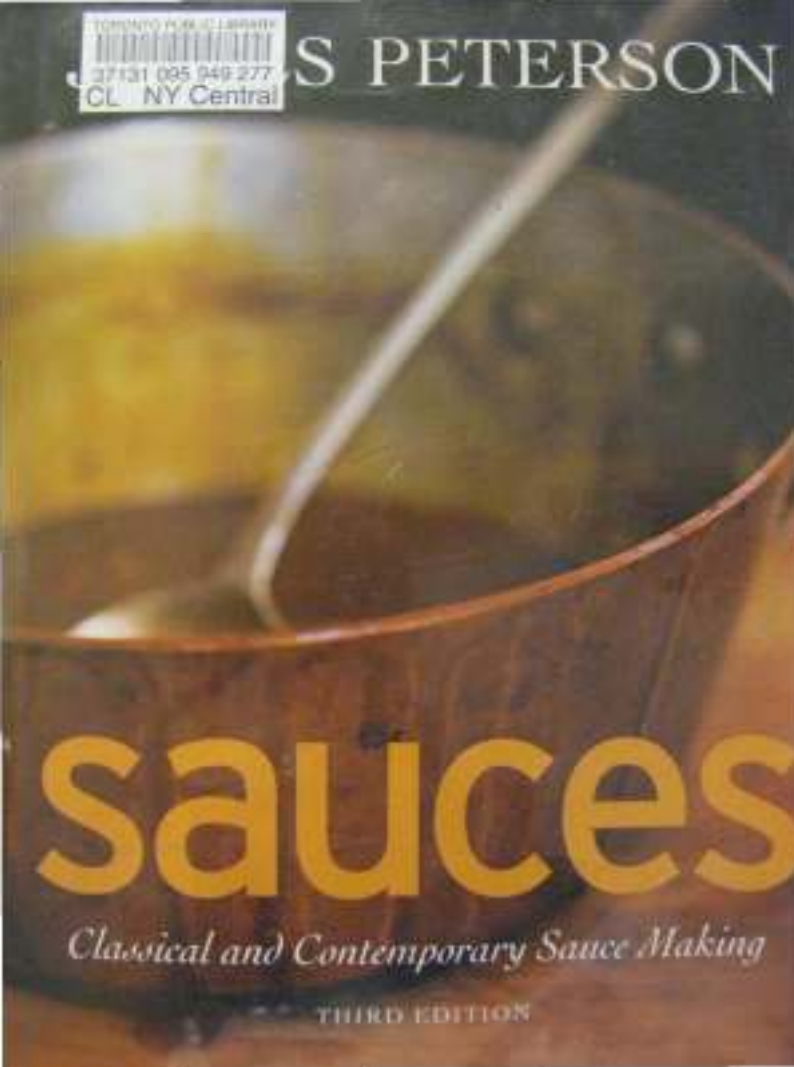


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# sauces

*Classical and Contemporary Sauce Making*

THIRD EDITION

# Contents

RECIPE CHANGES	ii		
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii		
FOREWORD FROM THE FIRST EDITION	iv		
PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION	vii		
PREFACE FROM THE FIRST EDITION	viii		
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>		<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>A SHORT HISTORY</b>		<b>INGREDIENTS</b>	11
<b>OF SAUCE MAKING</b>	1	Asian Sauces, Condiments,	
Ancient Greek Cooking	2	and Other Ingredients	14
Ancient Roman Cooking	3	Condiments	20
Cooking in the Middle Ages	4	Dairy Products	25
Renaissance Cooking	5	Herbs	27
The Sixteenth Century	4	Meats, Bones, and Toffees	29
The Seventeenth Century	5	Nuts and Seeds	30
The Eighteenth Century	7	Pick Products	30
The Nineteenth Century	7	Spices	31
The Twentieth Century	10	Spirits	32
		Wine	32
		Other Ingredients	32
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>		<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>	17	<b>STOCKS, GLACES,</b>	
Culinary	17	<b>AND ESSENCES</b>	37
Baker's Tools and Utensils	27	Stocks	38
Measures	28	Glaces	38
Serving Utensils	30	Jus	38
		Sauces	39

<b>CHAPTER 5</b>			
<b>LISSONS: AN OVERVIEW</b>	89		
Hot Luscious Sauces	91		
Cakes	91		
Saucier	91		
Egg Yolks	94		
Cream	97		
Butter	99		
Gilders and Fish Goss	99		
Blood	99		
Yogurt and Fresh Cheese	101		
Wine Lees	102		
Coral	102		
Bread	104		
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>			
<b>WHITE SAUCES FOR MEAT AND VEGETABLES</b>	107		
Sauce Bechamel	108		
Sauce Velouté	111		
Improving White Sauces	114		
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>			
<b>BROWN SAUCES</b>	117		
Demi-Glace and Consé	118		
Modern Methods for Making Brown Sauces	121		
Rawing Brown Sauces	127		
Integral versus Ready-			
Based Brown Sauces	128		
White Wine-Based Derivatives			
Brown Sauces	134		
Red Wine-Based Derivatives			
Tartare Sauces	135		
Derivative Brown Sauces			
Based on Fortified Wines	141		
Vinegar-Based Derivatives			
Butter Sauces	144		
Delicative Brown Sauces			
Madame Wine or Virginia	146		
Tips on Improving the Flavor of Brown Sauces	146		
Improving Brown Sauces	146		
Tips for the Restaurant Chef	149		
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>			
<b>STOCK-BASED AND NON-INTEGRAL FISH SAUCES</b>	151		
Classic French Fish Sauces	151		
Cooking Methods	158		
Sauces Using Scallop Coral	161		
Contemporary Fish Sauces	161		
Improving Fish Sauces	171		
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>			
<b>INTEGRAL MEAT SAUCES</b>	177		
Integral Sauces for Sauced Meats	178		
Integral Sauces for Roasts: The Jus	203		
Integral Sauces Derived from Poached Meats	210		
Integral Sauces Made from Braised Meats	243		
Sauced Meats	267		
Grilled Meats	268		
Tips for the Restaurant Chef	285		
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>			
<b>INTEGRAL FISH AND SHELLFISH SAUCES</b>	287		
Basic Preparations and Ingredients	288		
Poaching	291		
Braising	296		
Roasting	305		
Sautéing	314		
Smoking	315		
Cooking Methods: Fish Stocks	317		
Cooking Methods	322		

