

Kitchen Alchemy

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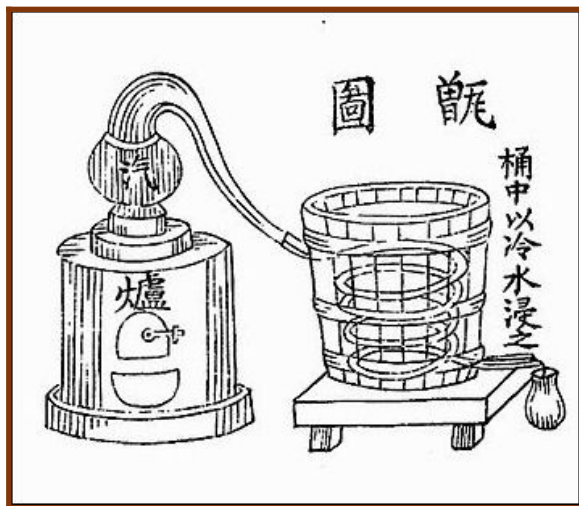
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Dedicated to
the memory of
Anthony Bourdain,
who always thought about
food in context

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Part I

Speculative

Cooking as Alchemy

Children are easily amused. Quotidian experiences are transformed, in their eyes, into magical events. A spell prevents oil and water from mixing. Some dark incantation creates explosions from vinegar and baking soda. These examples are common in elementary school science classes. For adults, the same reactions may no longer hold that sense of wonder, but the memory remains. Perhaps it is only nostalgia, but I seem to rediscover this magic everyday in the kitchen.

A clear oil becomes a white-yellowish thick cream. Green, translucent alcohol turns opaque and milky white with a slightly oily texture. Bright orange powder mixed with alkalized water turns blood red. These mutations, surprising and exciting every time, are nothing short of magic. They are not magic because the chef doesn't understand what is happening, but because a radically different property emerges from the ingredients that compose it. And yet, this reaction is not limited to the substantial quality of an ingredient or food. These visual changes are just one sign of an alteration in the taste and potential of an ingredient.

The art of cooking is a topic of debate. Some argue that it is not an art at all. Chefs and food writers have adopted the commonplace of comparing cooking to science. Alton Brown, host of *Good Eats* (one of the longest running food programs of all-time), digs into the molecular structure of ingredients to examine how they react with each other and transform when cooked. He contends: "Everything in food is science. The only subjective part is when you eat it."¹ Brown drew inspiration from Harold McGee, who literally wrote the book on the field of "food science," *Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*. Although he often asserts that scientific

investigation of food takes nothing away from the experience of eating it, McGee motivated a generation of food professionals to look beyond their senses into the world of equations and diagrams.

My contention is that this view not only marginalizes the irreducibly magical experience of preparing and consuming food, but that it also obfuscates the nature of culinary creation for the everyday cook. Instead of acknowledging the magic impetus of scientific inquiry, it privileges chemical abstractions to describe the subjective experiences of flavor and joy. In effect, it limits the secrets of cooking to an elite group of professionals. Think you know how to make something? Alton Brown will tell you that you don't, and he'll have an equation to prove it! And yet, if the metric is the ability to produce world-class cuisine, food science has shockingly low credibility. Not one world famous chef has contributed a compelling dish to their cuisine as a result of some algebraic formula. In fact, chefs frequently make reference to the phenomenological aspect of food preparation. Famed French chef Jacques Pepin, who I will return to again, insists that cooking is an embodied, not intellectual, act: "Great cooking favors the prepared hands."

How, then, are we to view the chef? Is she truly a scientist or an artist? A craftsman or a magician? Just because our experience of food is magical doesn't mean that it is unexplainable. The everyday cook gets better by honing the skills of preparation, combination, and transformation. One must learn how the ingredients respond in different situations in order to maximize and control their potential. This type of learning doesn't require diagrams and formulas, but just a good memory. Watching, hearing, smelling, feeling, and tasting a meal throughout its stages of preparation allows one to chart its transformations. This way, one

cultivates a sense of the ingredient itself, not its atomic nature. This form of experimentation resembles a different kind of science, one infused with magic and predecessor to modern chemistry. That science is alchemy.

The chef is an alchemist.

Alchemy, in the Western world, is generally thought of as a misguided and less rigorous precursor to modern chemistry. Many of the founders of chemistry actually identified themselves as alchemists. Even Isaac Newton, famous for his discoveries in physics, wrote more on alchemy than any other subject. Alchemy, however, has a longer history. For the past four millennia, it has been practiced in all parts of the world in some form or another. The all-important invention of gunpowder was done by Chinese alchemists in the ninth century. Despite modern pronouncements to the contrary, alchemical research was an effective blend of magical insight, scientific method, and technical experimentation.

