I like to eat it for dinner with the potatoes still warm—they're nice against the cold, snappy beans—but it's great from the fridge, too, for picnics and packed lunches.

You can boil your eggs for this recipe however you like to boil your eggs. My method is to put the eggs into a pot large enough so that they lie in a single layer, cover them with cold water by an inch, bring to a boil, then immediately remove the pot from the heat, cover with a tight-fitting lid, and let sit for 9 minutes. When the timer goes off, I fish out the eggs with a slotted spoon and drop them into an ice bath to stop the cooking. I recommend starting with eggs that are a week or two old. They're easier to peel than fresh ones.

For the vinaigrette:

- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ½ a large shallot, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon of chopped fresh herbs, any combination of parsley, chervil, chives, or tarragon

For the salad:

- 2 pounds red waxy potatoes, scrubbed under cold running water and quartered
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Diamond Crystal kosher salt
- 1 pound green beans, washed and trimmed
- 6 radishes, washed, dried, and thinly sliced
- 5 large eggs, hard-boiled and quartered
- Freshly ground black pepper

Combine all the vinaigrette ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid, shake well, and set aside.

Put the quartered potatoes into a large pot and cover with cold water by an inch. Add a few generous pinches of kosher salt, bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are fork tender, about 10 minutes. Drain the potatoes, transfer into a large bowl, and toss immediately with 4 tablespoons of the vinaigrette. Meanwhile, bring a second pot of water to a boil, salt it, and fill a large bowl with water and ice cubes. Blanch the green beans in the salted boiling water for 60 seconds, then transfer them to the ice bath.

Dry the beans and add them together with the sliced radishes and quartered hard-boiled eggs to the potatoes. Add the rest of the vinaigrette and mix gently. Serve right away, or chill it first if you prefer.

Serves 6.

Chapter 22: Doing the Math

Louise's Apple Pie

I like to use two or three different kinds of apples in this pie, some tart and crisp, like Granny Smith, Honeycrisp, or Macoun, and one or two of a juicier, sweeter variety, like McIntosh. That way the filling is pleasingly fluid, without oozing all over your plate. The crackly sugar shell here is adapted from a recipe in Ruth Reichl's *Comfort Me with Apples*.

Now, let's talk piecrust.

It's simple, in theory. Cut butter into flour and add just enough water to form a cohesive dough. That's how I did it for years, making sure to follow the rules: cold butter cut into pea-sized chunks, large enough to visibly marble the dough when flattened beneath a rolling pin. That butter would melt in the oven, leaving air pockets between layers of flour to form a nice, flaky crust. Mindful of gluten development—too much means a tough crust—I'd add as little water as possible and take care not to overwork the dough. It all made sense to me.

But cutting butter into flour is imprecise. Every time you do it, there's variation in how much dry flour, completely loose from butter, remains in the mixture. That means variation, too, in how much water you'll need for the dough to come together. Most piecrust recipes list a range of water amounts because it depends. You learn to adjust the water by a tablespoon here and there, and with a little practice, your piecrusts turn out great.

What if you're new at this, though, and you'd like to get it right on your very first try? For this book, I wanted a recipe with exact measurements that would lead to a perfect flakey, buttery piecrust every time. Even if you've never made a piecrust in your life.

I found exactly that in J. Kenji López-Alt's column "The Food Lab" on the website *Serious Eats*. Kenji's secret lies in a "fat-flour paste," as he calls it, which eliminates variation in the flour-butter mixture. You make the paste by incorporating the butter into just two-thirds of the flour, processing it in a food processor or cutting, rubbing, and squeezing it by hand until the mixture is the consistency of Play-Doh. (You don't have to worry about too much gluten developing from overmixing at this stage. The proteins in flour need water to form gluten, and you haven't yet added any.) This fat-flour paste—essentially flour particles completely coated in fat—functions completely *as* fat. You then add the remaining bit of flour and a set amount of water that no longer varies batch to batch because you know exactly how much flour you're dealing with. It's brilliant and produces the best piecrusts I've ever made.

I always recommend measuring by weight instead of volume when baking. Here especially, since the volume measurements are a little fussy. Note that a scant ½ cup in this case means removing only about a teaspoon or so from the cup.

