



The Amateur Gourmet: How to Shop, Chop and Table Hop Like a Pro (Almost)

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As a self-taught chef and creator of The Amateur Gourmet website, Adam Roberts knows the challenges you face in bringing fresh, creative homemade meals to the table without burning down the house or bruising your self-esteem. But as he shows in this exciting new book, the effort is worth it and good eating doesn't have to be difficult. To prove his point, Roberts has assembled a five-star lineup of some of the food world's most eminent authorities for your culinary education.

In this illuminating and hilarious "Kitchen 101," Adam Roberts teaches you how to bring good food into your life. Learn the "Ten Commandments of Dining Out" courtesy of Ruth Reichl, editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine. Discover why the *New York Times*'s Amanda Hesser urges you never to bring a grocery list to the market. Get knife lessons from a top sous-chef at Manhattan's famous Union Square Cafe, and accompany the intrepid author as he dines alone at L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Paris.

From how to chop an onion to how to cook a seven-course meal that dazzles your friends, Roberts shares the skills you need to overcome your food phobias, impress your parents, woo a date, and create sophisticated dishes with everyday ease.

Packed with recipes, menus plans, shopping tips, and anecdotes, **The Amateur Gourmet** provides you with all the ingredients for the foodie lifestyle. All you need is a healthy appetite and a taste for adventure!

From the Hardcover edition.

The Amateur Gourmet: How to Shop, Chop and Table Hop Like a Pro (Almost) Details

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From Reader Review The Amateur Gourmet: How to Shop, Chop and Table Hop Like a Pro (Almost) for online ebook

Katherine says

I picked up this up after attending a talk between the author and Deb Perelman at Smitten Kitchen. Not having heard of him or his site before, I was pleasantly surprised by how good a host/interviewer he was at that talk, so I thought I'd check out his book. I'm not that into "serious foodie-ism" or eating out and such, but I thought it would be a memoir of how he went from a processed foods/chain restaurants to competent home cook or something like that and I hoped maybe it would be a good book to recommend to people who want to start learning to cook for themselves more but are afraid of where to start.

There's a few pages on this in the very last chapter and maybe his blog was more like that in the past, but this felt a bit more gimmicky--each chapter has a theme and there are a few food celebrity drop-ins, but otherwise it wasn't as humorous as I was hoping and while I wasn't expecting to learn anything new myself (how to chop an onion, for instance), I thought those lessons aren't best conveyed in text format anyway. So it's not that useful for someone new to cooking.

I also started to get more annoyed at the various anecdotes about people who aren't into cooking and such. I like to cook because I like to eat, so for some of those, it made me feel a bit like I don't have anything in common with people who are happy to eat the same (in my opinion, boring) thing prepared by someone else every week--on the other hand, you could argue that I did more or less marry this kind of person and have been working on a lifetime project to convert him to my side, so, there's that too.

Also, I've been churning through books quickly this week with downtime from the holidays, but this was really short.

Overall, I wanted to like this and find a new approachable and engaging food writer to follow, but was a bit disappointed.

Patty says

I am always astonished when I encounter people who don't cook. I don't expect everyone to garden, or do a handicraft or even read, but you have to eat to survive and why wouldn't you want to know how to cook something?

Adam Roberts, on the other hand, grew up in a family where making reservations was as close to cooking as they got. He is the odd man out - Roberts has learned to cook.

I did not read Roberts' blog until I finished the book, but his book makes it obvious that cooking and writing are both skills he has mastered. I am guessing that the blog helped him hone these talents.

For me, this book was enjoyable. I did not learn much about cooking since I have been cooking longer than Roberts has been alive, but I found his interview with Ruth Reihl to be interesting and I really liked reading about his feast.

I recommend this book to anyone who likes to read about food; to readers who might want to learn some very basic cooking skills and folks who enjoy reading biographies. This is not your typical bio, but I think it would appeal to those readers.

Soon after I read this book, I went to Roanoke, VA to see Alton Brown in his Incredible Edible tour. I think Brown and Roberts would find some things in common. Brown suggested that everyone should learn to cook eggs. I wonder what kind of eggs Roberts would make?

