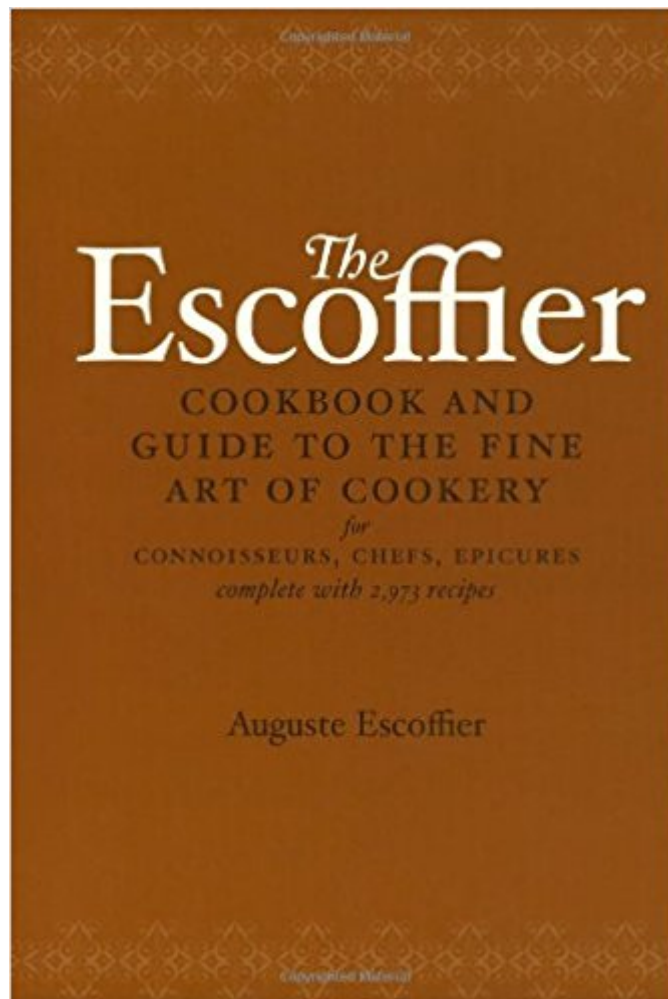


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# The Escoffier Cookbook And Guide To The Fine Art Of Cookery: For Connoisseurs, Chefs, Epicures Complete With 2973 Recipes



## Synopsis

An American translation of the definitive Guide Culinaire, the Escoffier Cookbook includes weights, measurements, quantities, and terms according to American usage. Features 2,973 recipes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I'm a Chef, and have borrowed copies of Escoffier's Le Guide Culinaire from friends whenever I need it. On a lark, I ran a search on Escoffier here at .com. I was stunned to find this book for the low cost of \$12 or so, knowing that every other copy I had seen cost \$60 or \$70. So I ordered it and paged through it. Well, it only prints 2300 or so of over 5000 recipes in Escoffier's treatise.

Admittedly, probably more than the home cook actually \*needs\*, but nowhere does the book say that it has been abridged. But, like many .com customers, I found myself in the position of thinking "but it'll cost me half the price of the book to send it back." So I wound up giving it to a friend who likes to cook, but doesn't need the "real thing." Suffice it to say that if you want the real Escoffier, you're still going to have to drop the \$60+ for the Van Nostrand Reinhold edition. Sorry, culinary students, you didn't luck up on a deal. ToqueBlanc

"The Escoffier Cookbook" is a heavily abridged American version of Auguste Escoffier's 1903 book "Guide Culinaire". It is a fascinating look at the art of professional European cookery at the beginning of the 20th century. However, to appreciate this book fully, it's important to understand exactly who it was written for. Escoffier's original guide was never for a second intended for the

home cook. Escoffier was a pioneer with respect to the education of professional chefs, and originally wrote this book for the use of those working in grand houses, in hotels, on ocean liners, and in restaurants who might not have had access to contemporary recipes. Accordingly, the original book does not attempt to teach basic cooking or food preparation techniques. The American translation does include some details on cooking techniques and utensils unfamiliar to the average American chef (such as poeleing, worth the cost of the book alone, and the old French form of braising), but even in the translation it is assumed that the reader is a trained, experienced chef. The recipes themselves are clear and simple to follow, but represent only a small subset of French cooking of the early 20th century. An earlier reviewer mentioned that there was no recipe for onion soup; this is true, but it should be understood that onion soup would never have been accepted by the class of restaurant patron Escoffier cooked for. Much of what has arrived on this side of the Atlantic as "French cooking" - dishes such as pot-au-feu, onion soup, and steak frites - is distinctly middle-class, and consequently would have been rejected by the clientele of quality restaurants of the time as being unspeakably boorish. Escoffier personally enjoyed bourgeois cooking, but as an astute, intelligent businessman he provided the haute cuisine his clients demanded. One interesting difference between modern cooking and the cooking featured in this book is that Escoffier uses few spices, and indeed declaims on the foolishness of using large amounts of spices in meat dishes. This appears bizarre from our vantage point, but Escoffier had sound economic reasons for his proscriptions. Most diners of the time grew up in the days before refrigeration, when old deteriorating meat was heavily spiced to make it palatable. Fresh, unspiced meat was a sign of the highest quality. The association between strong spices and poor quality was powerful enough to survive long into the 20th century, as any reader of a 1950s American cookbook can attest. As for the recipes themselves, I doubt that many of them could be prepared by the North American home cook. Most of us cannot afford (if we can even find) foie gras, truffles, or capons, and few have espagnole sauce or fish fumet available at all times. However, many recipes can be adapted for the modern cook - using ceps or porcini mushrooms for truffles, for instance - and those that can be prepared really are delicious.