For the pie dough:

- ¾ cup plus 3 tablespoons (118 grams) + a scant ½ cup (59 grams) all-purpose flour, divided
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 10 tablespoons (142 grams) unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons cold water

For the filling:

- 2½ pounds (5 to 7 medium) apples
- ¼ packed cup (50 grams) dark brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons apple brandy, like Calvados

For the topping:

- ½ cup (1 stick; 113 grams) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- ¾ cup (150 grams) granulated sugar
- ¾ cup (94 grams) all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg

Make the pie dough:

Stir together the ¾ cup plus 3 tablespoons (118 grams) flour, sugar, and salt in a medium-sized bowl. Add the cubed butter to the bowl. Use your hands to rub, squeeze, and squish the butter together with the dry ingredients to form a homogenous, not-at-all-sandy fat-flour paste with the consistency of Play-Doh. It will take a few minutes. Cover with plastic and chill in the freezer for 10 minutes.

Remove the fat-flour paste from the freezer and spread the dough around the bowl with a rubber spatula. Add the scant ½ cup (59 grams) flour and work it in with your hands until it's just incorporated. Sprinkle with the water, then fold and press the dough with the rubber spatula until it comes together into a ball. Form the dough into a 4-inch disk, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

Alternatively, you can make the dough in a food processor. (It's faster, but you end up with more dishes to clean.) Combine the ¾ cup plus 3 tablespoons (118 grams) flour in the bowl of a food processor and pulse twice. Add the cubed butter, and pulse until the flour is fully incorporated and the dough begins to clump around the blades (25 to 30 pulses). Spread the dough around the bowl with a rubber spatula, sprinkle with the scant ½ cup (59 grams) flour, and give it 3 to 5 short pulses. Transfer the dough to a large bowl, sprinkle with the water, and continue with the by-hand directions above.

Prepare the filling:

Rub together the dark brown sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon, and salt in a large bowl. Wash, dry, but do not peel the apples, and cut them into ½-inch slices. Pile the apples into the bowl on top of the sugar mixture, sprinkle with the lemon juice and brandy, and mix gently with your hands.

Assemble the pie:

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Remove the pie dough from the fridge, and let sit until rollable but still cold. Flour your counter, and roll out the dough with a rolling pin into an 11-inch circle. Transfer the dough to a 9-inch pie plate. Crimp or flute the edges, if you'd like. Pile the apple filling into the shell—you'll have a huge heaping mound, but it will shrink down in the oven—and put into the fridge while you make the topping.

Make the topping:

Melt the cut-up stick of unsalted butter in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the sugar and stir well. Turn the heat down to low and add the nutmeg and flour, stirring to form a thick paste. Remove from the heat, grab the filled pie from the fridge and, using a rubber spatula, spread the paste over the apples. You don't want to cover the apples completely; they should peek out here and there. This "venting" keeps the apples from steaming and turning to mush.

Bake at 425 degrees for 15 minutes, then lower the temperature to 350 degrees and bake for another 35 to 40 minutes, until the pie is golden brown on top and bubbling. Let cool to room temperature, or just above, before slicing to give the filling a chance to set up.

Serves 8 or more.

Chapter 23: They Cooked

Sweet Potato Curry Latkes

Sweet potatoes are lower in starch than the “regular” potatoes typically used to make latkes. That means a wetter batter. To get a crisp edge on these, you’ll want to squeeze the excess liquid from the batter as you form the latkes, so that they’re as dry as possible when they hit the hot oil. I get the best results frying latkes in a cast-iron pan, but a stainless steel pan will also do the trick.

For our Chanukah party each year, Eli makes ten times this recipe, and relies on my grandmother Louise’s freezing and reheating technique, which turns latkes into a terrific make-ahead food: Instead of draining the finished latkes on a paper towel immediately after cooking, allow them to cool on a baking sheet lined with foil. Then freeze the latkes in gallon-sized Ziploc bags. They will keep in the freezer for up to one month. When you’re ready to serve the latkes, heat them for 15 minutes in a 400-degree oven. The excess oil will spill out of the latkes onto the pan, and they will reify a little. *Then* you can place them on paper towels to drain any excess oil before serving. Your latkes will be as crisp as they were when they first came out of the pan.

This recipe is adapted from Joan Nathan’s *Jewish Cooking in America*.

- ¼ cup (32 grams) all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup (32 grams) cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 2 teaspoons fine sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 pound sweet potatoes (about 2 potatoes)
- Peanut oil, for frying (canola oil works too; if that’s what you have on hand)
- Sour cream and apple sauce for serving, if you’d like

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, cornstarch, sugars, baking powder, cayenne pepper, curry powder, cumin, salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Add the lightly beaten eggs and stir to form a thick batter.

Fit a food processor with the grating disk. Peel the potatoes, and quarter each one lengthwise. Then cut each quarter in half lengthwise, so that you end up with 8 long, fingerlike pieces. This slender shape will produce the most even shreds. Vertically feed the sweet potato fingers through the grater, and stir the resulting shreds into the batter. If you don’t have a food processor, use a box grater to coarsely grate the potatoes by hand.

