



The Little Paris Kitchen

120 Simple but Classic French Recipes



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and illustrations by Rachel Khoo



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Acknowledgments

Introduction

Five years ago, I made the decision to pursue my sweet dream of studying pâtisserie at Le Cordon Bleu. So I packed my belongings and waved goodbye to London. A short train journey across the Channel and it was “*Bonjour, Paris.*”

And so my edible Parisian adventure began. The bakeries would entice me with their perfume of freshly baked baguettes and croissants. The cheesemonger would lure me with his perfectly ripe, oozing Brie displayed in the window, conveniently located next to a little wine shop. Its owner, who I nicknamed “the wine fascist,” would interrogate me with a thousand questions in order to find the perfect wine match for my dinners.

The outdoor produce markets overflowed with the season’s bounty, brightly colored fruits and vegetables, and the market traders would shout “*Mademoiselle, goûtez le melon C'est délicieux!*” (“Miss, taste the melon. It’s delicious!”) It was a world away from the markets in London and the traders’ cockney cries of “Pound of bananas, a pound!” I soaked up the French ambience in the little cafés and bistros, with the locals sipping their glasses of wine, and watched the world go by.

But discovering *la vie parisienne* wasn’t just about eating it up. I had some hard work to do. During my first summer in Paris, I donned my chef’s whites and enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu, the famous cookery school, for a pâtisserie course. I said goodbye to my style for the summer, chef’s whites not being the most flattering of women’s attire. No even Kate Moss could make them look good! It was “*Oui, chef,*” for the next three months, while I learned how to make French classics like croissants and crème brûlée. Two hundred eggs and 40 pounds of butter, sugar, and flour later, I graduated from Le Cordon Bleu. Not quite ready to give up my sweet dream of living in Paris, I started to work at a small culinary bookstore, La Cocotte, where I baked delicious delicacies for the *salon du thé* and catered for their book launches. My little baking job led me to my current vocation as a food creative, where I develop culinary ideas for events, cookbooks, workshops, and anything else food-related. All the testing is done from the tiny little kitchen in my apartment with just a mini oven and two gas rings.





Somehow the rest of the world has forgotten how délicieux French food can be. The food headlines have been dominated by the molecular movement in Spain, Heston Blumenthal's edible English eccentricities, or, more recently, Scandinavia's flourishing foraging scene showcased at Noma. French cuisine has been forgone, stereotyped with the stuffy image of an old-fashioned chef laboring over a terribly complicated dish, finished with a ton of butter.

“*Mais non!*” I say. French flavors and techniques needn’t be out of reach of the everyday home cook. Living in Paris, I eat and cook everything from simple weekday suppers to big gourmet dinners. And just because they use fancy words like *jus* or *blanchir* doesn’t mean you have to have a Michelin-starred kitchen to cook great French food. I certainly don’t and I’ve managed to cook up everything from feasts for six to girlie tea parties for eight to romantic three-course dinners for two.

My book includes all the well-known French dishes such as *boeuf bourguignon* and *coq au vin*, but it’s not simply another collection of classics. It’s the story of how I discovered these recipes, whether it was picnicking along the Seine on a sticky summer’s night, dining with friends, or experimenting at home. I have added my own creative twist on some occasions, making this book a fresh and simple approach to French classics, perfect to share with friends and family.

Bienvenue dans ma petite cuisine à Paris!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachael".



LES ASPERGES



LA VAISSELLE



LES PIMENTS



LA CREVETTE



LES BOUGIES



LE CHOU



LA COQUILLE SAINT-JACQUES



L'OIGNON



LE POULET



LES POMMES DE TERRE



LES BADIANES



LE FENOUIL



LES POIVRONS



LA CARAFÉ D'EAU



LA LAVANDE



LE CHOU



LE THYM



LES FEUILLES DE LAURIER



LE FENOUIL



LES BOUGIES



LES BADIANES



L'OIGNON



LA VAISSELLE



LES CAROTTES



LA COQUILLE SAINT-JACQUES



LA CREVETTE



LA CARAFÉ D'EAU



LES POMMES DE TERRE



LE THYM



LES ASPERGES

Everyday Cooking

Ma cuisine de tous
les jours

There is much to be said about the daily eating habits of the French. Simplicity and *savoir-faire* and an understanding of ingredients are key. Generally, a steaming cup of *café au lait* with a sweet and comforting croissant are grabbed en route to work for breakfast. Dinners for family and friends are important events, so dishes for these occasions have a chapter of their own (see page 152), which leaves us with lunch. I wanted to call this chapter **Everyday Cooking** as it features simple things that are mostly eaten for lunch or supper.

