

Female Chefs Edge Up

by Natalie Danford

Two of the season's hottest cookbooks come from female restaurateurs

Cookbooks by working chefs who let the cat out of the toque and reveal restaurant recipes now form their own simmering subgenre. Dozens of culinary celebrities, like Nobuyuki Matsuhisa of New York's Nobu (*Nobu: The Cookbook*, Kodansha, 2001) and Thomas Keller of Napa Valley's French Laundry (*The French Laundry Cookbook*, Artisan, 2000) have produced award-winning books with solid sales. While it may come as no surprise that most of these authors are men, this fall marks the first season that women, who now make up about 15% of executive chefs, are gaining ground in high-end cookbooks. Two of the season's most prominent titles—*The Zuni Café Cookbook* by Judy Rodgers (Norton, Sept.) and *The Anatomy of a Dish* by Diane Forley with Catherine Young (Artisan, Nov.)—are the work of women who are restaurant chef/owners.

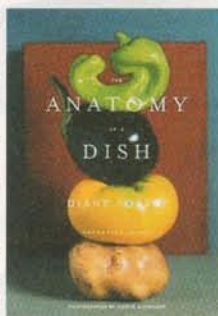
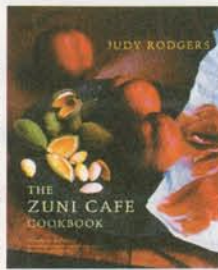
Rodgers has been winning accolades for her stylish blend of Mediterranean and California cuisine since she became chef at San Francisco's Zuni Café in 1987, but *The Zuni Café Cookbook* is her first book. "This is a person who waited a long time before she felt she had anything to say," Norton v-p and senior editor Maria Guarnaschelli said. Rodgers clearly had plenty to say during her six-week stint as a guest columnist in the "Dining In, Dining Out" section for the *New York Times* that ended September 4. To publicize the book, which has a first printing of close to 100,000 copies, Rodgers will appear on *Today* on October 4 and will cook on two segments of *Martha Stewart Living*, aired nationally on CBS. "We're not going to have her do a whistle-stop tour, though," said Guarnaschelli. "That's exhausting and not very productive."

"Every year, a few books build up a tremendous head of steam before publication through a combination of word of mouth and advance press," noted Nach Waxman, owner of New York City's culinary bookstore Kitchen Arts and Letters. "The Judy Rodgers book is one of those." Waxman said he expects to sell 200 to 300

copies at his 850-sq.-ft. store.

While *The Zuni Café Cookbook* is a conventional collection of recipes, Forley's *The Anatomy of a Dish* is both a botanical study and a compendium of recipes by the chef and founder (and now co-owner with her husband, chef Michael Otsuka) of New York City's Verbena. Like *Think Like a Chef* (Clarkson Potter, 2000) by chef Tom Colicchio of Gramercy Tavern and Craft and *The Elements of Taste* by then Lespinasse chef Gray Kunz and Peter Kaminsky (Little, Brown, 2001), Forley's book demonstrates how a working restaurant chef develops recipes. Artisan plans a 30,000-copy first printing and a 10-city author tour. Ellen Rose, owner of the Cook's Library, a culinary bookstore in Los Angeles, has placed an initial order for 45 copies, a relatively large number for her 900-sq.-ft. store. "People already have cookbooks. They want to know how things work," she explained.

Until now, women chefs who have written cookbooks have usually been pastry chefs laboring in what culinary professionals term the "pastry ghetto." Consider this: At the Culinary Institute of America, the country's premier culinary school, 30% of the total student body are women (up from 25% seven years ago), but women account for 70% of baking and pastry arts majors. Female pastry chefs have substantial track records, too. In 2001, Random House published *The Last Course* by Claudia Fleming—who was until recently pastry chef at New York's Gramercy Tavern—and there are now 20,000 copies in print. Gale Gand, co-owner and pastry chef at the Chicago restaurant Tru, has become a Clarkson Potter mainstay. Her 1999 collaboration with Rick Tramonto and Julia Moskin, *Butter Sugar Flour Eggs*, sold 32,000 copies, and her *Just a Bite* (with Moskin)



Executive chefs Judy Rodgers and Diane Forley have proven they can stand the heat.

has sold 37,000 copies since publication in 2001. Her latest, *Short and Sweet*, again with Moskin, is tentatively scheduled for spring 2004.

Though Forley and Rodgers aren't the first female chefs to publish cookbooks, they represent a new breed who are working chefs. Alice Waters, whose landmark restaurant, Chez Panisse, has spawned seven cookbooks (plus one for children), is certainly one of their forerunners, but Waters is better known for her dedication to organic farming and local produce than for her kitchen artistry. Lidia Bastianich owns New York's northern Italian favorite Felidia and hosts a cooking show, but her books focus on home cooking rather than allowing wannabes to taste the

restaurant chef experience.

"Earlier people like Barbara Kafka and Martha Stewart came from a slightly more housewifely, entertaining, catering direction," said Moskin, also coauthor with Patricia Yeo, executive chef at two Manhattan restaurants, AZ and Pazo, of *Patricia Yeo: Cooking From A to Z* (St. Martin's, Nov.).

With women chefs making this kind of progress in cookbook writing, can we hope one day to see a female Emeril Lagasse with a string of cookbooks, a highly rated television show and a clutch of successful restaurants? Right now, out of 67 chef-hosts listed on the Web site of television's Food Network, 28 are women. While that's not a bad bean count, most of the network's stars are still men. "The woman executive chef with the blockbuster book and the TV show and huge professional respect is yet to come," Moskin said. For his part, Nach Waxman of Kitchen Arts and Letters, suggested it may come down to a matter of taste: "I hope never to see another man, let alone a woman, carry on like Emeril Lagasse."