Pour a ½-inch layer of peanut oil into a 10- or 12-inch pan—don’t skimp!—and place over medium-high heat for about 3 minutes, until a test fleck of batter sizzles upon contact.

Use your hands to squeeze out the liquid from about ¼ cup of batter, form the batter into a ball, and drop into the hot oil. Repeat, spacing the latkes an inch or so apart. You don’t want to crowd them. Flatten each latke a bit with a spatula, and cook for a couple of minutes on each

side, until crisp and brown. Place the finished latkes on a paper-towel-lined baking sheet to cool and drain. (Unless you're freezing them to eat at a later date. See my note above.)

Taste, and season with additional salt and black pepper if necessary. We serve these with sour cream and homemade cranberry applesauce.

Makes about 15 latkes.

Chapter 24: Food Blog

Buttermilk Biscuits

There's a little place in Boulder, Colorado, called Dot's Diner. I have never been there, but someone named Kimberly McClain once visited, and was so impressed by their buttermilk biscuits that she wrote to *Bon Appetit* magazine to see if their editors could snag the recipe. They did, and published it in the October 2000 issue. I was a junior in college then, and a recipe that required only a bowl, a spoon, and a baking sheet was right up my alley, since that was more or less all the kitchen equipment I owned. I've tried other biscuit recipes over the years, but I always come back to Dot's.

- 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (1½ sticks; 170 grams) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 cup cold buttermilk

Heat the oven to 425 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, whisk together all the dry ingredients (everything but the butter and the buttermilk). Drop the cubes of butter into the bowl and rub them into the flour mixture with your fingertips until the texture resembles a coarse meal.

Make a well in the center of the mixture, and fill it with the buttermilk. Stir just enough to form a wet dough. Don't worry if you end up with a bit of flour at the bottom of the bowl. Better to leave it than to overmix. Drop a packed $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of dough per biscuit onto the prepared baking sheet, leaving a couple of inches between each biscuit. Bake for about 15 minutes, until golden brown on top.

Makes 12 biscuits.

Chapter 25: The All Clear

Julia's Sesame Noodles

I'd never been a fan of sesame noodles until I ate them at my friend Julia's table. The culprit? Peanut butter. It was a starring ingredient in the recipes I'd tried, and the sticky texture wasn't for me. Julia's noodles skip the peanut butter. They're slippery and light, mildly sweet. Her recipe was one of the first that I posted on my blog, and I still make it all the time. You can dress the noodles up, if you'd like, with chopped peanuts, sliced raw cabbage, grilled chicken, or tofu. My friend Stephanie adds julienned red bell peppers and carrots that she has lightly sautéed in sesame oil. The flavors of this dish don't fully come together until the noodles and sauce have cooled to room temperature, so you'll want to plan for that.

- 3 tablespoons sesame seeds
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 6 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 pound dry angel-hair pasta or spaghetti
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal
- Crushed red pepper

Toast the sesame seeds in a dry skillet on the stovetop, stirring frequently, for about 5 minutes, until the seeds are fragrant and take on a bit of color. Set aside.

Place the garlic, rice vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, and sugar into a small saucepan over medium heat and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and set aside.

Fill a large pot with water and bring to a rolling boil. Add the pasta, and cook until al dente. Drain the pasta, transfer to a large bowl, immediately pour in the sauce, and toss. Let the noodles cool to room temperature. Gently mix in the toasted sesame seeds, the scallions, a pinch or two of crushed red pepper, and whatever else you'd like to add just before serving. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Serves 4 to 6.

Chapter 26: More Than Enough

Cleveland Cassata Cake (Strawberry Custard Layer Cake)

When I first started hunting around for a cassata cake recipe, I found one after another that called for ricotta cheese between the cake and strawberry layers. I was baffled. It was custard in the cake that I remembered from my childhood.

With a little more digging, I found that, while most cassata cakes are indeed made with ricotta, Corbo's Bakery in Cleveland has long produced a custard and strawberry cassata cake. Their Sicilian family recipe traces back a hundred years, and no less than chef Mario Batali has called it "the best cassata I have tried in the USA." Other bakeries and supermarkets in the Cleveland area took their cue from Corbo's and made their cassatas with custard, too.

This cake is a bit of a project in that it involves several components and takes some advance planning. To keep things manageable, I usually make the custard and the cake a day in advance and store them in the fridge. (Chilled cake is easier to split into layers, anyway.) I then macerate the berries, whip the cream, slice the cake into layers, and assemble the next morning.

