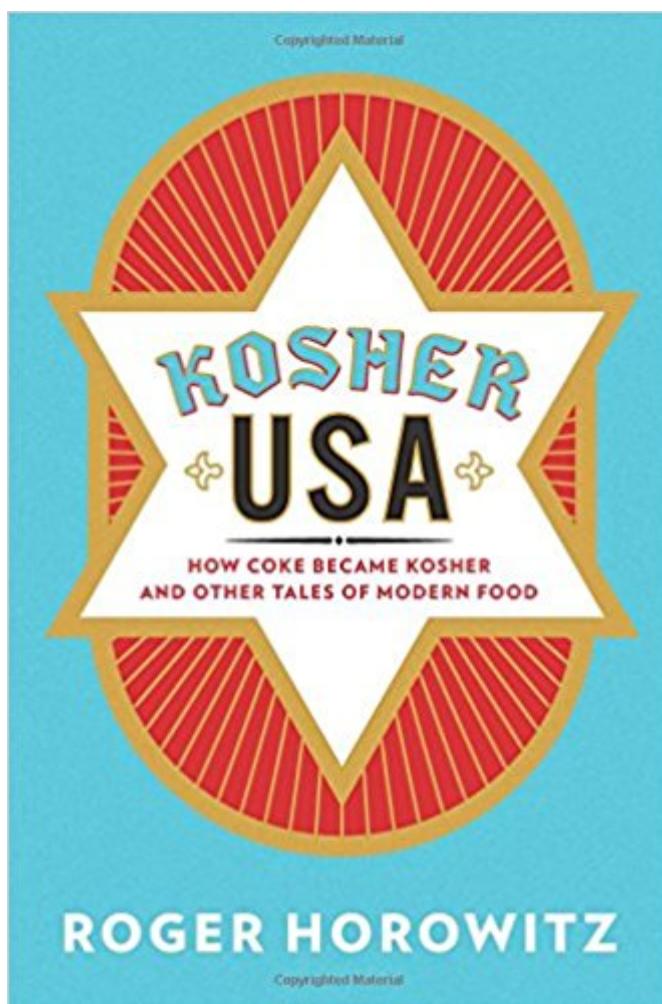


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Kosher USA: How Coke Became Kosher And Other Tales Of Modern Food (Arts And Traditions Of The Table: Perspectives On Culinary History)



Synopsis

Kosher USA follows the fascinating journey of kosher food through the modern industrial food system. It recounts how iconic products such as Coca-Cola and Jell-O tried to become kosher; the contentious debates among rabbis over the incorporation of modern science into Jewish law; how Manischewitz wine became the first kosher product to win over non-Jewish consumers (principally African Americans); the techniques used by Orthodox rabbinical organizations to embed kosher requirements into food manufacturing; and the difficulties encountered by kosher meat and other kosher foods that fell outside the American culinary consensus. Kosher USA is filled with big personalities, rare archival finds, and surprising influences: the Atlanta rabbi Tobias Geffen, who made Coke kosher; the lay chemist and kosher-certification pioneer Abraham Goldstein; the kosher-meat magnate Harry Kassel; and the animal-rights advocate Temple Grandin, a strong supporter of shechita, or Jewish slaughtering practice. By exploring the complex encounter between ancient religious principles and modern industrial methods, Kosher USA adds a significant chapter to the story of Judaism's interaction with non-Jewish cultures and the history of modern Jewish American life as well as American foodways.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed the author's anecdotes surrounding his own family's history with kosher foods, especially his very relatable tales about holiday gatherings, such as the Passover seder. And, of course, there's a wealth of surprising information about the origins and increasing selection of kosher foods

in America. Food historians and anyone with an interest in Jewish culture will find much to admire here.

The author explains key kashrut issues of the 20th century American Jewish community. As a baby-boomer I remembered discussions over the topics he covers. He explains and summarizes history and scientific matters really well.

This is a fascinating study of the inter-relations between Kosher certification and industrial food production in the U.S. It is interesting in itself, but also indirectly poses some most interesting questions about how the same issues Halal certification, about which there has been a big controversy in Australia. I recommended that the Halal food certifiers here purchase the book!

I've been working through Kosher USA, beginning with the introduction, then the conclusion, and then moving to each chapter, according to my interests. I've found it filled with interesting information, written in an engaging style, and opening my eyes not only to the topic of "kosher" but also to the variety of Jewish opinions on the topic. The concluding chapter was especially helpful as Horowitz sketched a broader historical sweep of Jewish ethics and how this related to attitudes toward religious practices. Since our library (the Pitts Theology Library, Emory U.) just mounted an exhibit of Haggadot, which included a case devoted to the matter of Rabbi Tobias Geffen declaring Coca-Cola kosher for Passover, I was especially interested in Horowitz' chapter on this topic (it turned out to be a much more complex matter than I'd thought and Horowitz' treatment is probably the most accurate to date). I would surely not have found this volume on my own or been so inspired to read it were it not for the fact that Rabbi Geffen's grandson, Rabbi David Geffen, established Pitts' first Haggadot Collection and saw to it that a copy of the book was given to me. This is a keeper!

"Kosher USA" is a fascinating, fast paced, in-depth read about what, on first blush, might seem to be of little interest to the general reader. In fact, it's a course in the: Sociology of the American Jewish Community, Chemistry, Jewish Ritual, Politics, Secular and Ethnic (Jewish) Law and American and American Jewish History. A unique view of the ups and downs of the American kosher food industry, with many twists and turns. Highly recommended to both the general reader and Jewish professional.

So I admit to bias: my great-grandfather, Abraham Goldstein, and my grandfather, George, feature prominently in Kosher USA. That aside, this is a highly readable book that includes significant information about the evolution of kosher certification in the United States. Interweaving his family history with that of kosher development, Roger Horowitz's highly researched work is a valuable addition to the story of kosher. I am enjoying it immensely. Avi Goldstein

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