A wood-fired oven with a pizza being cooked inside. The oven is made of brick and has a large opening on the left side. The pizza is on a metal peel and is being cooked over a fire. The fire is bright orange and yellow, and the pizza is golden brown with some charred spots on the crust. The background is a brick wall.

“Tassinello’s love for cooking
with fire is contagious.”

— ALICE WATERS
author of *The Art of Simple Food*

THE ESSENTIAL **WOOD-FIRED**
PIZZA
COOKBOOK

Recipes and Techniques
from My Wood-Fired Oven



ANTHONY TASSINELLO



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ANTHONY TASSINELLO

Photography by Kelly Ishikawa

Styling by Rod Hipkind

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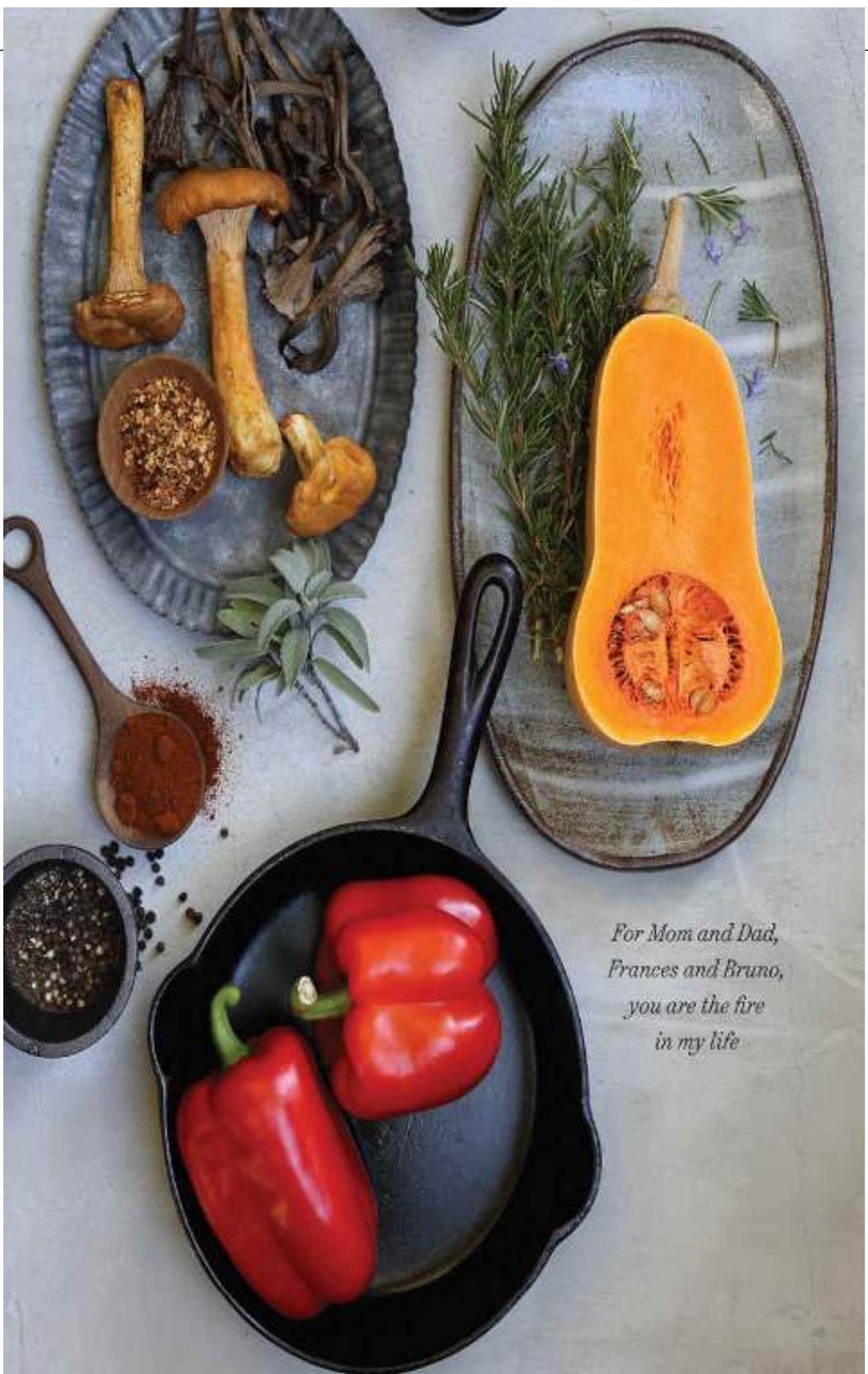
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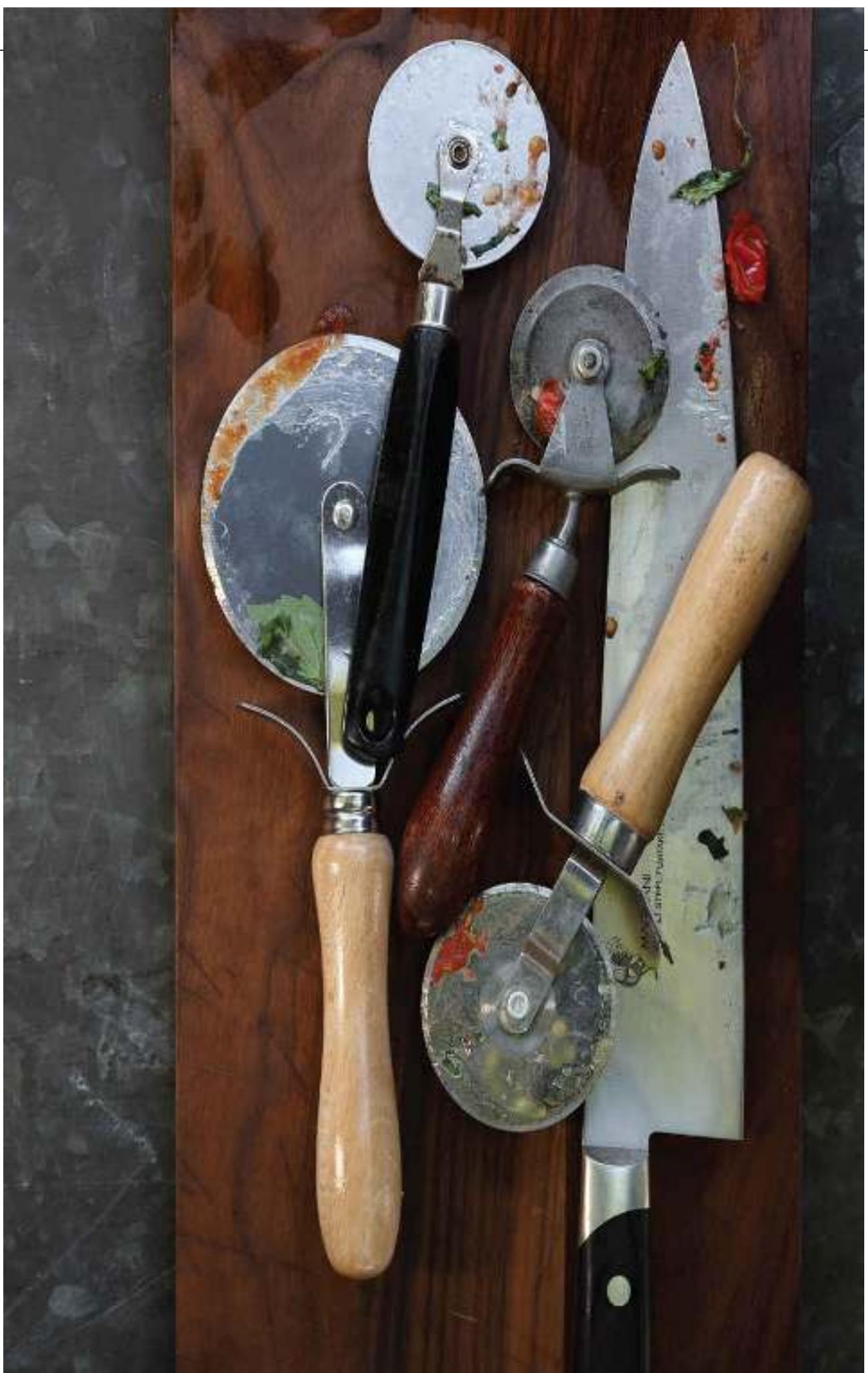
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ISBN: Print 978-1-62315-724-1
eBook 978-1-62315-725-8