<b>CHAPTER 11</b>	
<b>CRUSTACEAN SAUCES</b>	202
Types of Crustaceans	204
Classic Sauces and Preparations	207
Tip for the Homecook Chef	207
Tip for Cooking Ladies	214
Using Crustacean Flavors	
with Meat and Fish	214
Improving Crustacean Sauces	247
Garnishes for Crustaceans	249
Additional Sauces for Crustaceans	247
Combining Crustaceans with	
Other Shellfish	250

<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	
<b>JELLIES AND</b>	
<b>CHAUDS-FROIDS</b>	254
Natural Meat Jellies	255
Fish Jellies	254
Flavoring Jellies	255
Working with Jellies	257
Improving Jellies	257
Chaudi-Froids	257

<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	
<b>HOT EMULSIFIED</b>	
<b>EGG YOLK SAUCES</b>	259
Precautions for Making Hot	
Emulsified Egg Yolk Sauces	259
Repeating Hotter Sauces	259
Storage	259
Serving	257
Classic Hot Egg Yolk Sauces	259
Contemporary Variations	267
Improving Emulsified Sauces	269

<b>CHAPTER 14</b>	
<b>MAYONNAISE-BASED</b>	
<b>SAUCES</b>	267
Precautions for Preparing	
Mayonnaise	267
Repeating Hotter Mayonnaise	267
Serving Mayonnaise	269
Classic Mayonnaise-Based Sauces	269
Contemporary Mayonnaise	
Variations	269
Mayonnaise-Based Shellfish Sauces	269
Mayonnaise-Based Meat Sauces	269
Improving Mayonnaise-	
Based Sauces	269
Tip for the Homecook Chef	267

<b>CHAPTER 15</b>	
<b>BUTTER SAUCES</b>	269
Beurre Blanc Sauces	269
Beurre Maître Sauces	270
Compound Butters	270
Whipped Butters	267

<b>CHAPTER 16</b>	
<b>SALAD SAUCES,</b>	
<b>VINAIGRETTES,</b>	
<b>SALTS, AND RELISHES</b>	270
Cream-Based Cold Sauces	270
Yogurt-Based Cold Sauces	270
Oil, Vinegars, and Vinaigrettes	277
Salads	280
Chutneys and Relishes	280
Fruit Sauces	280

**CHAPTER 17**  
**PURÉES AND PUREES-THICKENED SAUCES**

Equipment for Preparing Purées	407
Tomatoes	408
Tomato Sauce	409
Puree	414
Garlic	416
Swiss Apples	417
Potatoes	420
Onions	421
Pumpkin	424
Winter Squash	424
Mushrooms	426
Cauliflower	427
Root Vegetables	429
Spinach	431
Peas	432
Artichokes	436
Beans and Other Legumes	438
Using Purées with Other Methods	440

**CHAPTER 18**  
**PASTA SAUCES**

Bolognese	443
A Nice Almond-Berling Sauce	444
Clay Oil and Butter	445
The Base for the Simplest Sauce	446
Cream-Based Pasta Sauces	448
Sauces Based on Emulsion	450
Meat Products	452
Seafood Sauces	453
Vegetable Sauces	456
Meat Sauces	457
Tomato Sauces	458

**CHAPTER 19**  
**ASIAN SAUCES**

Japanese Sauces	461
Korean Sauces	462
Thai, Vietnamese, and Indonesian Sauces	463
Chinese Sauces	464
Indian Sauces	465

**CHAPTER 20**  
**DESSERT SAUCES**

Cream Anglaise	466
Sabayon	468
Chocolate Sauces	469
Caramel Sauces	471
Fruit Sauces	472

**APPENDIX**

The Relative Thickening Power of Liquors 473

A Few Tangible Mass Weights 474

**GLOSSARY** 475

**SOURCES** 478

**INDEX** 479

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** 480

**NOTES** 481



# Recipe Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1</b>			
<b>A SHORT HISTORY OF SAUCE MAKING</b>	1		
Spice Mixtures	4	Brown Beef-Base Stock for Meat Glace (Glace à Saucier)	86
Gold-Plated Chicken with Ginger, Saffron, and Almonds	8	Orzo-Rice Wine Stock	90
Leeks with Almond Milk, Creamer, and Flour	9	Veal Stock	94
Chicken with Capers and Oysters	14	Brown Veal Stock	96
Chicken with Artichokes, Olives, Capers, and Orange Juice	16	Modern Veal Demi-Glace	98
		Chicken Demi-Glace	100
		Fish Stock	102
		Vegetable Stock (Green-Beanlike or Fungi)	104
		Meat Glace (Glace à Fines)	106
		Fish Glace (Glace à Fines)	108
		Meat Jus	108
		Mushroom Essence	107
		Japanese-Style Mushroom Sauce	107
		Truffle Essence	108
		Vegetable Essence	108
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>			
<b>INGREDIENTS</b>	10		
Red Wine Mustard	10		
Beefsteak Gumbo	11		
Quatre Epices	11		
Dried Chile-Coriander Sauce	11		
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>			
<b>STOCKS, GLACES, AND ESSENCES</b>	17		
Brown Chicken Stock	19		
Red Wine Chicken Stock	21		
White Chicken Stock	22		
Brown Beef Stock	24		
		<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
		<b>LIAISONS: AN OVERVIEW</b>	116
		Braised Lamb Shank with Shallots	118
		Roux	121
		Berry Mirepoix	124
		Greens	126
		Five Sauces Finished with Cream	129
		White Wine Sauce with Three Liaisons	131

Sauce-Tenderloin, Steak or Oyster	
Red Wine Sauce	30
Sautéed Piglets Braised with	
Golden Sauce	101
Sauce-Chicken with Garlic	
and Fresh Onions	102
Sauce-Turkey with Artichokes	
or Golden Goose	103
Vegetarian-Fresh Golden Sauce	104
Roasted and Braised Duck	107
Crest de Lapin (Braised Rabbit Steak)	108
Sauce-Horseshoe 1	111
Tiger-Braised Fish Sauce	113
Red Burgundy with Fresh Cheese	117
Sauce-Banquet	118
Sauce with Beans	118
Sauce with Cornichons	119
Sauce-Yeast	119
Pineapple Sauce	120
Pineau Blanc	120