'The Escoffier Cookbook' is an English translation of the 'Guide Culinaire' by the renowned French chef, Auguste Escoffier, the most important figure in modern professional French culinary practice. One may argue that Antonin Careme is more important simply because Careme influenced Escoffier and wrote many books on culinary technique, but I suspect every culinary professional reads Escoffier today and few outside academic circles read Careme's original works. One of the

most reliable symptoms of Escoffier's importance can be found in the first essay of Michael Ruhlman's 'The Soul of a Chef' dealing with the Certified Master Chef examination given at the Culinary Institute of America. Whenever the candidates were presented with a problem in an unfamiliar area and had the night to consider the problem, they consulted Escoffier for their preparation. This is because most of the situations in the problems came straight from the practice defined by Escoffier a 100 years ago. For these and many more reasons, this book is THE standard by which all French culinary issues should be judged. Therefore, my review is less on why this is a good book and more on why you should pay attention to it if you are serious about cooking. For starters, this 920 page book with 2,973 recipes lists for about \$20. Admittedly, the text describing many of those recipes is pretty terse, being based on techniques from one or more earlier recipes. Therefore, you must be committed to really getting involved with this book and mining it for its riches rather than expecting to make a quick search for a particular recipe you can copy or scan at the library on the way home. Of course, if you are already a fairly experienced chef, many of the recipes suggestions are all you need to follow up with a good improvisation based on techniques at your fingertips. The very first thing you learn from this book is that professional French culinary doctrine was concerned about lightness, using fresh ingredients, and eliminating excess fat a century ago. This is not an invention of modern nutritionists and Alice Waters. The next most important lesson is less surprising. This is the importance of sauces in French cuisine and therefore, the importance of stocks, fonds, consommés, essences, and glazes. James Peterson's great book, 'Sauces' may be just a bit more accessible to modern readers, but this is the book from which he got all his material. Stocks, sauces, and many other basics are covered in 'Part I Fundamental Elements of Cooking'. These 135 pages should be read from front to back by anyone who is remotely serious in doing good cooking and adapting the ability to improvise with food. Readers like myself who are impressed by Alton Brown's footwork with details about cooking technique will be happy to discover that the French like Escoffier knew a thing or two about careful observation and measuring, as when Escoffier discusses temperatures of various frying media such as butter, various animal fats, and vegetable oils. Next comes 'Part II Recipes and Methods of Procedure', organized by how various dishes typically appear on standard menus. This means chapters on: Appetizers Eggs Soups Fish and Seafood Relishes and Entrees of Meats Poultry and Game Roasts and Salads Vegetables and Starchy Foods Appetizers and Snacks Desserts and Sweets. A quick look at the egg chapter shows 192 egg recipes, almost as many as in my favorite book dedicated entirely to egg recipes. There are 22 recipes dedicated entirely to poaching. These counts just suggest the depth to which Escoffier covers this subject, as many recipes will refer to one or more recipes in other parts of the book, as

we find for 'Careme Hard-Boiled Eggs' which involve a timbale crust and a Nantua sauce from other chapters. One small symptom of how 'modern' Escoffier is with his recipes is in his recipe for scrambled eggs. Many authorities, including James Beard, will insist on scrambled eggs being done in a water bath (bain-marie). Escoffier allows that it can be done on direct heat, as long as the cook is especially careful with using only moderate heat. One thing you may have noticed from some of my quotes is that you will need or expect to acquire knowledge of basic French cooking terms to understand this book, even in this excellent English translation. Learning the term 'relevés' will take you deep into the history of French cuisine and how that contrasts with the Russian style of service popularized in France by Antonin Careme. The Russian style of one course following another became so popular that today we are inclined to think that is a French invention. Not so! By the way, entrees are dishes based on tender cuts of meat and relevés are braised, poached, or roasted dishes done with less tender cuts of meat. You will not be able to dip into a recipe at random in this book without a firm handle on terms such as poach, braise, sautee, croquette, blanch, julienne, and several other terms. This is the one book I believe a food lover should unequivocally have on their bookshelves. Cook all you want from Saint Julia's 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking', but come to Escoffier to really understand the underpinnings of French culinary practice.

This book, published in the 1890s, is an excellent resource for those who aspire to cook great french food. Too often cookbook authors insult readers by leaving out key steps for fear that they may be 'too complicated' or call for veal stock when chefs use demi-glace. This book is complicated, poorly organized and difficult, but it WILL tell you the proper way to make french sauces (an incredible section, and well worth the price of the book in itself) and how best to lard a joint of beef. Treat yourself and buy this book to learn the proper way to prepare traditional french cuisine.

Please note that this is an abridged version of Escoffier's famous Le Guide Culinaire. If you want the translated to English COMPLETE version buy the Cracknell- and Kaufmann-edited version instead (click link).<sup>^</sup> Escoffier

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