*For Mom and Dad,
Frances and Bruno,
you are the fire
in my life*



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INTRODUCTION

VOLUMES HAVE BEEN WRITTEN about the pleasures of the table and the meaning of cuisine in our lives. As we pause and consider food as a medium, it has for centuries defined our celebrations and lamentations, but the days between the festivals and holidays also carry weight. These small moments, too, can have deep meaning and bring us sustenance.

The rise of the kitchen as a hub for family activity has not gone unnoticed by modern social scientists. As smart home technology has blossomed, the kitchen has been elevated as well. Rain-filled, rusty grills are giving way to showpieces for culinary adventure. Consequently, we begin to see former luxury items, such as outdoor kitchens and wood-burning pizza ovens, included in many new construction projects and remodels.

For the established homeowner with culinary ambition, the addition of a wood-fired pizza oven can unlock an atlas of edible adventures. To put it simply, people are revisiting the joys of gathering friends and family to reconnect, meaningfully, over a delicious home-cooked meal. What was once looked upon as a burden—shopping, cooking, and serving—has more recently become a gift of gratitude. The idea of creating edible memories is leaving an indelible mark on our collective consciousness and our palates alike.

Over the past decade, a wave of enthusiasm about ingredients and their pedigree has seen “family meal night” expand exponentially. A new breed of do-it-yourself, home-based, artisanal foodies has drawn the awareness of what we eat and how we eat it out of restaurant kitchens and placed it squarely in the capable hands of 21st-century home cooks. It’s no surprise, then, that high-tech cooking gadgets now dominate the retail landscape; novice chefs are encouraged to create signature dishes using odd techniques that achieve scientific results.

Have we lost our way? This story of cooking comes not only from the nourishment we gain, but also from the pleasure derived from the sights, sounds, and smells of those pedigreed ingredients being transformed. Gone are the heady aromas: hijacked, vacuum-packed, and plunged underwater. Certainly, there will always be room for experimentation and culinary invention, but leave that to the chefs in lab coats. This is an exploration of a more primitive method of cooking.

Fear not—we won’t entirely abandon the modern ethos of food preparation. Instead, we will explore an area of our gastronomic past that is experiencing a bit of a renaissance. The bonus is that this way of cooking does not inhibit our culinary senses, but emboldens them. Let me (re)introduce you to a celebration of fiery wood-oven cookery.

If I had to choose one method of cooking, nothing seems to quite capture my attention more than live fire. Maybe it’s a primal instinct, innate and hardwired in all of us, that dates to when our ancestors first “tamed” the flame. Fire is wildly alluring, with its dancing, unpredictable patterns, smells and crackles, sparks and smoke, glowing coal beds and radiant heat. Honestly, it’s slightly intimidating, too. Tending a fire can take focus, but when done with confidence and poise, it’s a not-so-gentle

reminder of humanity's greatest triumph over nature.

Beginning with the basics, we'll explore the different types of ovens, fire-building practices, and suggestions for how to alter your oven performance, as well as a variety of cooking techniques. We'll look at the when and the where of preparing recipes based on your choice of fire styles. We will also explore an array of cookware, fuel types, and necessary equipment to help streamline your cooking experience for delicious success.