**CHAPTER 6**  
**WHITE SAUCES FOR**  
**MEAT AND VEGETABLES**

Sauce-Béchamel	127
Sauce-Mornay	128
Sauce-Sauces 1	127
Sauce-Cheese	128
Sauce-Velouté	128
Sauce-Tartar	129
Sauce-Almond	130
Sauce-Sautéed White Sauces	131
White Sauces Based on	
Béchamel Sauce	131
Yolk-Enriched White Sauces	132
Sauce-Artichoke	132
Sauce-Cheese (Cream-Flavored White)	133
Sauce-Banquet	133
(White Wine Hollandaise)	133
Sauce-Cherry (Fish Sauce)	134
Curry Sauce	134
Sauce-Tartar (Tartar Sauce)	134

Sauce-Dijonnaise (Parsley Sauce)	135
Sauce-Tartar (Mushroom	
and Herb Sauce)	135
Sauce-Picante (Mustard	
and Lemon Sauce)	136
Tartar Sauce	136
Sauce-Rigoutte (Blanc Wine,	
Mustard, and Truffle Sauce)	136
Sauce-Viergeuse (Mustard	
and Onion Sauce)	137
Sauce-Alsatique (Red Pepper Sauce)	137
Sauce-Lorraine (Dress Sauce)	137

**CHAPTER 7**  
**BROWN SAUCES**

Escoffier's Demi-Glace and	
Sauce-Tartar	137
Modern Demi-Glace and Meat Glace	
(Glace à Froids)	138
Alternative Glaces	139
Sauce-Chasseur (Mushroom Sauce	
for Chicken)	139
Sauce-Diable	139
Sauce-Tartar (Tartar Sauce)	139
Sauce-Fines Herbes	139
Sauce-Coriandre (Parsnips	
and Mushroom Sauce)	140
Sauce-Dijonnaise (Parsnips	
Sautéed Horseradish Sauce)	140
Sauce-Rigoutte (Blanc Wine	
and Truffle Sauce)	140
Sauce-Robin (White Wine-	
Mustard Sauce)	140
Sauce-Charcuterie (White Wine	
and Chervil Sauce)	140
Sauce-Diable (Chopped	
Mushroom Sauce)	140
Sauce-Sauces	140
Sauce-Tartar 2	140
Sauce-Hollandaise	140
Hollandaise Sauce Made	
with Red Wine Stock	140

Sauces		Egg Yolk-Based Sauce Normandy	107
Red Wine Sauce	90	Sauce Normande (Creamy Sauce)	108
Sauce Beurreblanc II	90	Sauce Orange for Fish	108
Sauce Maitre (Maitre Sauce)	90	Sauce Berry	108
Sauce Petite (Petit Sauce)	90	Sauce Maitre Blanc	108
Pine and Mustard Sauce	90	(White Mustard Sauce)	108
Sauce Piquante	90	Sauce Rigoutte for Fish	108
Sauce Rigoutte (Orange Sauce for Fish)	100	Sauce Au Blanc	108
Sauce Roman (Raisin and Pine Tree Sauce for Game)	100	(White Wine-Pink Sauce)	108
Sauce Sauternes Sauce for Fish or Chicken	97	Sauce Saumon	108
Sauce for Venison Sauce	98	Sauce Sauternes (Horseshoe Sauce)	108
Sauce Fricadee (Pigeon-Chestnut Game Sauce)	98	Sauce Chausson (Herring Sauce)	108
Sauce Chervil (Red Wine Sauce for Game)	100	Sauce D'hermine	108
Sauce Green-Yucca (Green-Fried Sauce for Fish)	99	Sauce Howard (Horseshoe Sauce)	108
Sauce Green (Whipped Cream and Truffle-Fried Game Sauce)	99	Sauce Jambon	108
Sauce Maitre (Mustard-Jellied Sauce for Fish)	100	Sau-Trouin Sauce	110
Sauce Piquante	100	Red Wine Sauce for Salmon	109
Sauce Piquante II	100	Rabe	110
Sauce Piquante and Sauce Piquante	100	Viande and Eggs	
Sauce Piquante	100	Brazilian-Spiced Olive Sauce	109
Sauce Piquante (Filet of Beef with Sauce Piquante)	100	Custard-Sauced Egg Sauce	109
Sauce au Champagne (Mustard Sauce)	99	Tomato-Based Vinaigrette	109
Sauce Hollandaise	94	Hollandaise Sauce for Fish	109
		Baked Salmon and Herring Sauce	109
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>			
<b>STOCK-BASED AND NON-INTEGRAL FISH SAUCES</b>	100	<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	
Fish Sauce	100	<b>INTEGRAL MEAT SAUCES</b>	100
Cream Sauce Normande	100	Poulet Saucé à la Maitre	100
Cream-Based Sauce Normande	100	(Chicken with Tomatoes, Olives, and Mustard)	100
Butter-Based Sauce Normande	100	Steak with Green Peppercorn Sauce	100
		Pork Chops with Mustard Sauce	100
		Oven-Braised Chicken with Natural Jus	100
		Roast Saddle of Veal	100
		Roast Rack of Lamb with Natural Jus	100
		Roast Saddle of Lamb with Natural Jus	100
		Pot au Feu	101
		Beef à la Française	101



Dark & de Poole	239	Filets à la Nappe	
Hallo's Menu	239	(Stuffed Chicken)	240
Maitre de Cuisine	239	Filets "à la Venise" (Stuffed Chicken)	240
Crème Suprême	240	with Stuffed Mushrooms	240
Roasted Chicken	240	Coiled Game Birds in	240
Roasted Chicken with		Smoke-Scented Butter	240
Crème and Egg Yolks	240		
Steak à la Veal Shoulder Cook	240		
Roasted Veal Shoulder	240		
Chaf (Potage)	240		
Roasted Roast Beef Shoulder Cook	240		
Roast of Veal Shoulder	240		
Chaf (Potage) with Jerusalem Vegetables	240		
Roast Sweetbreads	240		
Roast Meat Sals	240		
Chinese Style Roast Beef Ribs	240		
Red Wine Pot Roast	240		
Red Shoulder Chop with			
White Wine and Potatoes	240		
Red Wine Beef Soup	240		
Beef Bourguignon	240		
Red Wine Beef	240		
Poulet à la Couronne (Whole Chicken)	240		
à la Couronne	240		
Coq au Vin	240		
Rooster Stuffed in Red Wine	240		
Chicken with Red Wine Sauce	240		
Sometimes Called Coq au Vin	240		
Gold Red Wine-Chicken Dishes	240		
Chicken Entrees	240		
Chicken with Potatoes and Apples	240		
Chicken with Vegetables, Saffron	240		
Medieval Apples and Wine	240		
Chicken Leggs	240		
Harmon Sauce	240		
Chicken Meat	240		
Chicken with Tomatoes	240		
and Anchoïtes Chile Sauce	240		
Chicken in the Style of a Roast	240		
Chicken with Mushrooms	240		
Roast Duck, Maple	240		
Dark Roast with Potatoes	240		
or Other Fruit	240		