Keep in mind before you begin that you'll want to chill the assembled cake for 8 hours before serving.

I used to make this recipe as a four-layer cake, but frankly it was all too much. It was hard to slice without making a mess, and the servings were impossibly large. I now assemble it as a three-layer cake and save the leftover layer in the fridge or freezer. It's nice to have around for a last-minute dessert of strawberry shortcake. Just whip some cream, slice some berries, and cut the cake into rounds with a biscuit cutter. It's great in an impromptu trifle, too. You will also end up with a little extra custard, but I assume you have a spoon and will know just what to do.

For the custard:

- 6 large egg yolks
- ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 cups half-and-half
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

For the cake layers:

- 8 large egg whites at room temperature
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¼ cup (50 grams) plus 1¼ cups (250 grams) granulated sugar, divided
- 2¼ cups (271 grams) cake flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 5 large egg yolks at room temperature
- ½ cup cold water
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ¼ cup lemon juice

- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

For the strawberries:

- 2 pounds strawberries, divided
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar

For the whipped cream:

- 2 cups chilled heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar

Make the custard:

Whisk together all the custard ingredients in a saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-low heat, whisking constantly. Turn down the heat so that the mixture just simmers, and whisk until thick, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer the custard to a bowl, cover with plastic, and chill for at least 3 hours, or overnight.

Bake the cakes:

Heat the oven to 325 degrees. Spray the bottoms (not the sides) of two 9-inch round cake pans with cooking spray, line the bottoms with cut-out circles of parchment, and spray the paper.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Add the $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, and beat on high until the peaks are stiff but not dry. Set aside.

Sift the flour, the remaining $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar, the baking powder, and the salt into a medium bowl.

In a separate large bowl, use an electric hand mixer on high speed to beat together the yolks, lemon juice, water, oil, zest, and vanilla until smooth. Fold in the flour mixture with a rubber spatula until just combined.

Using a rubber spatula and a very light touch, fold about a quarter of the fluffy egg whites into the egg yolk mixture. Then fold in the remaining whites. The goal here is to incorporate the egg whites without significantly deflating them. As soon as the egg whites are no longer visible, stop folding. (A streak or two of egg white is preferable to overmixing.)

Scrape the batter into the two prepared pans and spread evenly. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the tops spring back when lightly pressed and a toothpick inserted into the centers comes out clean.

Leave the cakes to cool in their pans on a rack for at least an hour. When completely cool, run a knife around the sides to release the cakes, cover each pan with a wax-paper-lined plate, and flip. Lift the pans off of the cakes, and carefully peel back the pieces of parchment. Wrap the two cakes in plastic, and refrigerate at least 3 hours, or overnight.

Prepare the strawberries:

Thinly slice 1 pound of the strawberries lengthwise, 1/8-inch thick, and place in a medium-sized bowl. Sprinkle with the 2 tablespoons sugar, and stir. Leave the strawberries to macerate for at least 1 hour. Give them a stir once in a while. They will release their juices. Strain the berries, reserving the syrup. (Don't worry if you don't end up with much syrup. Some strawberries are juicier than others.) Meanwhile, slice the remaining 1 pound of strawberries lengthwise, 1/4-inch thick, and set aside. These unmacerated berries are for the top of the cake.

Split the cakes, whip the cream, and assemble:

Remove the custard and cakes from the fridge. Using a long, serrated bread knife, carefully saw each cake into two equal layers. You'll only need three layers for this cake. Store the fourth, well wrapped, in the freezer for another day. Place each of the three remaining layers on a wax-paper-lined baking sheet or plate.

Whip the cream and sugar together until stiff.

Tear four 2- to 3-inch strips of wax paper and arrange them in a square on your cake stand or serving plate. Place one cake layer in the center of the square, with the four strips of wax paper partially sticking out on all sides. (The strips are to keep the plate clean from frosting. You'll remove them before serving, taking any smears with you.) Brush the top of the cake with half of the reserved strawberry syrup. Cover with 1 cup of the custard, then half of the sliced macerated strawberries. Top with the next layer of cake, and repeat: syrup, 1 cup of the custard, strawberries, cake.

Using an offset spatula, cover the entire cake with whipped cream. Arrange the sliced unmacerated berries in concentric circles on the top of the cake, and press them into the sides of the cake around the bottom.

Chill the cake for at least 8 hours, then bring to cool room temperature before serving.

Serves 12.