More than 85 recipes will tempt you to explore the full range of capabilities that your wood-burning pizza oven can handle. In-depth reviews of ingredients are coupled with tips on how to make a perfect pizza for anything from a casual midweek supper to a full-blown wood oven celebration.



From the classically simple, perfect Margherita pizza and everybody's favorite pepperoni pie, we will gradually progress to more exciting and challenging recipes that showcase different uses for your oven. Included are recipes for every night of the week, as well as special occasions. Together we will transform and elevate humble ingredients in all manner of savory dishes, from appetizers and entrées to sides, and even a few sweet offerings. You will also find additional tips and insights that will have you turning again and again to your hearth. Let's get started!



PART ONE
**A WOOD-FIRED
OVEN ROMANCE**



The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every receipt and invoice should be properly filed and indexed for easy retrieval. This is particularly crucial for businesses that deal with a large volume of transactions, as it helps in identifying discrepancies and ensuring compliance with tax regulations.

In addition, the document highlights the need for regular audits. By conducting periodic reviews of financial records, businesses can detect errors or fraud early on, preventing potential losses. It also suggests implementing internal controls to minimize the risk of mismanagement and ensure the integrity of the accounting system.

Furthermore, the document touches upon the importance of staying updated with the latest accounting standards and regulations. As the business environment evolves, new rules and practices emerge, and it is essential for accountants to adapt accordingly to maintain accuracy and transparency in their reporting.

Finally, the document concludes by stressing the value of clear communication between all stakeholders involved in the accounting process. Regular meetings and reports can help in providing a comprehensive overview of the company's financial health and ensuring that everyone is on the same page regarding financial goals and strategies.

1 FIRE UP THE OVEN

IF YOU HAVE MADE the exciting decision to embark on the culinary journey that is wood-fired oven cookery, congratulations! You are in for an enlightening and delicious experience, a bit of hard work, and, ultimately, an increased acumen when working with live fire. If you are considering adding a wood-burning oven to your property, I hope the knowledge contained in this book will convince you to go ahead and do it.

For the current oven owner, I've got good news and better news. The good news is there are no shortcuts when learning the nuances of your particular oven. This is a craft that you will grow into, one with no particular timetable. Why is this good news? Because you can expect fine results, and an abundance of entertainment, even during your earliest attempts at cooking with fire. And the better news is that whether you choose to fire your oven several times a year or several times a month, you will constantly be building on the knowledge you gained from the previous session.

A TIME-TESTED TRADITION

Perhaps the reason we refer to the Old World as “old” has to do with the cooking methods that have filtered through to modern times. We can only speculate, of course, but imagine the first few savory morsels that were exposed to live fire and how our ancestors came to prefer them. Maybe it was accidental—an overlooked scrap of meat dropped near the hearth and seared on a hot rock. From that moment on, our path was altered. Nothing is older than cooking with fire, and using ovens to prolong the energy in our fuel was a logical progression on the learning curve. The less time spent gathering firewood and burning through precious calories, the greater your chances of surviving another day.

Pottery shards discovered in southeast China dating back nearly 20,000 years contain remnants of soot, presumably from cooking fires. Farming and agriculture took root several millennia later, implying that these were people on the move, carrying their cooking vessels as they followed food sources.

As civilization progressed and cultures evolved, it became evident that oven cookery was cross-cultural. Examples exist of ancient Egyptians using clay pots, a possible predecessor to the Indian tandoor oven. Simple by nature, a fire is built in the base of an open-topped vessel and the interior walls are used as the cooking medium, capturing heat while smoke escapes. This kind of oven was effective and easy to construct, but rather inefficient in how much heat it retained.