Firecooked says

I really hated this book. I hated it so much I finished it to figure out why. The premise is to teach people raised on chain restaurants and frozen dinners how to be gourmets, through a series of chapters of stories about shopping/chopping/table hopping with friends (non-gourmets) or experts (gourmets). The book was preceded by a successful blog, but is not the Julia / Julie project! I was interested in this because I too hope to persuade people that they can do better when it comes to eating, with more "real/good food" in their diets. So... why do I hate it? First, the term gourmet is off-putting, so I checked Wikipedia to better understand the definition. I think this sentence summed it up: "The term and the practice may have negative connotations of elitism or snobbery, but is often used positively to describe people of refined taste and passion".. I guess its OK to be called a gourmet, but not consider yourself a gourmet. Next, his instructions to chop an onion went on for 2 pages, and I had to read it 3 times for it to make sense. And I know how to chop an onion. This would be hopeless to anyone who really wanted to learn. Last, he has that self-centered, NYC writers affliction. I don't know where or why I picked up this bias against male NY writers (and the lead name of this list is Garrison Keillor). Female NYC authors like Julia Powell and Elizabeth Gilbert don't seem to have this problem.

Shari says

This book made me remember why I used to read AG's blog every day... and why I probably should do so again.

If there is one flaw, it's surely in the *marketing* of the book. From the cover, with its apparently "too cute to be mercifully ignored" subtitle of "Shop, Chop, and Table-Hop Like a Pro," it sounds like this is a handy guide to A-to-Z lessons in specific pro cooking and dining techniques.

Sure, the book offers this *in spirit*, but the real value in the work is that it's the memoir of a foodie in the making.

Just look at the author's somewhat contradictory title: "Amateur Gourmet." Sometimes the AG is the leader, sometimes he's the follower, and in the middle you have the charm and flop sweat of the amateur sharing equal billing with the passion and determination of the gourmet. Throw in a clear prose and light wit, and you have a winner.

Well, in *theory*.

The AG's voice and enthusiasm is why so many of us loved (and hopefully still love - I have some

resubscribing to do) his blog. Unfortunately, just as some may be disappointed to find too much musing, the fanboys (and girls) may not find enough.

Read the blog, and you know the AG is a creature of many stories. Many, *many* stories. Therefore I blame someone in the publishing process for having him skirt the anecdotes and breathlessly run right through the must-do gems, like the Janet Jackson cupcake that brought him all this attention in the first place.

Even I, a lapsed reader, can remember so many adventures that could inspire others along the journey Adam has started (laughing all the way). And isn't that the real point of this work? Yes, this is nice, neat, well-organized volume, but - heavy sigh! - it's not what the cover says and it's not (enough of) what the author is known for.

And no, I don't just say this because, if there's been more stories, then maybe the first AG contest would've been mentioned, the one where readers were challenged to do something "zany." Okay, I admit it - I was the winner! I threw my hamster a birthday party, trying many new recipes, techniques, and presentation styles in the process.

And guess what? My family now does it every year, trying something new each time. There's even an annual T-shirt!

So, I know firsthand what an inspiration the AG can be. His book reminded me of those good times, but I'm afraid it was just a glimpse hiding behind a confusing cover.

Still, there are worse things one can say than "the food is delicious, but such small portions!" I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who has to use the verb "cook" with air quotes when speaking about themselves. (Likewise, if you've ever avoided a restaurant experience because you weren't sure how you'd fit in, you better give the AG's philosophy a go.)

Rj says

Just finished reading Adam Roberts' new book *The Amateur Gourmet*. Written in a pastiche-style the collection of small essays based on Adam's experiences with food and cooking with his friends and family is so sweet and enjoyable that I couldn't put it down and read the whole thing in one sitting. Mind you it is short and I found myself after I finished it wishing there was a little more. Like a good meal, I wasn't gorged on his stories and style and found myself wanting a little bit more. But maybe that is the best way to leave your readers, wanting a little bit more of your writing, also the best way to leave a table. Satiated but not full. The essays are short and detail his own development as a "foodie" and how cooking and food came to occupy a large part of his life in part because other parts of his life left him feeling a little lost and wanting. Of late I have had the same experience. The circumstances in my own life, so many that remain seemingly beyond my control make food, cooking and eating an attractive accomplishment on days that would otherwise seem lost and bereft of meaning. Somedays mastering a pie crust can make the whole day seem worthwhile. While a minor accomplishment in the eyes of others, like the wonder of a housewife finishing a cake, it can bring tears to the eyes of those going through the process. The search for a particular olive oil, a quest for buckwheat honey that someone recommended, the ability to read a beautiful recipe and to be able to take a bunch of ingredients and create a beautiful and delicious meal helps give structure, meaning and a feeling of accomplishment to days and a life that sometimes can seem so lost and bereft of meaning. It is nice to read about how food, preparation and cooking has served others in similar ways. Like any exploration of a

