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Pickles, Pigs & Whiskey: Recipes From My Three Favorite Food Groups And Then Some



Synopsis

Not just another successful Southern chef, James Beard Award-winner John Currence is THE ambassador for Oxford, Mississippi. In his first book, he shares his rugged and fancy style of cooking through 130 delicious recipes, colorful personal stories, music pairings, and beautiful photography. Chef John Currence would rather punch you in the mouth with his fantastic flavors than poke you in the eye with fancy presentation. In his first cookbook, Currence gives you 130 recipes organized by 10 different techniques, such as Boiling/Simmering, Slathering, Pickling/Canning, Roasting/Braising, Muddling/Stirring, Brining/Smoking, and Baking/Spinning, just to name a few. John's fun-loving personality rings true throughout the book with his personal stories and history, and his one-of-a-kind recipes for Pickled Sweet Potatoes, Whole Grain Guinness Mustard, Deep South "Ramen" with a Fried Poached Egg, Rabbit Cacciatore, Smoked Endive, Fire-Roasted Cauliflower, and Kitchen Sink Cookie Ice Cream Sandwiches. Each recipe has a song pairing with it and the complete list can be downloaded at spotify.com. Over 100 documentary-style color photographs by photographer Angie Mosier complete this stunning look at the South. Pickles, Pigs, and Whiskey is at once irreverent, and at the same time a serious look at Southern food today. John's upbringing in New Orleans, time spent in his grandparent's garden, experience living in Western Europe, and schooling along the Eastern Seaboard all inform this volume of recipes that reflects where today's Southern culinary landscape is going. This book illustrates why Southern food is finally recognized as the driving force in the American culinary movement today.

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INTRODUCTION: If ever there was a book about common sense 'suthun' cookin' this is definitely it. John Currence is amiably intense, seriously playful, and humorously somber. John starts the show with his 'Acknowledgements' page which begins the fun. You will want to definitely read every word, especially being that he seemingly received his inspiration from changing the first diaper of the day. His good friend John T. Edge continues the fun with a little page called 'Foreplay' where I received the inspiration for the title of this review, and the 'Introduction to Johnny Snack' amps up the volume to perfect pitch. But things REALLY start getting serious when we hit the 'My Manifesto: How I Cook' page. It was here where I fell in love with John Currence. So much so, that I stalked him on Twitter, and friended him immediately. I have underlined just about every statement, every sentence, and to some degree I feel like John Currence is the guy I am SUPPOSED to be in the kitchen. One hand dishes up lard by the buckets, while the other hand smacks the chemical laden treats of the (page xx) standard American fare that is giving us obesity, and diabetes. His 'Ingredients' section is probably one of my favorites. But let's look at the book overall and see what Andrews McMeel Publishing, LLC has given us.

PHYSICAL COMPOSITION: Solid book, beautiful dust-cover. Binding is sewn and glued. I love sewn bindings because they tend to lay flat easier, and will not fall apart once the glue starts to vulcanize. Pages are thick, and semi-glossy which means you need to read it 'indoors' or the sun begins to blind you and the print turns 'white' in the glare. Definitely not a deal-breaker but it needs to be noted. Mr. Currence assures us that the pages were specifically selected to take a 'pen' or 'pencil' equally. I know my fountain pen glides effortlessly across the pages with NO bleed through. That being said I LOVE the page material.

CONTENT: Mr. Currence doesn't waste any time at all on non-essentials or personal epitomies. It is a book for chefs, or at the very least, very serious home cooks. There are some really nice vignettes, which should appeal to the coffee-table crowd but they are fewer between due to the sheer volume of 'recipes' (which has almost become an evil word these days in the shadow of 'Ratio').

MECHANICS: Grammatically everything works. I have found no punctuation errors, or mechanical mistakes at all.

GRAPHICS: Graphics and images are superb. Almost every recipe has a picture to go with it. Page economy is phenomenal as well, as opposed to Bouchon and other Thomal Keller works.

RECIPES: I havn't had a chance to cook from the book however, but everything looks superb. As an 'ex' bartender I can say chapter 1 brings back some of the 'old-school' mixes, with a twist and I can tell simply by looking they should be perfect. Of course what I am REAL sucker for is stuff you pickle, and the 'Pickling and Canning' chapter is right on the money. I am particularly excited to do the 'Tasso Ham' and the entire chapter of 'Roasting and Basting' which includes such things as 'Herb and Garlic Roasted Poulet Rouge' and definitely the 'Bourbon-Braised Pork Cheeks'.