## CHAPTER 10 INTEGRAL FISH AND SHELLFISH SAUCES

Sea Scallops à la Nappe	240
Sea Scallops with Butter	240
Coiled Nappe	240
Sea Scallops à la Nappe	240
with Vinaigrette	240
Sea Scallops à la Nappe	240
with Vegetable Potatoes	240
Lobster à la Nappe I	240
Bouillabaisse (Nappe Bouillabaisse)	240
with Macaroni	240
Filets of Sole Steady	240
Roasted Whole Flatfish with	
Crackles and Norman Butter	240
Sole Marguery	240
Shrimp with Capers, Mustard	
and Anchovies, and Flammigations	240
Sauce or Red Curries	240
Filets of Sole Steady Potatoes	240
Filets of Sole Borelaine	240
Filets of Sole Crisp	240
Filets of Sole Dressed	240
Filets of Sole Fines	240
Filets of Sole Thermale	240
Filets of Sole Veronique	240
Filets of Sole with Lobster Sauce	240
Hallo's Roast with Crackles	240
Filets of Sole with Tomatoes	
and Pepper Sauce	240
Roasted Salmon Filets	
with Sweet Onion Sauce	240
Roasted Sole Filets with	
Yogurt Curry Sauce	240

Sauces on Page 101 with Tendered Vegetables	76	Meat Duck Jelly	80
Red Wine Mustard	76	Pine Harts Jelly	80
Sauces with Red Wine Sauce	76	Must Jelly	80
Crème Fraîche	76	Saffron and Tomato Fish Jelly	80
Sauces with Champagne Sauce	88	Salad Dressing in Cream Mustard Jelly	80
Salads, Emulsion with Olive Classical Mustard with Butter Hollandaise	88	Five Grains "à la Grèce"	80
	88	Asparagus Potato (Parsleyed Plum Tartare)	80
		Beef Mince (Cold Stewed Beef)	80
		Salmon and Truffle Hair	80
		Chicken Soufflé with Smoked Jelly	80
		Sauces Cold-Fused	80

**CHAPTER 11  
CRUSTACEAN SAUCES**

Crustacean Butter	82
Crustacean Oil	82
Butter with Whole Crustaceans	82
Classic Sauce Américaine	82
Classic Sauce Cardinal	82
Classic Sauce Normais	82
Contemporary Sauce Cardinal and Sauce Normais	82
Crayfish Sauce	82
Sauce Hollandaise (Lobster Sauce)	82
Sauce Newberg	82
Sauce Oriental	82
Sauce Béarnaise	82
Steamed Lobster with Parsley Sauce	82
Limón à la Nage II	82
Chicken with Crayfish	82
Japanese-Style Crab Sauce	82
Wood Shellfish Piccata	82

**CHAPTER 12  
JELLIES AND  
CHAUDS-FROIDS**

Classic Meat Jelly	82
Classification for Meat Jelly	82
Classic Fish Jelly	82
Green Béchamel Jelly	82
Red Wine Meat Jelly	82
Pork and Crackling Pappou Jelly for Five Grains	82
Lobster with Sachertouze Jelly	82

**CHAPTER 13  
HOT EMULSIFIED  
EGG YOLK SAUCES**

Sauce Béarnaise	82
Sauce Hollandaise	82
Sauce Choron (Beurre Blanc with Tomato)	82
Sauce Maitre (Orange Flavored Sauce Hollandaise)	82
Sauce Moutarde (Hollandaise with Whipped Cream)	82
Sauce Normais (Norman Sauce Sauce)	82
Sauce Foyot or Valais (Classic Béarnaise with Meat Glace)	82
Sauce Lyonnaise (Oil-Based Sauce Béarnaise)	82
Sauce Riches (Asparagus and Crustacean Sauce for Fish)	82
Browned Pillows of Sea Fish with Salacious Sauce	82

**CHAPTER 14  
MAYONNAISE-BASED  
SAUCES**

Traditional Mayonnaise	82
Saladonna-Style Mayonnaise	82
Sauce Verte (Green Mayonnaise)	82
Sauce Aube (Garlic Mayonnaise)	82

Saffron-Honeyed Aioli	205
Sauvy Ardennes Cream and Brown Red Pepper Mayonnaise	206
Sauvy Charente Mayonnaise with Whipped Cream	207
Sauvy-Charente Mayonnaise	208
Sauvy Rhineland (Caper and Duck) Mayonnaise	209
Sauvy Southwest Apple-Honeyed Mayonnaise	210
Sauvy Grilled	211
Sauvy Tartare (Tartar Sauce)	212
Sauvy Mayonnaise	213
Sauvy with Hazelnut Mayonnaise	214
Sauvy and the Pepper Mayonnaise	215
Sauvy Mayonnaise	216
Sauvy Yogurt Mayonnaise	217
Sauvy "Mayonnaise"	218
Sauvy-Based Lathum Mayonnaise	219
Sauvy-Coral Mayonnaise	220

**CHAPTER 15**

<b>BUTTER SAUCES</b>	427
Traditional Beurre Blanc (Beurre Normain)	428
Beurre Blanc (Red Wine-Butter Sauce)	428
Beurre Citron (Lemon Beurre Blanc)	429
Beurre Poivre (Peppered Butter)	430
Beurre Serrano	431
Pilons of Salt & le Mouton	432
Beurre Noir	433
Almond Butter	434
Anchovy Butter	435
Berry Butter	436
Cherry Butter	437
Citrusy Butter	438
Garlic Butter	439
Garlic Butter	440
Herbs of Butter (Beurre Maitre d'Hôtel)	441
Mustard de Vie Butter	442