The practice of alchemy resembles the art of cooking. Alchemists believed that all matter consisted of vibrations, a view that current quantum physicists continue to hold. The goal of alchemy is to raise the vibrations.² If these vibrations could be raised to a higher degree, the matter would become more divine, or diabolic, as in the case of a Fra Diavolo. In its most modest instances, raising vibrations would take the form of distilling herbs in order to make them more potent. Distilled organic solutions had various purported effects depending on the ingredients, but many were used medicinally.

The techniques of reducing, distilling, mixing, heating, straining, and so many more are common to both the modern cook and the alchemist. Despite the technical similarity, the modern cook doesn't possess the same phenomenological acumen. She has lost the ability to discern the

essential forms of culinary transformations amid a bombardment of food science dogma, “quick” recipes, frozen dinners, and one-use appliances. Alchemical methods may not be as useful as chemistry when it comes to mass-producing aerosolized oven cleaner, but it is the most effective means of improving your culinary sense regardless of your culinary experience. With a good culinary sense, you can cook anything.



Instructions for Use

Television food personalities and recipe writers often rely on the language of technique, but have no understanding of *techne*, the art that underlies any technical manipulation of objects. Technique for the Alton Browns of the world is solely a means to an end. It is an instrument for the efficient production of “good eats.” But a dish, especially one cultivated and attended to in a technical way, is always more than itself, i.e., more than “good eats.” Moreover, cooking has the power to transform oneself as much as it does the dish. Culinary technique, in this way, is not just the assembly of components to serve a specific function, but the mingling of elements that catalyze unexpected outcomes.

Some philosophers, notably Gilbert Simondon, have defended this conception of technique by drawing on cybernetic theory and examples of post-industrial machines. These philosophers forget where the blinking lights of their smoking factories comes from. The fate of humankind did not always involve this technology. Humans were originally the default species, lacking any unique virtue or talent, because they were forgotten by the god who was supposed to give them one, Epimethius. It was necessary for his brother, Prometheus, to steal fire (*techne*) from the gods and deliver it to humanity. This fire, or what is said in some versions to be a tool for making fire, gave humankind their unique talent: technique.

Despite its accidental origins, technicity has come to define human nature more closely than anything else. Even non-technical aspects of the human are sometimes explained in technical terms, like the evolution of speech organs that allowed for language, which provides a mechanical explanation for something that was formerly believed to be an innate quality of

human reason. Technicity is, or stands in for, humanity's essential propriety. But in what way are we twenty-first century humans to understand a notion of technicity originating in the stone age? It clearly does not invoke the technology of the high-impact particle accelerator. Yet it may not be as incomprehensible as it may first seem.

Fire, or a tool for making fire, is indeed an ancient technique, but this was not the first *techné* given to humankind. Rather, the primordial technique was the *form*, not the *content*, of Prometheus' gift. To carry the fire down from Olympus, Prometheus used a giant fennel stalk. The charred stalk with its arresting aroma transfixed the first humans to encounter it. They gobbled down the fennel, forgetting all about the enticing but painful light that once came from one end of it. Later, when they would make their own fires, it would be for the sole purpose, at first, of charring fennel stalks. Thus, the original (meta-)technique that made possible and inspired all future technology was a culinary technique.



It goes without saying, and has already been said in other ways, that this technique changed humanity as much as it did the fennel stalk. Technique, when practiced attentively, always transforms its practitioner. Repeated technique congeals on a person's body like a new organ. Through repetition, this organ becomes more precise in its function, like the muscle that

flips a tortilla on the *plancha* without utensil or the teeth that precisely measure the firmness of pasta. In cooking more than any other domain, the essence of humanity (i.e. its technicity) manifests itself. This insight is not lost on great chefs, as evidenced by Jacques Pepin's untimely advice:

I tell a student that the most important class you can take is technique. A great chef is first a great technician. If you are a jeweler, or a surgeon or a cook, you have to know the trade in your hand. You have to learn the process. You learn it through endless repetition until it belongs to you.

Technique is self-transformation in two senses. It allows one to transform what one wishes (the dish, a skill, an organ), but it also transforms the self in unexpected ways. As twentieth-century alchemist Frater Albertus notes, "If one has not undergone the alchemy of the inner self, or transcendental Alchemy, as it has been termed, he will find it extremely difficult to obtain results in his practical laboratory experimentation. He may produce things he knows nothing about, consequently passing them up as worthless."³ In other words, if you do not change along with your technique, you will gain nothing. Knowledge grows in tandem with your palate. Culinary technique is first and foremost an alchemical practice, transforming you as much as it does the dish.