Chapter 27: Time-In

Cherry Clafoutis

The base for clafoutis typically involves only flour, milk, and eggs, but getting it just right can be tricky. You need enough eggs for the custard to set up, but use too many and the flavor is overly eggy and the texture turns gummy as it cools. To solve this problem, I've cut back on the eggs and added baking powder for a bit of lift. The custard comes together best in a blender, but if all you've got is a bowl and a whisk, use them, and get it as smooth as you can.

For the kirsch in this recipe, I like Trimbach. It's pricey, but since I only ever use a teaspoon or so at a time, a single bottle lasts a while. Kirsch works its magic on all manner of stone fruits and berries, by the way. Toss it with peaches before baking them into a pie or with plums destined for crumble to enhance the fruits' flavor. If you prefer, you can swap in amaretto or ½ teaspoon almond extract for the kirsch in this recipe. Clafoutis traditionalists get their hint of almond flavor by leaving the cherries unpitted. I tried that once, but worried so much about my guests' teeth that I've been pitting my cherries ever since.

- 1 tablespoon softened unsalted butter for greasing the pan
- Granulated sugar for dusting the pan
- 2 cups (400 grams) fresh cherries, pitted
- 1 cup whole milk
- 3 tablespoons (38 grams) brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon kirsch
- ¼ teaspoon fine sea salt
- ⅓ cup (42 grams) all-purpose flour
- Confectioners' sugar, for finishing

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Grease a 9-inch baking dish, cake pan, or pie plate with the 1 tablespoon butter. (Use the entire tablespoon so that the coating is thick.) Dust the sides and bottom of the dish with granulated sugar and shake out any excess.

Put the cherries into the baking dish and shake into a single layer. Combine the milk, brown sugar, baking powder, eggs, vanilla extract, kirsch, salt, and flour in the jar of a blender, and blend on high speed for 1 minute. Pour the batter over the cherries, and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the clafoutis puffs up and turns golden brown, and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean.

Serve at room temperature or chilled, dusted with confectioners' sugar.

Serves 6.

Chapter 28: Humpty Dumpty Day

Whole Wheat Banana Bread

I adapted this banana bread from the Classic Banana Bundt Cake that appears in Dorie Greenspan's book *Baking: From My Home to Yours*. I halved the recipe to make just enough batter to fit a loaf pan, and swapped in some whole wheat flour to deepen the flavor. Instead of creaming the butter with an electric mixer, I melt it and fold everything together by hand for an especially tender, muffinlike crumb.

Ideally, the bananas for this recipe should be ripe past the point where you'd want to eat them straight from the peel. You're looking for plenty of dark brown spots—if your bananas are almost entirely black, even better—and some squishiness when you hold them in your hand.

Store the bread at room temperature, covered tightly with plastic. It will keep for a few days this way, and only improves with time.

Dry ingredients:

- 1 cup (125 grams) all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (57 grams) whole wheat flour
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon granulated salt
- 3 ounces (85 grams) semisweet chocolate, chopped into small, irregular pieces (The largest chunks should be about ¼ inch.)

Wet ingredients:

- 1 large egg
- 1 stick (113 grams) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup (235 grams) mashed overripe bananas (You'll need 2–3 medium bananas.)
- ½ cup (123 grams) plain, whole-milk yogurt

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and butter and flour an 8½-by-4½-inch (6-cup) loaf pan.

Whisk together the dry ingredients in a medium-sized bowl. In a large bowl, lightly beat the egg, then add the rest of the wet ingredients and stir well. Dump the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients, and gently fold with a rubber spatula until the flour mixture is just incorporated. Do not overmix.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan, and bake for 50 to 60 minutes, until a tester inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean. Cool in the pan for 10 to 15 minutes, then carefully turn out the bread onto a rack. Cool completely before slicing.

Chapter 29: Luxury Head

Five-Fold Challah

For years, the challah I baked was fine. Not great, though I was convinced it was. That's because we always ate it super fresh, still warm from the oven, when all breads, even so-so ones, taste like something special. Once cooled, and certainly by the next day, the bread would be just okay. Its flavor would flatten out and the texture would go a bit crumbly and stiff.

This challah is different, thanks to a tip from my friend Andrew Janjigian, a baker and editor at *Cook's Illustrated* magazine. Instead of kneading the dough, he said, try folding it. Then stash it in the fridge for a long, slow rise. With this technique, the gluten develops beautifully. The crumb is elastic and light, and the loaf pulls apart in fluffy wisps like cotton candy. The flavor is deep, almost buttery, though it's made with olive oil. And it's just as good on day two.