Mustard Butter	443
Mustard Butter	444
Peppercorn Butter	445
Smoked Salmon Butter	446
Small Butter	447
Sweet Red Pepper Butter	448
Tarragon Butter	449
Tomato Butter	450
Truffle Butter	451
Vanilla Butter	452
Hot Vanilla-Coral Butter	453
Hot Vanilla-Rose Butter	454
Garlic Butter	455
Spice Butters	456
Herb Butters	457
Pigeon Sauce	458
Pine-Goose Butter	459
Whipped Butter for Grilled or Sauced Fish	460

**CHAPTER 16**  
**SALAD SAUCES,  
VINAIGRETTES,  
SALSAS, AND RELISHES**

Shrimp Cocktail	461
Hot General Traditional Cream for Salads	462
Citrused Cream	463
Mint and Cilantro Yogurt Sauce	464
Cold-Infused Olive Oil	465
Butter or Olive Oil	466
Ancho Chile Oil	467
Citrus-Apple Chile Oil	468
Sweet Red Pepper Oil	469
Tomato Oil	470
Hot or Pesto Oil	471
Spice-Infused Oil	472
Provencal Herb Vinaigrette	473
Orange Vinaigrette	474
Raspberry Vinaigrette	475
Bacon Vinaigrette for Green Salads	476
Cherry Vinaigrette for Salads	477
Honey-Mustard Vinaigrette	478

Wild Mushrooms-Walnut Oil Salad	309	Soft Parsley Puree	309
Salsa Verde	310	Pine Parsley Parsnips	310
Sauce Bordaise	310	Spreading Sauce	310
Meat Sauce for Lamb	310	Muscovado Sauce	310
Hot Tomato Vinaigrette	310	Mushroom Sauce	310
Warm Sweet Red Pepper and Garlic Vinaigrette	310	Red Wine-Mushroom Sauce	310
Red Vinaigrette for Roast Lamb	310	Crabberry and Calabash Sauce	310
Hot Herb and Parsley Vinaigrette	310	Pan Butters	310
Mexican Salsa	310	Cardamom-Hot Butter Sauce	310
Vegetable Dressing for Grilled Food or Pick	310	Hot Curry Sauce	310
Truffle Salsa	310	Garlic Sauce	310
Truffle Pizza Sauce	310	Garlic Paste	310
Sauce and Hot Fruit Chutney	310	Heady Garlic-Braised Potato	310
Green Tomato Chutney	310	Cheddar Paste	310
Kamout Relish	310	Shrimp with Coconut and Peanut Sauce	310
Caper and Cornichon Relish	310	Walnut and Parmesan Cheese Sauce for Pasta	310
Sesame and Onion Chutney	310	Coriander Paste	310
Chickpea or Mint Chutney	310	Indian Mint Paste	310
Carrot-and-Sweet Potato Chutney	310	Artichoke	310
Coastal Sauce	310	Tapioca	310
Coastal Sauce	310	Green Olive and Capers Tapenade	310
Coastal Sauce	310	Fava Bean Puree	310
		Lentil Puree	310
		Red Wine Sauce Fizzled with Lemon Juice	310
		White or Flagship Beer Puree	310
		Watercress and Shallot Sauce for Pick	310
		Ferula-Submerge Sauce	310

**CHAPTER 17**  
**PURÉES AND PURÉE-THICKENED SAUCES**

Hot Tomato Concombre	310
Grilled Tomato Concombre	310
Tomato Confit	310
Tomato Sauce	310
Sweet Puree	310
Sweet Sauce for Fish	310
Sautéed Garlic Puree	310
Sweet Pepper Puree	310
Sweet Red Pepper Vinaigrette	310
Pasta Puree	310
Shepherd's Pie-Garlic Potato	310
Roasted Chicken with Terragena	310
Pasta-Thickened Sauce for Pick	310
Sauce Soubise II	310
Sweet Cheese Puree	310

**CHAPTER 18**  
**PASTA SAUCES**

Pasta with Butter or Olive Oil	310
Pasta with Butter and Sage (Pasta alla Norma)	310
Spaghetti with Marinara's Sauce (Spaghetti alla Marinara)	310
Spaghetti with Black Truffles, Garlic, and Anchovies (Spaghetti alla Truffle)	310



# 1 A SHORT HISTORY OF SAUCE MAKING



Perhaps in no period in history have a nation's eating habits changed so profoundly as during the last two decades. Until twenty or thirty years ago, it seemed that the history of sauce making and cooking was complete. If asked about the future of classical cooking, a French chef would likely have replied that all the dishes had been invented by the end of the nineteenth century and that there would be no new combinations or techniques. In that era of processed and frozen foods in the United States, few would have predicted the sophistication and enthusiasm for cooking that exists today.

Who begins with a history of sauce making? A *mise en cooking*—and of other creative arts—is that creation never takes place in the context of a tradition and set of aesthetic values. At a time when creativity and originality in cooking are considered more important than reliably recreating classic dishes, one of the difficulties confronting American chefs is the lack of a rigid traditional system of cooking like the system that France adapted in the middle of the nineteenth century, which was virtually unchallenged for over a hundred years. America has a rich culinary heritage, but its cooking from many different regions has never crystallized into a national cuisine. While the limitations imposed by a rigid traditional system can be stifling, they also provide structure. This protects the chef who is working not a combination of flavors, an innovative presentation, or a new juxtaposition of textures from eccentricity and excess.

Many chefs have been (and some still are) scolded by the dogmatism of classical French cooking. Until recently, straying from classic tradition was considered heretical and signified only ignorance or audacity on the part of the chef. Creativity was limited to interpretation within the classic structure.

As an American teaching in a French cooking school, I was particularly suspect. I did not demand even slightly from classic norms. Any innovation or improvement was dismissed as an American eccentricity. My only defense was to find the idea in the literature of French cooking. By delving far enough back, it became clear that "classical" French cooking was only a stage in the evolution of cooking, rather than the culmination and assimilation of the entire history of French cooking. I also discovered that most seemingly new, even startling, combinations had been used before.

A true history of sauce making is not easy to chart. Research is limited to the source word, which until the nineteenth century described only the eating habits of the rich. Cookbooks, which have been around for thousands of years, describe an area's affinity for certain flavors and ingredients, but early cookbooks rarely give quantities. Left merely with a description of flavors and techniques, it is hard to guess how foods tasted. But a description of how dishes have been used over the centuries is often surprising—dishes that seem new or even eccentric often have a lengthy history. Veal with capers, peas, root meats with saffron and ginger, chicken with toasters—all were written about from 500 to 200 years ago.