OVERALL: This is an

amazing work, and was totally worth the wait. I pre-ordered the book some months ago and was told just a couple of weeks ago that the book has been pushed back to November, but happily the book showed up a lot sooner. I must say I am a complete fan of Mr. Currence, and would love someday to watch his kitchen in action. Following is what really won me over; 1. Enjoy Yourself 2. Make a drink 3. Listen to music 4. Read the recipe all the way through. This is exactly the way cooking should be. My only criticism is that Mr. Currence talks about how superior Lodge Cast Iron cookware is, but from what I can tell, it (the cookware) only gets two cameo's in the book. But that is a totally acceptable especially concerning the overwhelming weight of the entire book. Thanks Mr. Currence for a book I can really sink my teeth into.

I bought the book on because of the glowing reviews that oddly don't mention any favorite recipes and are obsessed with the weight of the paper and the full page color photos. reviews that talk about "spelling and grammar errors" as if we should hold that against the author of a southern cookbook? Anyway, I agree with all of them. The paper is very heavy, the book is very heavy and in true southern style, the "NOLA Oyster Stew" is heavy, Oh boy. My problem with the book and the thing omitted from the author's description is that this isn't a book for the down-home southern cook, and in fact, I'm not really sure who its for. Perhaps a collector of cookbooks? The problem with this recipe book, it doesn't have enough food in it. You can't make a meal of dark chicken stock, garlic infused olive oil, tomato jam and brown sugar black pepper bacon (or maybe you could, but that recipe certainly doesn't appear in this book.) What little star of the show main course food that does appear (which is maybe 30-40 real recipes at best) are usually overly complicated takes on southern classics that rather miss the point of southern cooking. Things like "deep south (pho)" "ramen" with fried then poached eggs" or "homemade shrimp and lobster corn-dogs" and just what is "country style pork pate"?" This book feels like it is about the pantry filler, more about the pickles than the pigs (more about ducks than pigs too). Don't get me wrong, this book would be great next thanksgiving if you feel the need to up your game. Almost every dish in here would make an excellent side dish or add in. What is a BBQ without a good chicken salad? And I'm sure that the "chicken skin cornbread" would compliment any proud dad's world famous chili. You may never make your pan seared chicken the same way once you pair it with an "english rosemary and pea risotto" and it never hurts to have a jar of "pickled Soy-shitaki mushrooms" on-hand, just in case. Oh, and BTW, if you like me bought this book hoping to have a little fun incorporating whiskey into your cooking, you can forget about that too. there are 10 chapters in this book including one on "slathers and spreadables" and yet, if you ignore the section on bartending (which I do) I think there

might be 3-5 actual liquor infused recipes. The author missed some amazing opportunities to include classics like a coq au vin or a whisky bbq sauce (which let's be honest is a glaring omission from a cookbook with whiskey and pork in the title and an entire section devoted to slathers, I mean really?) or even a nice beer or whiskey (beer and whiskey?) chili. My advice to the owners of this book is to read it thoroughly, pull out the various sauces, pickles, preserves, jams and jellies and use them to cook the simple southern food that you (hopefully) know how to make and if you are like me, a 20-something Texas man who thinks that campfires and stove tops are interchangeable heat sources in the culinary world, you should probably stay away from any books that mention the words "duck confit." So, to sum up I would give this book 4-5 stars if we had another dozen (or more) pork/whiskey recipes, a section on BBQ, a little more focus too (if you are going to do a section on slathers and sauces, include 2-3hotsauces a couple of amazing bbq sauces for instance, same with pickles, same with, well, you get the idea) a more complete table of contents, and didn't ignore the classics like Steak, BBQ Pork Ribs, Coq Au Vin and Chili(either that or just skip the gratuitous invocation of southern culture and call it something like John Currence's Cornucopia and be done with it).

I first saw this book in a local cooking store killing time before a meeting and was intrigued by the title. I gave it a quick flip through and found some recipes interesting enough to look it up on when I got home. The reviews were very positive so bought it. I have three criteria for buying a cookbook. The first is recipes that catch my attention and I want to try. Second are pictures showing the author's ideas on plating. My third criteria is stories talking to how the recipe came about. A bonus is a book that has recipes on how to make ingredients that are then used in other recipes. Like Sean Brook and Thomas Keller's cookbooks this does this well. Also like them John gives his opinions on various subjects in side notes that I find help me better understand how they think and how they got to their opinions. The pickles and whiskey parts are a lot like Sean Brook's book and deals with how to pickle things and cocktail recipes. Unlike the others, John gives music suggestions to play while cooking each recipe. Cute but none of the recipes can be completed during the playing of its song. The first recipe I tried was French onion soup recalibrated for sweet onions like Vidalia. It was spot on. The next one I tried was the hero stuffed trout. Easy and delish. I can't wait to do more exploring.

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