Alchemical practice traditionally took place in three phases: preparation, explication, and transformation. The preparation phase involved gathering the elements and readying them to be

acted on by some process (e.g. infusing a liquid with an herb). Explication was the processing of the prepared element, which literally unfolded or enhanced its inherent qualities (e.g. distilling an infused liquid). The final phase was the ultimate explication of the element, which created a radically different element (or element with radically different properties). The transformed element would often attain some new property (e.g. a medicinal serum) that could only emerge after the first two phases.

This book organizes culinary techniques according to the three alchemical phases. Each recipe not only embodies the process of preparation, explication, or transformation, but also demonstrates a fundamental culinary technique that can be applied to a myriad of dishes from any cuisine. In this way, one need not make the exact recipe described for one to make use of the technique. The recipes are ephemeral, though delicious, placeholders that can be jettisoned as soon as the technique itself is acquired. It is recommended that beginning cooks follow the recipes closely, at least the first one or two times.

Since this cookbook is not ordered in typical ways, you do not need to read the recipes in order. Some later recipes will refer back to techniques described in earlier recipes, but one can easily refer to the relevant step in the previous recipe without having to cook that particular dish. Think of this book as a catalog of spells or a toolbox for engineering new organs. Make use of what you can and do not worry about the rest. Most of all, observe your technique more closely than you do the recipe instructions. Good technique, unlike a recipe, can save even the most hopeless of kitchen disasters.

Gastronomy as Ethics, Ethics as Gastronomy

Observing how ingredients transform throughout the cooking process requires a certain amount of attentive care. It requires a kind of care that respects the alterity of the ingredient, its ability to surprise us. This element of surprise is very common in the kitchen. The heat of a pepper, sourness of a lime, and pungency of a garlic clove are all variable. An oven has unpredictable hot and cold spots. One must learn to be aware of these individual variations and accommodate one's cooking style or recipe for them.

There is an essentially ethical relationship between the cook and cooked. *Ethics* should be understood in its original Greek sense (*ethos*) of customs, habits, and dispositions, as well as in its coincidentally culinary valence, manners. One must become attentive to the unique being of an individual ingredient in order to properly utilize it. As a chef, you may wish to use the ingredient in the same way on multiple occasions, but to produce the same result, you must take care of the individual. You must cultivate a practical sense, or what Aristotle would call *phronesis*, for the uniqueness of the mushroom, block of tofu, or egg you wish to cook with.

What does an ethical relationship with food mean? It means treating each ingredient as an individual that can respond uniquely to your demands, rather than as an object that will mechanically reproduce the same reaction every time. The other is capable of responding in a way that surprises us and teaches us something about the other at the same time that we learn something about ourselves. The other is objectified by a hand that wishes only to provoke a desired reaction from it (such as texture or flavor). For many, being a chef means self-mastery, i.e., control over oneself, one's technique, and one's ingredients. This culinary style objectifies

the ingredient. It posits that the chef can only become master (i.e. subject) through violently claiming himself as such over-against some slave (i.e. object).

The difference between subject and object is established through interiorization: the subject interiorizes the other, the chef interiorizes the ingredient, thus making *him/her* an *it*, an object. Interiorization can happen through language. A word, exiting or entering one's mouth, generalizes for an entire group of unique individuals. In the same way, food is consumed as fuel or bio-energy or any other metaphorizing abstraction that negates the radical alterity of that ingredient in that dish at that time.

Perhaps this sounds like panpsychic, hippie nonsense you'd hear at the local farmer's market, but professional chefs, when asked, can recall an extraordinary meal, maybe enjoyed decades prior, with detailed fondness. This sort of culinary memory doesn't require any skill, just attentive care. Many of the world's top chefs have stepped out of the kitchen to deliver this exact message to the masses in television series such as *Mind of a Chef*, *Chef's Table*, and *Ugly Delicious*. They scorn the idea of precise (read: molecular) cooking and, instead, privilege the sight, sound, smell, taste, and feel of the dish throughout its process of transformation. René Redzepi, famed Danish chef and owner of *Noma*, advocates for an intimacy with not just the ingredient in transformation, but the ingredient in its natural context: "If you see how a plant grows and you taste it *in situ* you have a perfect example of how it should taste on the plate."⁴ This proximity to and respect for the ingredient is entirely lost on a food personality like Alton Brown.