Cookbooks also fail to describe the context of foods within a meal. Recipes are presented with little or no description of how they should be served, in what order or with what wines. When nineteenth-century authors describe meals in a social context (Balzac and Zola are good sources), we begin to get a sense of how rich and poor ate and which foods were reserved for special occasions.

## ANCIENT GREEK COOKING

Some historians have theorized that the Greek dietary regimen, which was closely linked with Greek medicine, had a powerful influence on both Western European and Middle Eastern cuisines. Unfortunately, no complete copies of Greek cookbooks survive. Much of what we know of Greek gastronomy is found in the writings of Aristoteles, which focus on the origins of the products—giving recommendations on how to purchase various foods, especially fish—rather than the techniques used in their preparation. The cooking techniques that are mentioned are simple and direct—usually boiling or roasting. Theophrastus's main famous recipe recommends that a lamb be roasted over and simply sprinkled with salt. Cheese and oil are often used in sauces and are sometimes flavored with garlic. One fish recipe starts against preparation by a Sicilian or an Italian who will "roast it with too much cheese, vinegar, and saffron-colored herbs."

## ANCIENT ROMAN COOKING

Much of our knowledge of Roman cooking comes from *De Re Coquinaria*, Apicius, who lived in the first century A.D. Many of the ingredients used in Apicius's recipes are seen again in medieval European cooking. Although reproductions of his manuscripts have been available in Europe since the Middle Ages, it is difficult to know whether the style of medieval European cooking was a direct result of his influence or the natural outcome of preparing food in a particular cultural and geographical climate.

Although many of the ingredients in Apicius's text are familiar and sometimes even appearing in the modern kitchen, we have little idea how they tasted because of the almost universal use of garum. Garum, a liquid sauce based on fish entrails, was used abundantly in Roman cooking, not only alone as a sauce but in combination with other ingredients such as herbs, onions, a wide variety of spices, wine, honey, and olive oil. Apparently it was not a haphazard combination of ingredients. A note in Apicius's *De Re Coquinaria* describes a remedy for garlic that has taken on an unpleasant odor in the city of Rome, implying that there were criteria for garlic. We can only guess how it tasted; the closest modern equivalent are probably the fermented fish sauces used in Southeast Asian cooking (except in Thailand, also eaten in Vietnam, parts in the Philippines).

Most Roman sauces, in addition to garum, called for honey as well as a variety of spices and herbs. Many of these we still use today but are more common in Asian cooking than in European cuisine: coriander leaves (cilantro), lemongrass, anise (a sticky spice that grows surprisingly wild when roasted, popular in Indian cooking), rose, dill, bay (dried) leaves, and saffron. Wine and vinegar were often used in Roman cooking, but the wines that were



arsenal—and probably used in cooking—were often flavoured with spices and combined with honey. The Roman preference for adding honey to wine probably indicates that intensely flavoured sweet wines were not common. There are, however, references to a sweet wine made with raisins (grapes). Some were sometimes coloured with wine that had been cooked down (*coloured*) to its intense ruby color.

Many Roman recipes call the reader to "bind" the sauce, often without saying what to use. Some recipes mention starch. Others suggest whole eggs.

Below are several sauces translated from Apicius's *De re coquinaria* into the French translation by Jacques Audouin (bracketed additions are mine).

*Sauce for Opuscula*. [Crushed] pepper, [chopped] lettuce, parsley, dried mint, cardamom (cassia leaves, related to nutmeg) to be combined with cummin, which at the time was worth more than its weight in gold), a little more (sic) cumin, honey, vinegar and garlic.

*Sauce for Garsale*. Grind together pepper, cumin, and rose. Grind the mixture of spices with vinegar, garlic, and a small amount of oil. Cook the dried garsale in the sauce. Bind the sauce with starch, and sprinkle with pepper.

• *Celery Sauce*. Boil the celery in water containing bicarbonate of soda (rock-mine sometimes used today to keep vegetables green). Drain and chop finely. With a mortar and pestle, grind together pepper, sausage, vinegar, onion. Moisten the mixture with wine, garlic, and oil. Cook the spices mixture in a pot, and add the chopped celery.

• *Sauce for Carduus*. Grind together fresh rose, mint, cucumber, and fennel. Add pepper, sausage, honey, garlic, and oil.

## COOKING IN THE MIDDLE AGES

There is very little literature describing the cuisine of Europe—indeed, there was very little literature of any sort—between the fall of Rome and the late Middle Ages. Most historians agree that the cooking of Europe was influenced by the Saracens, whose cuisine was in turn influenced by the ancient Greeks. The limited number of cookery books of medieval Europe reflect the influence of Middle Eastern ingredients, often originating in India, and the acquired tastes of the returning Crusaders.

Many Crusaders to the Middle East in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries found the Middle East more inviting and more cultured in Europe. Those who did return brought back ingredients never before used in Europe.

including wine (in case form), almonds, pistachios, pineapples, citrus fruits, and squash. Spices had been used in Western Europe since Roman times, but their variety was limited, and they were served only in noble and royal circles. As the Crusaders returned, the use of spices became more common, as they not only provided flavor but probably masked the taste of tainted meat.

Various *deus* unseasoned stews of unripe grapes and sometimes crab apples and cherries are most often called for when a liquid is needed. In later manuscripts, influenced by Middle Eastern cooking, orange and lemon juice were sometimes used.

Vermorel and orange are distinctly sour ingredients, and the Saracens and Western Europeans substituted them with sweeteners. Honey and dried fruits were used initially but were partially replaced with sugar, which remained sparse and was treated as a spice. The medieval *fraser* (a kind of liquid stew) was sometimes sweetened with dates, raisins, or sugar.

The modern custom of preparing stews had not yet appeared, but beef boudin and the cooking liquids of both meats and fish were bound with bread, almonds, and egg yolks to convert them into sauces.


Almost every medieval recipe includes spices, such as saffron, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, and long pepper. Rarely was the flavor or nature of one spice emphasized in contrast with a dish. Instead, most dishes contain three or more spices with seemingly little attention to their relationship. Medieval texts (Tullio's *Le Viande* and *Le Manier de Faire*) are filled with recipes for soups and *ragout* in which the element being prepared—beef, meat, fish—is purged and used to bind the liquid.

When bread or almonds were used to bind sauces, they were pounded together at the beginning and ministered with vermorel, orange, wine, almond milk, and sometimes cow's milk. When used, egg yolks were beaten and added at the end, just as they are today. In some recipes, lime (it is often not clear what kind) is used to thicken the sauce.

