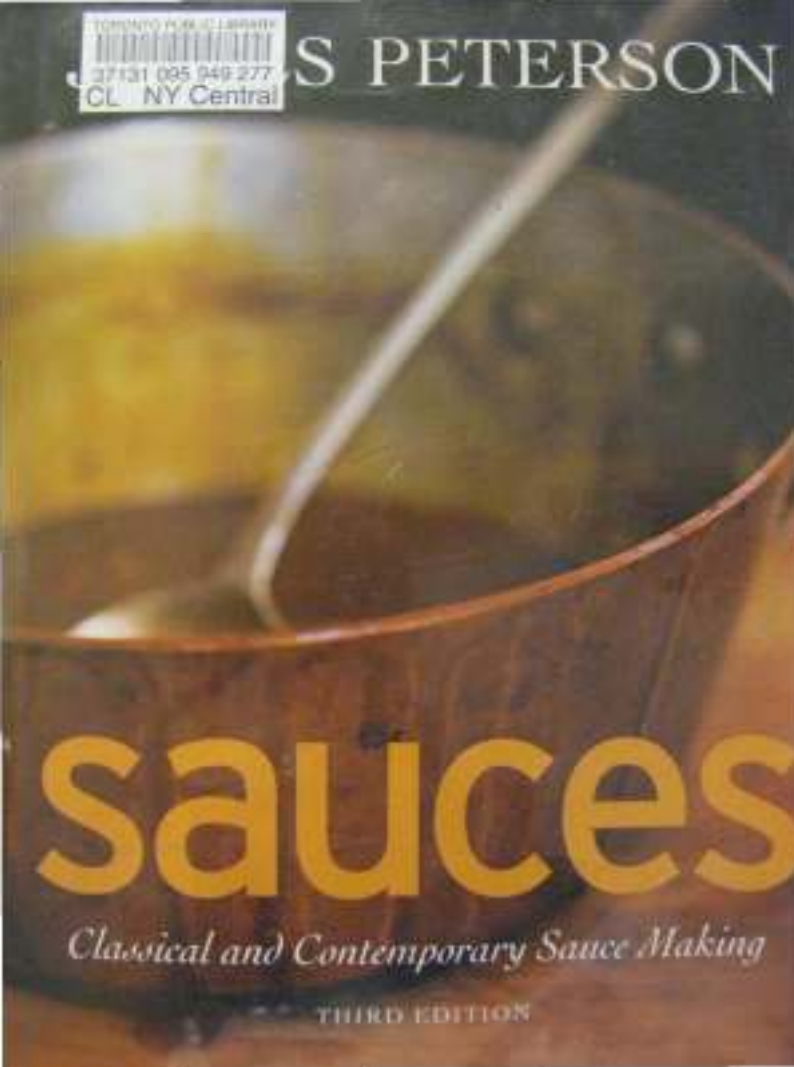


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sauces

Classical and Contemporary Sauce Making

THIRD EDITION

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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 *saute* of cooking — and of other creative arts — is that creation never takes place in the context of a tradition and set of aesthetic values. As 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 inconsistency and excess.

Many chefs have been (and some still are) stifled 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 upset if I deviated 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 cuisine. 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 appealing to the modern reader, 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 garum that has taken on an unpleasant odor or too salty a taste, implying that there were criteria for garum. We can only guess how it tasted; the Chinese modern equivalent is probably the fermented fish sauce used in Southeast Asian cooking (except in Thailand, and even in Vietnam, just 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 roasts surprisingly well 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 (piscus). Saucers were sometimes prepared with wine that had been cooked down (*defrutum*) to its intense sticky state.

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 rue. Cook 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 (such minor substances used today to keep vegetables green). Drain and chop finely. With a mortar and pestle, grind together pepper, sausage, vinegar, onion, Mustard 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 rue, 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 Moslems more inviting and more generous to 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 *elixir* concoctions made of unripe grapes and sometimes crab apples and vinegar 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.

Vinegar and vinegar are distinctly sour ingredients, and the Persians 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 steaks 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 Fere*) are filled with recipes for soups and *ragouts* 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 mineral with vinegar, 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 (*tranchets*) 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 *tranchets*. 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.

Roast de Capelle. 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 sautéed almonds and cinnamon in leaf broth. Grind them and strain them with leaf bundles and mix into the chicken pieces with this liquid. Add onions, ginger, cloves, grains of paradise [*Wormseed* (*Wormseed*)]. The sauce should be well broiled.

Roast Gygis. Cut the chicken or meat being prepared into pieces. Cook the pieces in leaf with finely chopped parsley and onions. Take leaves, lightly mixed 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 verjus.

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, dried in a coffee grinder	1 tablespoon	15 milliliters
ground cloves	2 tablespoons	30 milliliters
medial galangal (also called lemongrass)	1 tablespoon	15 milliliters

Put 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 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 need—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, skinned	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 milliliters
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 (page 82)	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 result is new methods of preserving fruit, including jellies and jams as they are known today. Previously, fruits were preserved by drying or by storage in 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, 1795, 1895, 1995, 2095, 2195, 2295, 2395, 2495, 2595, 2695, 2795, 2895, 2995, 3095, 3195, 3295, 3395, 3495, 3595, 3695, 3795, 3895, 3995, 4095, 4195, 4295, 4395, 4495, 4595, 4695, 4795, 4895, 4995, 5095, 5195, 5295, 5395, 5495, 5595, 5695, 5795, 5895, 5995, 6095, 6195, 6295, 6395, 6495, 6595, 6695, 6795, 6895, 6995, 7095, 7195, 7295, 7395, 7495, 7595, 7695, 7795, 7895, 7995, 8095, 8195, 8295, 8395, 8495, 8595, 8695, 8795, 8895, 8995, 9095, 9195, 9295, 9395, 9495, 9595, 9695, 9795, 9895, 9995	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 pendulum 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, glutamate, and BHA? Food technologists claim that they can synthesize the flavors of our familiar foods, transmuting, for example, leucovorin into bacon. 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 selling 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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