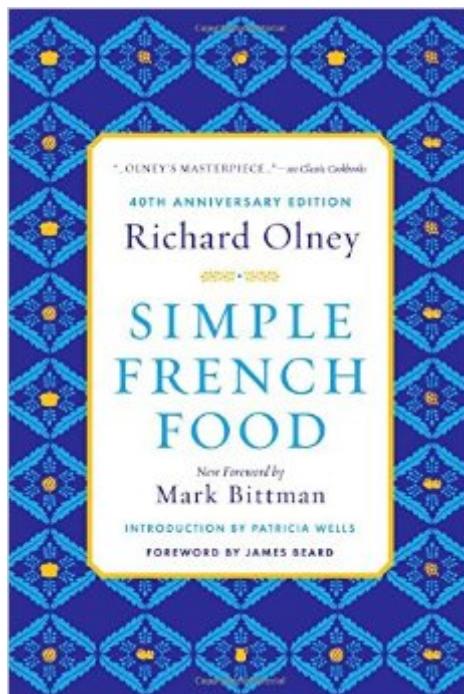


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Simple French Food 40th Anniversary Edition



Synopsis

Richard Olney was considered a culinary genius for his ability to elevate cooking to a practical art. He wrote evocatively about the beauty and pleasure in cooking by focusing on preparing simple foods well. This new edition of his classic cookbook includes a fresh cover, new interior design, and a foreword by Mark Bittman "so that a whole new generation of food lovers can enjoy this inspiring book. Olney's 175 recipes are so straightforward that cooks will be inspired to go right into the kitchen: herb omelets, fish with zucchini, lamb shanks with garlic, and many more. He also shares techniques (several featuring his own illustrations), such as fermenting vinegar, in line with the back-to-basics trend in cooking. Olney's emphasis on simplicity and improvisation in cooking will resonate with today's cooks and food lovers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For Americans, Richard Olney is one of the three most influential writers on French cuisine, along with Julia Child and Elizabeth David, although these three all approach their subject from a different direction. Child is the great popularizer who succeeded in communicating 'la cuisine Bourgeoise' without compromising on the techniques used by housewives in Paris and Lyon and Provence. David was the 'culinary anthropologist', possibly less interested in culinary technique as in rustic culinary traditions and thinkings. Olney is the ambassador of haute cuisine to American restaurant kitchens. He was a colleague of James Beard, who recommended Olney to Time Life to edit their popular series on world food. The California gang, Alice Waters and Jeremiah Tower also cite him as the ultimate authority on French cuisine. Olney's notion of 'simple' is quite different from what you may expect from modern fast home cooking proponents such as Rachael Ray and Sandra Lee. His

explanation of 'simple food' requires a rather closely reasoned seven pages in his Preface. Olney's position is like my favorite anecdote of Mario Batali commenting on a trainee's 'rustic' dice job, he says 'No dude, that's just lazy'. Olney recognizes that what many people call simple is really an excuse for the lazy cook. At the other extreme, Olney dismisses fancy architectural constructions on the dinner plate. This is certainly not lazy, but it is not simple either. Although Olney does not dismiss expensive ingredients like truffles and foie gras, he does indict them as crutches used to replace imagination in the kitchen. Some people may promote being true to simple tastes as being the hallmark of simplicity.

Many of the reviews posted here bemoan the fact that the recipes in this volume are not "simple" enough... they require careful selection of raw materials, attention to detail, heightened sensibility, occasionally some difficult technique. But the reference to "simple" in the title is not, as some might assume, a sort of promise that "Anyone Can Cook." It is, instead, an affirmation of Olney's approach -- a relatively short list of ingredients, a few central flavors and textures and not a lot of fuss for the sake of fuss. No complexity for its own sake, and no piling on of flavors and "stuff" to make it big or showy or "ethnic" or whatever. His approach is definitely not for the beginner who cannot boil water or doesn't know veal from stewing beef. It isn't for those who are looking for "20 minute meals to impress your friends" or how to make chef so and so's signature dish. Indeed, while there are recipes, much of the book consists of mere suggestions. Look, for example, at Olney's chapter on salads. He begins with some general ideas about dressings -- how to select a good quality oil, what sort of vinaigrette you might want to make to dress greens and what sort to accompany cold meats, when you might want to consider adding strong mustard and when you might think of something else. Then he describes crudites - no recipe, just a few paragraphs of ideas and things you might consider when you shop and when you begin to put together a platter. Ditto the entry on asparagus -- how to pick the most flavorful, how to peel and steam and cool; and then he will counsel to "eat it cold, toss it in butter, throw it into a salad or an omelet, cover it with bechamel and buttered breadcrumbs and gratinee it, puree the stems and mix with the tips into a souffle batter..."

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