new world it gives one the desire to learn more, to discover details one never knew existed, to appreciate products and foods for their clarity and simplicity and at the same time it gives a sense of pride that can be crafted into a sense of mastery over knowledge that previously seemed daunting and arcane. A little bit of knowledge mixed with desire and tempered with a little elbow grease yields growth and a sense of self that helps weather another day. As Adam suggests the products of our labours always far outshine those in the food business. Food is something measured with love, care and compassion and needs to be shared to be appreciated. Learning how to master a pie crust, to create a delicate dinner makes one realize how special food and cooking can be. Thank you Adam for your book, your blog and your sense of humour.

Rob says

I've read Adam Roberts' weblog for nearly a decade now, starting just after this book was first published, and until I found it in a bookshop last month I completely forgot it existed. I'd always meant to pick it up, but it somehow didn't happen for ten years. This isn't like me. I'm amazing at buying books. You could make a very strong argument that I'm better at buying them than reading them.

If you've ever read Roberts' weblog, you'll know that it's his combination of enthusiasm and humour that really pulls the reader in. His writing is relaxing and enjoyable to read, and he captures those little moments of a new cook so well, like the sense of pride that comes from throwing together a new meal from whatever's in the fridge and pantry.

His food writing also stands out because it's from the point of view of an amateur. He didn't start cooking at all until university, so you aren't reading a Michelin star chef's memories of how it felt to learn to cook. You're reading from the point of view of someone who is actively in the process of learning how to cook, so every new technique he's excited about, every new ingredient he discovers, and every new milestone he reaches all feel genuine. It's not remembered enthusiasm; it's his excitement as it happens.

This book loses some of that energy, and I think the hint to the problem is in the subtitle - *How to Shop, Chop and Table Hop Like a Pro*. He tries to spin each chapter into a learning experience, and it just doesn't really work. The worst chapter was on how to fine dine like a professional, in which he invites Ruth Reichl, food writer and former food critic for *The New York Times*, out to lunch to discuss how one should eat in a restaurant, and it was almost painful to read. He just bombarded her the most inane questions for the entire meal. I really thought (and, to be honest, hoped) it was going to end with Reichl physically attacking him.

There are some great bits. I loved his chapter on the anxiety of eating alone at an high-end restaurant in Paris. It was funny and interesting and the 'how-to moral' didn't feel forced. I also enjoyed the chapter in which he introduces his Korean American friend to Jewish food and she introduces him to Korean dishes. In "Cook for a Date", he walks a friend through cooking a meal for a new girlfriend, and that was quite funny while also capturing how to prepare a meal ahead of time without the stress. I also really enjoyed the last chapter, which flashes between him cooking a large feast for a group of friends and his time in university as he realizes the law career he's pursuing won't make him happy.

Roberts recently got back to blogging after a two year hiatus, and I've really been enjoying his latest posts. I hope he'll go on to publish another collection of food writing at some point in the future. He did publish a recipe book, which I own but haven't fully read yet, but I'd love to see something narrative-driven without the self-help angle. A book where each chapter is just him describing a food-related scenario, like visiting a renowned restaurant or travelling to a country to try a specific dish - really just anything in a more natural

format. Something heavier on the *amateur* and lighter on the *pro*.

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Ben Exner says

Amateur Gourmet is the debut from Adam Roberts, the writer of a food blog on www.amateurgourmet.com. Adam is a graduate of Emory Law School who ended up studying writing at NYU and chose to begin a career in food writing based on the success of his blog. This book is written for the beginner, but can be enjoyed by an experienced foodie/cook as well. It covers basic lessons on how to get the most out of your cooking and dining experiences, from shopping at a market to dining out to cooking for those you love. It's a short, easy read, very much in the style of a blog with Roberts' story-telling. While not the best book on food I've ever read, it is definitely worth a read, and shows the potential for this young writer to perhaps joining the Ruhlmanns, Steingartens and Reichls of the world some day.

Barbara says

A light, fun read for people who don't know how to cook. I do know how to cook and I enjoyed it. Recipes are included

karen says

this book is fun to read, but it didnt really teach me anything about cooking i didnt already know. except where to get my knives sharpened professionally - which i know i am too lazy to do when i can do them here adequately myself. actually, im too lazy to do it myself too. its more about overcoming food attitudes - food aversions, solitary dining, menu anxiety etc., than cooking, but its a fun, quick book if you like to read about food.