Although we do not know what the exact textures of sauces were like in medieval cooking, the eating habits of the time would have made it difficult if not impossible to appreciate a delicately balanced sauce. Most foods were served on thick slices of bread (*trancher*) instead of plates and eaten with the fingers instead of with forks. If a sauce were too thin, it would have been absorbed by the bread. More than likely, sauces were thickened as they would cling to the bowl and run on top of the *trancher*. Later, as plates came into more widespread use, it became possible to make thinner, more delicately thickened and flavored sauces that would not disappear into the bread. Two recipes from Tullio's *Le Viande* follow.

*Beaufort de Carville.* Cook a chicken in water and wine or other liquid. Remove it from the liquid and cut it into quarters. Cook the quarters in fat. Cook powdered almonds and cinnamon in leaf broth. Grind them and strain them with leaf balm: and moisten the chicken pieces with this liquid. Add onions, ginger, cloves, grains of paradise [*Amomum melegueta*]. The sauce should be well broiled.

*Beaufort Greye.* Cut the chicken or meat being prepared into pieces. Cook the pieces in leaf with finely chopped parsley and onions. Take leaves, lightly roasted bread, wine, and leaf broth, and boil everything together (the text is not clear whether these are boiled with the meat or separately). Strain the mixture and thicken and flavor with ginger, cloves, and saffron. Add verjuice.

 SPICE MIXTURE

Here is a spice mixture written about in the middle of the sixteenth century. Long pepper, grains of paradise, and galangal are sold online. Galangal can be found in shops that sell Thai ingredients.

(YIELD: 1/2 CUP OR 125 MILLILITERS)

powdered ginger	2 TABLESPOONS	45 milliliters
finely ground black pepper	2 TABLESPOONS	30 milliliters
whole nutmeg	1 TABLESPOON	15 milliliters
grains of paradise, ground in a coffee grinder	1 TABLESPOON	15 milliliters
ground cinnamon	1 TABLESPOON	15 milliliters
long pepper, stored in a coffee grinder	1 TABLESPOON	15 milliliters
ground cloves	2 TABLESPOONS	30 milliliters
medicinal galangal (also called lemongrass)	1 TABLESPOON	15 milliliters

Mix together all the ingredients and store in a tightly sealed container in the freezer. Use to dress chicken and seafood to lend a medieval flavor.

## Adapting Medieval Recipes

Adapting historical recipes to modern tastes is an exciting means of designing new dishes that are still grounded in culinary tradition. The flavors, textures, and colors inherent in an old recipe can be adapted to modern tastes without losing sight of the original recipe. References to the aesthetics of the original can be made without compromising the dish's flavor or appeal.

One can only guess at the intensity and balance of the flavors. Most authors assume that the spices were used in large quantities. Some have also assumed that spices were used carelessly because many spices were used in one preparation. Whether or not these assumptions are true is irrelevant to the modern cook, who is free to adapt historical recipes to today's tastes. Obviously the quantities of spices used can be adjusted to taste, and a variety of spices in the same dish—as Indian curries prove—does not necessarily imply a careless mishmash of flavors.

The choice of liaison requires liberty on the part of the chef. Although bread is an interesting liaison (see "Bread," page 126), a bread-thickened sauce may not be appealing in a contemporary dish. Binding sauces with oat lactaria, however, is both authentic and satisfying.

When experimenting with an unknown dish in which a variety of flavors meld—such as a medieval recipe containing three or more spices—infuse the spices individually in small amounts of liquid, such as stock or cream, and then gradually combine the liquids until the flavors of the spices are in balance.

## GOLD-PLAYED CHICKEN WITH GINGER, SAFFRON, AND ALMONDS

This modern adaptation is not based on any particular recipe but is taken from several recipes in Talbot's *Book of Simples* and fifteenth-century manuscript. Ginger, saffron, and wine are the principal flavorings; ginger and saffron were the spices most often called for in medieval recipes, and wine was one of the most commonly used herbs. The sauce is bound with almond batter, a typical medieval flavor. Bread can also be used. Green-colored saffron almonds and pistachios were used as the garnish. The almonds are a reference to the medieval cook's tendency to fashion new food from another to surprise and delight the diner. They are never found surprisingly good with the sauce, recalling the inclination to juxtapose the savory with the sweet in the medieval past. The gold plating is ornamental and can be eliminated or silver leaf can be substituted, but it is taken from an authentic recipe. Gold and silver leaf are still used in Indian cooking to decorate *chassera*. Medieval diners were fond of bright colors, hence the gold, the pistachios, the saffron, and the colored almonds.

The chicken is prepared like a *fricassee*, but the recipe could be adapted to a small roaster as well.

### YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

CHICKEN, cut into 1	3 pounds	14 ounces
salt and pepper	to taste	to taste
butter, 1/2 cup	2 ounces	60 grams
onion, chopped	1 medium	1 medium
white-flour starch	2 cups	500 milligrams
ground garlic	2 teaspoons	30 grams
green herb mixture or chervil	several drops	several drops
pistachios	1	1
saffron threads	1 pinch	1 pinch
hot water	1 tablespoon	15 milliliters
finely ground fresh ginger	2 teaspoons	10 milliliters
red wine	1 small bottle	1 small bottle
colored butter (see #1)	2 tablespoons	30 milliliters
egg yolk	1	1
oil of sweet gum	4 drops	4 drops

1 Season the chicken pieces with salt and pepper. In a square of heavy-weighted metal pan, gently cook the seasoned chicken pieces, skin side down, in the butter. After about 10 minutes, turn and cook the flesh side down, basting the chicken or basting the butter. Season the chicken

2. Add the chopped onions to the butter in the pan and sauté, without browning, until they are translucent.
3. Add the chicken stock to the pan. Arrange the chicken pieces in the liquid and cover.
4. Cook the chicken in a 350°F (177°C) oven or over low heat on the stove for 12 to 20 minutes.
5. While the chicken is cooking, wash the cleaned parsnips with the food coloring and let it brighten green. Shape the colored parsnips into 12 almonds and set aside.
6. Remove and reserve the seeds from the pomegranates. Discard the flesh.
7. Soak the saffron threads in the hot water for at least 20 minutes.
8. Transfer the chicken to a plate and keep it warm. Add the ground ginger to the liquid in the pan and let it infuse for 5 minutes.
9. Strain the sauce into a 2-quart (2 liter) measuring cup and reduce it to 1 cup (250 milliliters). Strain carefully.
10. Gradually add the saffron, noting so that its flavor becomes apparent but does not overpower the flavor of the ginger. Add the rest.
11. Whisk in the almond butter until the sauce has the desired consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.
12. Beat the egg yolk with a large pinch of salt to make an egg wash.
13. Break the top of the chicken pieces with the egg wash.
14. Apply the gold or silver leaf by holding the sheet about 3 inch (7.5 cent) from the surface of the chicken and systematically blowing on the back of the gold leaf through a 5-inch-long (12.5 cent) plastic straw.
15. Serve the chicken surrounded with the sauce, the pomegranate seeds, and the green almonds.

