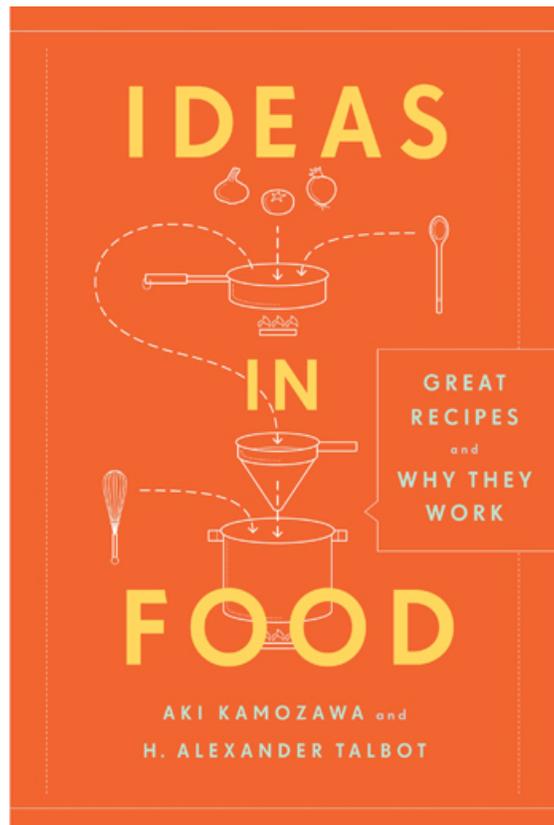


Ideas for Dinner

Ideas in Food: Great Recipes and Why They Work

by Drew Lazor

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MANY PROFESSIONAL CHEFS WHO GO THE COOKBOOK ROUTE RELY ON THEIR TEXTS TO PROVE just how unprofessional they're capable of being, the starched-white formality of the restaurant kitchen shunned in favor of rolled-up sweater sleeves, carefree pinches of coarse sea salt (it's rustic!) and more familial whimsy than a Hallmark Channel holiday movie marathon. *Ideas in Food: Great Recipes and Why They Work* (Clarkson Potter, Dec. 28) is a diametric response to this school of culinary authorship. It's the print realization of the blog Ideas in Food (ideasinfood.com), written by H. Alexander Talbot and Aki Kamozawa, Levittown-based chefs known for approaching dishes with the chem-lab exactitude some have come to associate with the so-called "molecular" cooking realm.

"The crux of our philosophy in and out of the kitchen is that there's always something more to learn. This book describes many of the things we've discovered thus far," they explain, those discoveries doubling as didactic (and sometimes dry) breakdowns in the book's introductory section, designed for amateur cooks. From the moment Talbot and Kamozawa reveal that they season their dishes "at a level of 0.5 percent of the weight of what we are cooking," it's clear that *Ideas in Food* is not a typical rainy-Sunday, chef-in-repose cookbook — they're as much students of science as they are stove

jockeys, explaining everything from the causes of sublimation (aka freezer burn) to the myofibrillar breakdown that takes place during a meat brine in indomitable detail.

The chefs' shared rationale is that a curious home cook should understand all there is to understand about even the simplest tasks — for example, scrambled eggs are something most can pull off, but few of us have a grasp on the discrepancy in coagulation temperatures between whites and yolks. Good thing there's an entire egg chapter.

Ideas in Food's back end, designed for the authors' professional peers, goes next-next-level, breaking down the complex techniques surrounding the use of materials like xanthan gum ("my first hydrocolloid") and methylcellulose. It's likely this section will prove impenetrable for all but the most academic home cooks, since it's not written for them anyhow. You're better off pursuing the straightforward comfort-food-style recipes — buttermilk biscuits, mac 'n' cheese (learn why they use evaporated milk), BBQ rigatoni, fried chicken (OK, cold-smoked fried chicken) — that populate the book's first half.

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