While this recipe takes a day or so from start to finish, it needs your attention for only a minute here and there over the first couple of hours. Then you leave the dough alone until you're ready to shape and bake it. I start the dough before dinner a night in advance, then go about my business at home, popping into the kitchen whenever it's time to fold.

I've included weight measures for the liquid ingredients here, because I've found it to be the simplest way to measure them for this particular recipe. With sticky, clingy things like honey and oil, it's fastest when you can measure directly into the bowl.

Please note that this recipe calls for instant dry yeast, not active dry yeast. Andrew explained to me the difference: Active dry yeast is coated with a layer of dead yeast that must be dissolved in order for the yeast to activate. That's why you have to proof it. Instant dry yeast, on the other hand, is all viable yeast. It's easier to use because there's no need to dissolve it in liquid. You just add it to your dry ingredients, and you're off. It's all I ever keep around. I buy the big red, white, and blue sacks of SAF-Instant yeast, which you can find online and in some grocery stores. Fleischmann's makes two instant yeasts, BreadMachine Yeast and Rapid-Rise Yeast, that are widely available in stores.

Dry ingredients:

- 4 cups (500 grams) bread flour
- 1½ teaspoons instant dry yeast
- 2 teaspoons fine sea salt

Wet ingredients:

- 2 large eggs plus 1 large egg yolk (save the extra white in a covered glass in the fridge for glazing later on)
- ¾ cup (190 grams) water
- ⅓ cup (75 grams) olive oil
- ¼ cup (85 grams) honey

For sprinkling, before baking (optional):

- Flaxseeds
- Rolled oats
- Sunflower seeds
- Pumpkin seeds

Whisk together the dry ingredients in a large bowl, and the wet ingredients in a smaller bowl. Dump the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until a wet, sticky dough forms. Cover the bowl with plastic and let sit for 10 minutes.

Peel back the plastic. Grab an edge of the dough, lift it up, and fold it over itself to the center. Turn the bowl a bit and repeat around the entire lump of dough, grabbing an edge and folding it into the center, eight turns, grabs, and folds in all. Then flip the dough so that the folds and seams are on the bottom. Cover tightly again with the plastic, and let sit for 30 minutes.

Repeat the all-around folding, flipping, covering, and resting for 30 minutes four more times. (I keep track by drawing hash marks in permanent marker right on the plastic.) The dough flops more than it folds in the first round or two. Then, as the gluten develops, you'll get proper folds. By the final fold, the dough will be wonderfully elastic, and you'll be able to see and feel the small pockets of air within. Pull the plastic tight again over the bowl and refrigerate for 16 to 24 hours.

Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface and divide into six equal pieces. Roll into six strands, about a foot long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter, dusting sparingly with flour when necessary to prevent sticking. (You'll want to add as little extra flour as possible.) Form two three-strand braids, and transfer the loaves to the prepared pan. Cover with plastic and let proof at room temperature for 2 to 3 hours, until the dough is noticeably swollen and puffed and bounces back very slowly, if at all, when you poke it lightly with your finger.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Remove the plastic from the loaves and brush with the reserved egg white. If you'd like, sprinkle with seeds. Poppy and sesame seeds are traditional challah toppings. I typically cover one with a combination of flaxseeds and rolled oats, and the other with sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds, though lately I've been opting for no seeds at all.

Bake for about 20 to 25 minutes, until the bread is golden and gorgeous and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean. You can also check for doneness with a thermometer. The internal temperature of the loaves will be 190 degrees when fully baked.

Transfer to racks and let cool.

Makes 2 loaves.

Chapter 30: Don't Look

Simplest Tomato Soup

I go through phases with recipes, making the same granola, for example, week after week, eating it daily. Then one morning, for no good reason, I stop. I eat eggs for breakfast, or Grape-Nuts, or toast. I develop some kind of amnesia that keeps me from knowing that granola ever existed. Until, months later, when I remember that it does, and off I go again on a mad granola streak, wondering how I ever got along without it.

This kind of ebb and flow in the kitchen creates a sense of seasonality beyond peaches in the summertime and apples in the fall. I remember who I was the last time granola came around, what I was doing, the book I was reading, the friend who came to town. And vice versa: When I think of that book or that friend, granola springs to mind.

When I was newly patched up but feeling broken still that fall, I made a lot of soup. One big batch on the weekends to stretch for as many lunches and dinners as I could manage. This simple tomato soup figured heavily in the rotation then. It's smooth, bold, and improves with age. I ate it all the time, after long hours in the library and runs along the river. I was also into a certain soda bread, a squat little loaf with a craggy crust; a nutty, faintly sweet flavor; and a compact crumb that slices well. It makes terrific toast.