## RENAISSANCE COOKING: THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Surprisingly little has been written about cooking in the sixteenth century. In France one important book was published, a translation of Bartolomeo Platina's *De Rebus coctivis*. Whereas most other books were based on earlier works and were medieval in character, Platina gives us a deeper insight consisting of both the cooking and the practices of Renaissance Italy and France. During the Renaissance and for several centuries thereafter, culinary methods were closely linked to health and medicine. Much of Platina's writing was influenced by medieval medicine, which itself was based on Greek medicine with its inherent system of humors and emphasis on the use of diet to balance the four "personalties": sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. The ingredient that appears in greater quantities in sixteenth-century recipes is sugar. Although by no means representative, cooking methods made it more accessible than it had been during

the Middle Ages. Coupled with various methods of pickling and salting, the need for new methods of preserving fruit, including jellies and jams as they are known today. Previously, fruits were preserved by drying or by making a vinegar and honey.

## LEEKS WITH ALMOND MILK, CINNAMON, AND ROSES

Almond milk, extracted from almonds using hot water, was popular in medieval and Renaissance cooking as a substitute for dairy products. It can still be used today for its flavor and for vegan cooking. The rosewater is typical of the Renaissance; it and other of roses are obtainable at Indian groceries.

### YIELD: 4 SIDE-DISH SERVINGS

whole almonds	1 cup	150 grams
sliced almonds	1 small handful	1 small handful
red wine	2 cups	500 milliliters
rosewater	1 teaspoon	5 milliliters
or	or	or
salt of roses	1 drop	1 drop
ground cinnamon	1 small pinch	1 small pinch
heavy cream	½ cup	125 milliliters
sugar	1 teaspoon	5 milliliters
1495, 1500s, 1600s, 1700s, 1800s, 1900s, 2000s, 2100s, 2200s, 2300s, 2400s, 2500s, 2600s, 2700s, 2800s, 2900s, 3000s, 3100s, 3200s, 3300s, 3400s, 3500s, 3600s, 3700s, 3800s, 3900s, 4000s, 4100s, 4200s, 4300s, 4400s, 4500s, 4600s, 4700s, 4800s, 4900s, 5000s, 5100s, 5200s, 5300s, 5400s, 5500s, 5600s, 5700s, 5800s, 5900s, 6000s, 6100s, 6200s, 6300s, 6400s, 6500s, 6600s, 6700s, 6800s, 6900s, 7000s, 7100s, 7200s, 7300s, 7400s, 7500s, 7600s, 7700s, 7800s, 7900s, 8000s, 8100s, 8200s, 8300s, 8400s, 8500s, 8600s, 8700s, 8800s, 8900s, 9000s, 9100s, 9200s, 9300s, 9400s, 9500s, 9600s, 9700s, 9800s, 9900s, 10000s	6 medium	6 medium
oil and butter	to taste	to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 300°F (178°C). Separately toast the whole almonds and sliced almonds in the oven for 15 minutes. Let cool. Set aside the sliced almonds. Grind the whole almonds in a food processor for 1 minute and put in a pot with the hot water, bring to a simmer and let steep for 15 minutes. Work through a fine-mesh strainer. Reserve the liquid and discard the almonds or grind them further with a mortar and pestle to use as a sauce thickener.
2. Add the rosewater, cinnamon, cream, and sugar to the almond milk. Adjust the seasonings.
3. Spread the leeks in an oval baking dish just large enough to hold them and pour over the almond milk. Bake until tender, about 25 minutes. Sprinkle over the sliced almonds and serve.

In the seventeenth century, French cooking began to diverge from that of the rest of Europe as new aesthetic standards with criteria that are much the same as those of today.

Especially important to sauce-making was the notion that food should taste of itself. Spices that disguised natural flavors were gradually abandoned. Sauces began to concentrate and emphasize the flavor of a particular dish rather than assert its distinctness. Barbara Wheaton, in her book *Flavoring the Past*, discusses how cooking over the centuries has graduated from one pole to another on an aesthetic spectrum:

Cooks and diners have long argued over whether the best cooking makes food "taste of itself" or transforms ingredients into something new and unrecognizable. To satisfy its adherents, food that tastes of itself should be locally produced and/or season, prepared at the peak of its natural ripeness, in constant, unseasoned food is a compound of the rare, exotic, and the difficult, made from ingredients belonging to other places and seasons and produced by techniques that require special skills or equipment. From the sixteenth century onward, both points of view have had persuasive supporters; they are the extremes to which the pendulum swings. In the late sixteenth century, the early eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century the measurements usually prevailed; at other times the palate has had the upper hand. At present two parts of our society are pursuing separate paths: traditional cooks and diners interested in fine cooking emphasize recognizable ingredients, food technologies and the mass market are more interested in the final combination of flavors. Ironically, today the simplest ingredients are likely to be more expensive. Most of us would not recognize many of the ingredients prevalent in processed foods. How many of us can differentiate, with eye, nose, or palate, among hydrolyzed vegetable protein, glutamic acid, and BHA? Food technologists claim that they can synthesize the flavors of our familiar foods, transmuting, for example, leucodiolol into protein into lactone. Analogously, the chefs and connoisseurs who avoid the seventeenth-century diet contrived to simulate it by clever deception. The plates of sugar "foss" at the reception for Elizabeth of Austria exemplify this point of view. There, as now, the willful suspension of disbelief on the part of the diner is essential.

The most obvious manifestation of this shift from one end of the aesthetic spectrum to the other was the complete abandonment of certain families of spices (pepper, saffron, galbanum, and others) and a traditional use of modern spices, especially pepper, which was less likely to distort the natural flavor of foods.



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