L'heure de déjeuner—the French lunch hour—according to the stereotype consists of several courses, a couple of bottles of wine, and takes half an afternoon. Unfortunately the days of leisurely lunches during the week are a thing of the past as even the French aren't immune to the working culture. *Le sandwich* is, therefore, fast becoming the norm for a weekday lunch, although the French do know how to make an excellent *jambon-beurre*, also called a *parisienne*, a crusty baguette slathered in rich creamy butter with a slice of juicy ham. Not much to it, but it does beat a soggy sandwich any day.

When life does allow a longer lunch break, a visit to the local bistro or neighborhood café is the norm. The local eateries know what their customers want to eat: food to comfort the nerves after a stressful morning at the office. *Moules marinières*, *steak tartare*, *gratin dauphinois*, *saucisse et purée de pomme de terre avec une sauce diable* (sausages and mashed potatoes with devil's sauce), *oeufs en cocotte* (baked eggs). No fancy fussed-about food here.

While I was writing this book, I decided to test some of the recipes out on the public by opening up my own “underground” restaurant for just two diners, as my apartment is so small. People from all over the world (including the French) booked and came for lunch. It soon became clear that no matter what nationality they were, the thing they loved most was the fact that it was simple home-cooked food, not Michelin-starred gastronomy. Food that any Pierre, Paul, or Jacques (Tom, Dick, or Harry!) can cook at home.

So roll up your sleeves and get stuck into a little kitchen work or, as they say in French, *mettre la main à la pâte* (put your hand in the dough) and you'll be rewarded with an everyday meal worth sitting down to.

Salade de figues et foies de volailles

Fig and chicken liver salad



When figs appear at my local market (the best figs are available from July to September in France), I just have to buy them. Sweet, sticky, and juicy, they often don't even make it back to my kitchen—I usually gobble them all up on my way home—but if there are a few remaining, they make a delicious addition to a salad.

The sweetness of figs goes particularly well with cheese and also chicken livers. I was never a big liver fan as a kid, but they have grown on me since living in France, especially as they take literally no time to cook. Fast food *à la française!*

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER OR 2 AS A MAIN COURSE

- 1 tbsp butter • 1 red onion, thinly sliced • 1 sprig of thyme • 7 oz chicken livers, cleaned (if the livers are quite large, cut them in half) • salt and pepper • 2 tbsp red wine vinegar • 4 handfuls of mixed salad leaves • 4 figs, quartered • extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Melt the butter in a large nonstick frying pan and add the onion and thyme. Fry on a medium heat

for 6–8 minutes or until the onion becomes soft and slightly caramelized.

Season the livers with salt and pepper. Turn the heat up to high before adding the livers to the pan then fry for 1–2 minutes on each side or until golden brown on the outside but still pink in the middle. Add the wine vinegar at the end and let it evaporate for 30 seconds.

While the livers are cooking, scatter the salad leaves and figs on a plate.

Top the salad with the onion and livers (discarding the thyme), followed by a drizzle of olive oil and sprinkle of salt.

Preparation time: 10 minutes Cooking time: 15 minutes

Lentilles du Puy avec un fromage de chèvre, betteraves et une vinaigrette d'aneth

Puy lentil salad with goat's cheese, beets, and a dill vinaigrette



Lentilles du Puy are grown in the sunny, volcanic Auvergne. The hot climate and mineral-rich soil give them a unique taste and texture, and they are known in France as poor man's caviar. They contain less starch than ordinary green lentils, so they hold their shape better: no mushy *lentilles du Puy*. Traditionally they are boiled in water, then fried with some chopped onion and lardons. I tend to improvise with ingredients I have in the fridge: they make a fine accompaniment to almost anything.

SERVES 4 AS A STARTER OR 2 AS A MAIN COURSE

For the dill vinaigrette: ½ bunch of dill • 2 tbsp sunflower oil • 2 tbsp white wine vinegar • salt • a pinch of sugar

- 1 cup Puy lentils • 1 bay leaf • 1 sprig of thyme • salt and pepper • 1 cooked beet, peeled • a handful of baby salad leaves (optional) • 7 oz fresh soft goat's cheese* • extra virgin olive oil

TO MAKE THE VINAIGRETTE: Whizz the dill (stalks included) in a blender with the oil, vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt, and the sugar. Taste and add more salt if desired.

Wash the lentils in cold running water, then put them into a large pot with the bay leaf, thyme, and generous pinch of salt. Cover the lentils with at least double their volume of boiling water and cook for 15 minutes or until tender.

Use a mandoline or a sharp knife to thinly slice the beet.

Drain the lentils and discard the bay leaf and thyme.

Divide the lentils equally between individual plates (or you could use a large serving dish) and scatter over the salad leaves (if using). Place the beet slices on top and crumble over the goat's cheese. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and a little olive oil, and finish with a sprinkling of salt and pepper.

* If you prefer a stronger-tasting cheese, try feta or a hard goat's cheese.

Preparation time: 20 minutes Cooking time: 15–20 minutes





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