Valerie says

This book was a light read... I thought that it would have more information for an intermediate- to well-versed home cook, but it really seemed more geared to people who don't know how to cook at all (maybe it would be ideal for people who were just moving out on their own for the first time).

There wasn't much in it for me. The chapters focused on topics like how to shop at the farmer's market, trying to expand your palate to eat foods that you don't like, cooking for a date, and eating foods from other cultures... pretty basic stuff.

The end of the book was a little more interesting to me, especially when the author went to lunch with Ruth Reichl, the former restaurant critic for the *New York Times* and the current editor of *Gourmet* magazine (Reichl wrote one of my favorite food books of all time, *Garlic and Sapphires*).

I wouldn't recommend this book. If anyone was interested, I'd suggest going to the author's website first:

<http://www.amateurgourmet.com/>

If you like that, then you might want to give the book a try.

Chris "Stu" says

This book doesn't do remotely what it claims to do. Instead of teaching you how to show, chop, and table hop, it just begins the first steps of doing so. It feels woefully incomplete--each chapter is framed around an "expert" or a "student" who he's going to teach/be taught by, but each of these chapters involves what seems like an hour or two of work at the most, such as, say, the chapter set up as a lunch with Ruth Reichl. That's it. You learn about as much from that chapter as you'd expect to learn from Ruth Reichl in one sitting. Or, you know, you could read her great book *Tender at the Bone* instead. It might take longer (this book took me about an hour and a half, which I think is the amount of time it took to write), but it's a better book, regardless.

Dani says

To me, the title of this book is a bit misleading. It sounds like an instructional manual, but I didn't pick up any specific skills from it. It's not a cookbook, either; there are a few recipes in it, but they all came from other cookbooks. This book is really an account of how Roberts connected with cooking and his attempts to get his family and friends to share his passion. He shares anecdotes about dining alone in Paris, tasting food from other cultures, and cooking for his restaurant-obsessed family.

When I get into a knitting slump, I flip through knitting catalogs or go to Ravelry.com and get inspired again. This book serves the same purpose for someone who has gotten into a food rut and needs a gentle nudge to get out of it. When I finished the book, I didn't learn anything new but I had a strong desire to get into the kitchen and cook something.

Tara says

Adam Roberts is a food blogger whose website, *The Amateur Gourmet*, I read pretty much daily. He was a law student at Emory when he realized that he was on a completely unfulfilling path, hated law school, didn't want to be a lawyer and really wanted to be a food writer. Although he graduated from law school, he then moved to New York to attend graduate school in writing. He is an entertaining writer and an enthusiastic cook - his blog is about food shopping, trying new recipes, and dining out in our fair city. I love it.

This, his first book, is about learning to enjoy and get to know food. He writes about eating and cooking in order to live well - ordering what you want in restaurants, the pleasures of cooking for other people, and the different steps of preparing a meal as a sort of therapy.

The book is great and touched me specially - being a law student is hard, and to leave that route and pursue what one really knows he loves is very, very brave. I enjoyed it so much that I actually e-mailed the author to

tell him I was rooting for him (something I never, ever do - fan mail! Ha!). I even sent it to my sister-in-law for her birthday. It makes a good gift.

Read it! It is a quick, enjoyable read.

Laura says

I know, only three stars. I really expected to love this more. First of all, I felt like Adam Roberts did a lot of hand-holding, storytelling, and editorializing...thus this book is really short on information, on the nuts-and-bolts of home cooking and dining out. Second of all, his self-deprecating, self-doubting persona gets *really* old, *really* fast. Oh, stop it! You have your own book, your own wildly successful blog, and now your own webcast on Food Network! There just comes a point where the whole I'm-not-worthy thing becomes cloying and false. Lastly, and this relates more to me personally than the actual book, I am kind of beyond this book in my own personal cooking. So for the most part, Adam didn't tel me anything I didn't already know. And I didn't need his self-esteem-building prose.

I am entirely, insanely jealous that Adam got to eat lunch with Ruth Reichl. Thus proving that he is no longer a mere mortal and can no longer pretend to be one of us.

Homerun2 says

3.5 stars

Mildly entertaining book by Amateur Gourmet food blogger. Although there are recipes, this is more about discovering a passion for food and cooking and confidence in your abilities to share with friends.