The Roman Empire took oven technology several steps further. In fact, most commercially available wood-fired ovens on the market today operate using some or all of the techniques used by those ancient Roman bakers. They use three main scientific principles of cooking with fire: refractory heat from the oven floor, radiant heat from the fire source, and convection heat created by the curve of the interior dome.

TYPES OF WOOD-FIRED OVENS

A dazzling array of ovens exists, constructed from a host of natural and manmade materials or a hybrid of both. I've seen ovens that ingeniously repurpose urban waste (car tires, old washing machines, even dryer lint) and integrate those materials in very resourceful ways. If budget is an issue, these are ways to trim the fat on your oven construction project.

We'll take a look at some of the more popular types of wood-fired ovens on the market and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. Some ancient oven designs still have 21st-century applications, like the durable cob oven. If you prefer a more finished, stand-alone structure, maybe a kit or a brick oven is the ultimate option. In the end, though, it's about deciding what is best for you and your budget, and how the project fits your construction footprint and the workload you are willing to shoulder. Whichever you choose, this book will help you cook delicious meals for the life of your new oven.

Clay/Cob Ovens

A brilliant example of an ancient building design that still has modern applications is the cob oven. The term "cob" has English origins and refers to a sustainable building material that is an amalgam of clay, sand, water, and a fibrous tensile material, usually straw. Cob, also known as adobe, has been in continuous use for centuries as a structural building material, and in fact has changed very little, other than in its aesthetics and preservation techniques.

Some of the qualities of cob as a construction material are its fire resistance, malleability, and long-term stability. Organic by nature, it readily holds heat, can be fabricated by hand, and is economical to produce.

Cob or earth ovens are also known as Roman-style ovens. They consist of a single domed chamber with an opening in front and a direct heat source (in this case, fire) within. A chimney may or may not be part of this type of oven. Cob ovens rely on the method of cooking that is generally described throughout this book: proximity to an intense heat source and reliance on convection, reflection, and refraction to get the job done.

Personally, I prefer this oven-building technique, and many do-it-yourselfers agree with me. While it lacks the professional finished look of some of the pricier imported kit ovens, it nearly matches them in the cooking department. Plus, it is a project that can be done manually—and that has intrinsic value to me, especially in an increasingly prepackaged society.

In cooking terms, "convection" means the transfer of thermal heat away from the combustion source, either through gravity or, in this case, air currents caused by the oven's draft.

"Reflection" means the heat produced by the combustion of fire that is reflected off the inner surfaces of the oven, then reflected onto the food cooking in the oven. "Refraction" means the

energy that is produced by the combustion of the fire that is transferred to the insulative layers of the oven. The stored energy is ultimately diffused, but during the process is refracted onto the contents of the oven.

Brick Ovens

Growing up in New Jersey as I did, we would often go out for pizza rather than have it delivered. Locally, it seemed that every tavern or Italian restaurant advertised authentic brick-oven baked pies. At the time, I assumed that was how all pizza was made: well done, long-cooked, crisp and doughy all at once. It would come to the table presliced in massive wedges, the whole round measuring almost two feet across. You chose a piece, slid it off the pan, and a web of mozzarella stretching all the way to your plate followed; a folded, heavy slice, pooled with oily, cheesy goodness in one hand, and a fistful of napkins in the other.

Brick ovens are an ideal way to cook pizza, and not just the classic Neapolitan style. A deep cooking chamber lined with masonry brick and heated either indirectly (a firebox) or directly (gas or electricity) acts like the dome structure of a classic cob oven. The masonry can be a variety of materials, including firebrick, concrete, or stone.

Traditional coal-fired ovens fall into the brick oven or masonry category as well, and were also lauded as an ideal way to cook pizzas in the Northeast and, later, nationwide. Popular from the 19th century on, a two-chamber system was used. The first, the firebox, was filled with burning coal and generated heat that flowed through a flue and filled a secondary baking chamber. Anthracite coal was plentiful and cheap, and still is. It also burns very hot, making it a top choice for fueling pizza and bread ovens.

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