- 1 large yellow onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar, divided
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 28-ounce cans whole tomatoes, preferably Muir Glen
- Pinch of baking soda
- 1 cup water
- Diamond crystal kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup whole milk, warmed (but not boiled)
- Good-tasting olive oil, to serve (optional)

In a large heavy pot, melt the butter over medium heat. When it foams, add the onion, and sauté until it softens, goes translucent, and browns a little around the edges. Add 1 tablespoon of the vinegar to deglaze the pot, scrape up the brown bits with a wooden spoon or spatula, and turn down the heat to medium-low.

Add the flour and the tomato paste, and stir to incorporate. Add the remaining tablespoon of vinegar to deglaze once again, and scrape up any flour or tomato paste that may be sticking to the pot.

Dump in the 2 cans of tomatoes and their juices and break them up a bit with a wooden spoon. (Watch out, they squirt.) Stir in the baking soda and water, season lightly with salt and pepper, add the bay leaf, partially cover, and simmer gently for about 30 minutes. Turn off the heat, remove the bay leaf, and use an immersion blender to purée the soup. (You can also carefully purée it in batches in a stand blender. As with the cream of asparagus soup on page 12,

fill the blender only one-half to three-quarters of the way full with each batch. Return the puréed soup to the pot.)

Add the warmed milk very slowly, stirring constantly, just before serving. Top each bowl with a drizzle of olive oil, if you'd like, and a grind or two of black pepper.

Serves 8.

Brown Soda Bread

- 1¾ cups (219 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1¾ cups (198 grams) whole wheat flour
- 3 tablespoons instant oats (rolled oats chopped coarsely with a knife will also work)
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseeds
- 2 packed tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 tablespoons (28 grams) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes, plus more for greasing the pan
- 2 cups buttermilk

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees and butter a 9-by-5-by-3-inch loaf pan. Combine the first seven ingredients (everything but the butter and the buttermilk) in a large bowl and blend well with a fork. Add the butter, and rub it in with your fingertips until the mixture resembles a coarse meal. Dig a well in the center of the dry ingredients, fill with the buttermilk, and stir until the liquid is just incorporated. (Better for a bit of dry flour to remain than to overmix the dough.)

Scrape the dough into the buttered loaf pan and bake for about 35 minutes, until the crust is brown and a tester inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean. Turn the loaf out onto a rack and cool for at least twenty minutes before slicing.

Chapter 31: A Funny Definition

Janet's Coconut Cake

The cake that I know as Janet's is actually an Ina Garten recipe to which Janet made one small, brilliant change. Instead of whole milk, Janet uses coconut milk in the batter. Thanks to the added fat, you end up with an especially rich and tender crumb. Be careful at the store not to pick up "coconut milk beverage" or "coconut milk drink," which are thin and watery. You're looking for pure coconut milk in a can. You don't have to be a die-hard coconut lover to enjoy this cake, by the way. The coconut flavor is nice and gentle.

Janet adapted this recipe from Ina Garten's *Barefoot Contessa at Home*.

For the cake:

- 1½ cups (3 sticks; 340 grams) unsalted butter, at cool room temperature, plus more for greasing the pans
- 2 cups (400 grams) granulated sugar
- 6 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1½ teaspoons pure almond extract
- 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting the pans
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 cup well-shaken coconut milk
- 1¼ cup (113 grams) shredded unsweetened coconut

For the frosting:

- 1 pound (454 grams) cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 cup (2 sticks; 226 grams) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon pure almond extract
- 3½ cups (454 grams) confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1¾ cup (165 grams) shredded unsweetened coconut, for finishing

Bake the cakes:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter two round 9-inch cake pans, then line the bottoms with cut-out circles of parchment paper. Butter the paper, and lightly dust with flour.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the 1½ cups butter and the granulated sugar on medium speed for 3 to 5 minutes, until fluffy. Crack the eggs into a glass. With the mixer on medium speed, add the eggs one at a time, waiting for each egg to be fully incorporated before slipping the next one in. Pause to scrape down the bowl after mixing in

the third egg, then again once all of the eggs have been incorporated. Add the 1½ teaspoons each of vanilla and almond extract, and mix well. It's okay if the mixture looks curdled.

In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. With the mixer on low speed, add half of the dry ingredients, then all of the coconut milk, then the rest of the dry ingredients. Mix until just combined. Fold in the 4 ounces coconut with a rubber spatula.

