



When French Women Cook: A Gastronomic Memoir

Madeleine Kamman, Shirley O. Corriher (Foreword by)

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Long lauded as one of the world's most revered culinary instructors, French-born Madeleine Kamman's career arose from remarkably humble beginnings in central France. As a young woman, Madeleine got her training by working in a family restaurant in Touraine and in the kitchens of France's most respected regional cooks, who nourished her appetite for the tradition, rigor, and personal nature of cooking. Her exuberant and colorful memoir of that time—originally published over 25 years ago—tells of collecting mussels at the shore, churning butter from the milk of village cows, gathering mushrooms in nearby woods, and then transforming them into glorious food under the tutelage of her informal mentors. Over 250 recipes for the simple dishes she learned at their sides illustrate her evocative reminiscences of a bygone era in rural France. Part travelogue, part social history, part instruction manual, this classic is required reading for anyone who wants to know more about the life, times, and tastes of a woman who has helped shape American cooking.

When French Women Cook: A Gastronomic Memoir Details

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Elizabeth says

What a delightful memoir! A must-read. And while we haven't made any of the recipes in Kamman's book, we have definitely followed the flavours of her recommendations for procedures and techniques.

Sam Mauro says

just the best.

Anne says

Travel back in time with this wonderful memoir which will delight all your senses, and try the recipes: many contain unique techniques not found in your ordinary cookbooks...

Laura Henderson says

A beautiful book full of vivid memories of France as it was before the 60's. You can almost smell the smoke from the old hearths, the garlic and the cheese. The memoir follows eight women who influenced Ms. Kamman and her love for food and cooking. The recipes range from simple - Bread soup with Cantal cheese to award winning complexity. The stories will pull you into the book and the recipes will inspire you.

CJ says

Recuerdos of the author of 7 women she cooked with. Each is from a different area of France. The recipes are heavy on the meats. I look forward to trying a few of them over a cold weekend.

September Dee says

A nice memoir and some good recipes as well. If you'd like an insight into French cooking give this a try. Very readable!

Rachel says

Contains, among other things, a superb recipe for cream of dandelion soup. Handy if you're barge-ing through Burgundy, all the groceries have closed, and you need to feed a crew of 11 lunch.

Matt says

Read it for the stories, would own it for the recipes.

Brett says

Read this if you cook and your mother wasn't french.

Meghan says

Really enjoyed the chapters on each woman and her cooking style. The recipes I tried were all scrumptious!

Miriam says

I was not expecting controversy from this book. "Ooh," I thought, "a gastronomic memoir. Food, travel, color, some amusing autobiographical anecdotes..." Immediately, however, I found myself off balance. Kamman is clearly of another generation, another culture, another attitude towards feminism. Only a few pages in, I feel uncomfortably ambivalent about the scene she is setting. She opens:

Where are you, my France, where women cooked, where stars in cooking did not go to men anxious for publicity but to women with worn hands stained by vegetables peeled, parched by work in the house

I am to a degree sympathetic -- it is certainly true that public accolades for cooking have gone to male "chefs" while the work of female "cooks" is largely taken for granted. On the other hand, I don't feel a lot of nostalgia for the "worn hands" of pre-labor-saving women's work (Kamman's France is pre-1960) or the imprisonment of the domestic sphere. Not that Kamman thinks women shouldn't work outside the home -- just that they still ought to do all the cooking.

Whether the women of the house worked outside of the home, or inside, there was a full meal on the table at noon and at night every day. My mother worked all her life and I fondly remember the lunches she put on the table during the ninety minutes that her lunch hour lasted.

I'm sorry. I love to cook, and that still sounds like hell to me. Working full time and using every spare minute to prepare food? Not to mention the cleaning. Wait, actually that sounds just like my mother's life. She never complained, but I know she missed having free time, going out, seeing her friends. Maybe Kamman's mother didn't mind. If so, more power to her. I have no objection to whatever lifestyle individuals find fulfilling; what I dislike is Kamman's implication that this is what women *ought* to do. It reflects a narrowness that is, sadly, all too common.

My favorite sections of this book were the little sketches of the women with whom Kamman cooked at various points in her life, and her relationships with them. Kamman also does a good job describing the food. So good, in fact, that I'm now pretty much confirmed in my earlier suspicion that I don't much care for classical French cuisine. It is too heavy, too fussy, too time-consuming for me. Why spend hours getting my *demi glace* just so, when really I'd be happier with a burrito?

Avis Black says

The memoir parts have some really outstanding prose. Delectable.

Peter Fazackerley says

lovely book interesting

Terry Gorman says

Contains the definitive recipe for roast chicken stuffed with morels with cream sauce.

Angela says

The recipes are wonderful, yes, but what I enjoyed most about this book was the way it was organized. Kamman groups the recipes by region and by the woman she learned them from; it's half cookbook, half memoir, and entirely beautiful.