Pour the batter into the prepared pans and spread evenly. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes, until the tops are brown and a toothpick inserted into the centers comes out clean. Cool in their pans on a rack for 30 minutes, then turn the cakes out onto the rack and cool completely.

Make the frosting:

Put the cream cheese, the 1 cup butter, the 1 teaspoon vanilla, and the ¼ teaspoon almond extract in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Add the confectioners' sugar and continue mixing on low speed, just until smooth. Do not whip.

Assemble the cake:

Tear four 2- to 3-inch strips of wax paper and arrange them in a square on your cake stand or serving plate. Place one cake layer, top side down, in the center of the square, with the four strips of wax paper partially sticking out on all sides. (The strips are to keep the plate clean from frosting. You'll remove them before serving, taking any smears with you.)

Spread the top of the cake layer with frosting. Place the second layer on top, top side up, and frost the entire cake. Sprinkle with coconut and lightly press some onto the sides, then remove the wax paper. Serve at room temperature.

Serves 12.

Chapter 32: Move Along Now

Baked Apricots with Cardamom Pistachios

You'll end up with more vanilla sugar than you need for this recipe. Save what's left in a lidded jar for sprinkling on cinnamon toast, whipping into cream, or stirring into anything that might benefit from a hint of vanilla flavor. If you'd rather not splurge on the vanilla bean, ½ teaspoon of vanilla extract will do. As for the white wine, use whatever you have on hand. I've tried everything from Moscato d'Asti to sauvignon blanc with splendid results. I don't think you can go wrong.

Serve these warm, with a pour of cold sweet cream or a scoop of vanilla ice cream if you'd like, though they don't need it. I store the leftovers in a jar in the fridge and eat them chilled over yogurt or oatmeal. My friend Carrie puts them on a sandwich with melted cheese. That sounds like a plan to me.

- ½ cup white wine
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 vanilla bean
- 8 apricots, halved and pitted
- ⅓ cup (45 grams) shelled, roasted, and salted pistachios
- 1–2 pinches ground cardamom

Heat the oven to 425 degrees.

Pour the wine into a 2½-quart baking dish. (Swirl in the vanilla extract, if using.) Put the sugar into a bowl, split the vanilla bean with a sharp knife, scrape out the seeds, and rub them into the sugar with your fingertips. Measure 3 to 4 tablespoons of the sugar into a shallow bowl or pie plate. Transfer the remaining sugar to an airtight jar, bury the scraped-out vanilla pod inside, and reserve for another time.

Press the apricot halves into the sugar to coat them on both sides, then place them, skin side down, in the wine bath. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until the apricots have deepened in color, puckered around the edges, and barely resist when you poke them with a fork. Meanwhile, coarsely chop the pistachios and toss them with the cardamom.

To serve, spoon a few warm apricots and a bit of the winey syrup into each bowl, and scatter with a spoonful of nuts.

Serves 4.

Chapter 33: Any Day

Italian Prune Plum Tart

Italian prune plums arrive in the final weeks of summer and don't stick around for long, so when you see them, grab them and make this tart. The press-in crust keeps things simple and bakes up beautifully into a sweet and salty shortbread-like shell. Then all that's left to do is fill it with fruit, whisk together a custard, pour it over top, and bake. While I'm waiting for prune plums to come around, I make this with apricots, instead. Delicious.

For the pastry:

- 1¼ cups plus 1 tablespoon (180 grams) all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon sea salt flakes, like Maldon
- ½ cup (1 stick; 113 grams) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon pure almond extract
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

For the filling:

- ½ cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 10–13 Italian prune plums, pitted and halved

Heat the oven to 350 degrees and generously butter the bottom and sides of a 9-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom.

Make the pastry:

Whisk together the flour and salt in a medium bowl, and set aside. Put the sugar and melted butter into a large bowl and mix well with a spoon. Add the extracts, flour, and salt to the sugar and butter mixture, and stir to form a soft dough. Transfer the dough to the center of the buttered pan and press it evenly into the bottom and sides of the pan. Bake for 13 to 15 minutes, until the dough puffs slightly and takes on a bit of color. Set aside to cool. (It doesn't need to cool all the way to room temperature, just enough so that you won't cook the egg in the custard on contact.)

While the pastry is baking, make the custard:

Whisk together the flour and sugar in a small bowl. Combine the heavy cream, egg, and vanilla in a medium bowl, and whisk well. Add the flour and sugar, and whisk again until smooth.

Place the prune plums cut-side down into the cooled pastry in two concentric circles, with one in the center. Pour the custard into the tart around the fruit. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, until the custard is just set and the top blushes with spots of golden brown. Cool before serving.

Serves 8 to 10.

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