The interiorization of the ingredient does violence to it, but, to a certain extent, this violence is unavoidable. French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in recognizing the ethical

imperative to “eat well” (*bien manger*) and respect the ingredient, noted the paradoxical counter-demand that one must nevertheless “really eat” (*bien manger*). In other words, a complete respect for the uniqueness of the ingredient would require that one not destroy it by consuming it. One cannot abide by this imperative, however, without destroying oneself. Thus, some amount of violence is always implied in eating. In order to eat well (in both the Stoic and Epicurean senses), Derrida concluded that one should do the minimum amount of violence possible.

One cannot speak of food and violence without raising the issue of animal consumption. More than 56 billion farmed animals are put to death each year. Many are not bothered by this figure because the victims are only animals and, as German thinker Martin Heidegger would say, are not capable of *dying*, but only *perishing*. Yet the view that animals are an intrinsically less valuable form of life is one that has been socially constructed and historically sedimented in Western thought since its inception. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida uncovered the long history of the objectification of the animal in Western philosophy. This tradition continues today, he claimed, in fields like zoology, ethology, biology, genetics, and all other forms of scientific knowledge “which remain inseparable from *techniques* of intervention *into* their object.”⁵ To be precise, the problem is that these fields objectify *prima facie* the individuals that populate their field of study, thus making any ethical relationship with those individuals impossible. Wouldn’t food science belong in this list?

In food science, an ingredient becomes an object or, more specifically, a molecular-chemical compound that can be analyzed and manipulated. Within industrial animal agriculture, animals are viewed precisely in this way. Take, for instance, certain species of farm raised pigs. Some will never live normal lives again. Selective breeding and genetic manipulation have

increased their rate of weight gain to such an extraordinary amount that the pigs will suffocate under their own mass if they live past their early (in terms of their overall lifespan) harvest date. Moreover, they can only reproduce artificially. The species has been, for all intents and purposes, exterminated.

The political resonances of this culinary arrangement should be evident. It is a form of violence that one would not hesitate to call “genocide” if it were exercised on humans. Nevertheless, one finds the same mechanism of exclusion operative in human genocides. The dehumanization of marginalized populations in order to justify their extermination is, quite literally, an ancient tactic. The theoretical foundation of this kind of violence is the paradoxical belief that one can be both living and an object or, in more transparent terms, like an animal. It is incisively this alimentary violence that Black activist and author bell hooks gestures at when discussing the implications of racism in her essay “Eating the Other.”⁶

What, then, is the minimal violence when it comes to food? This question may be impossible to answer, but a tangential question is not: What is avoidable violence when it comes to food? For that vast majority of people, consuming animals purely for personal preference is avoidable violence. Choosing to not consume animal meat is not only a good ethical decision, but a good gastronomic decision as well. For it is the attentive care toward the ingredient that allows one to elevate its role in the dish. Gastronomy must be practiced as an ethics, but, for this to be possible, ethics must become gastronomy.

For these reasons, the following recipes are strictly vegetarian or vegan.

The Categorical Imperative (Eat Your Mistakes)

In 1788, German philosopher Immanuel Kant published *Critique of Practical Reason*, which, he believed at the time, completed his systematic philosophy. The *Critique* was a treatise on morality. Not the kind that proscribes the right and discourages the wrong, but a radically new kind of moral philosophy. Instead of tenets to live by, Kant described how one can know if a particular maxim is moral or not. In this way, his moral philosophy could be applied to any situation, because it concerned the conditions of the ethical decision, rather than the decision itself. This highly abstract thought was distilled into one supreme maxim, which he called the Categorical Imperative.

“Act in such a way that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation.”

This maxim has been accused of being vague, convoluted, and inapplicable. Some readers say it is far too esoteric, while others claim that it is just the “Golden Rule” reformulated. It is easier to understand, as all things are, with a pizza metaphor.

The Categorical Pizza Imperative can be stated as follows: “Create that mixture of ingredients which you will that can also serve as the recipe for a universally delicious pizza.” It can be explicated in the form of three theorems:

Theorem I: Any and all recipes which presuppose a specific taste to the pizza are solely concerned with empirical conditions and cannot become principles for universal laws of pizza-making.

Scholium I.1: It is said that some prefer a thinner and crunchier crust, while others enjoy a thick and doughy crust. Based on these inclinations, pizza-makers have established practical principles that confirm the existence of such traits. Thus, one has a recipe for crunchy crust and another for doughy crust. The perfection of the recipe to create a desired effect does not give rise to universal laws, however. These recipes lack the objective necessity required by the *a priori* grounds of the pure pizza. Such pizzas are well-and-good for those who desire them, but they cannot furnish the universal deliciousness of the ideal pizza.

Theorem II: All recipes based on specific tastes and preferences belong to a general principle that privileges self-love.

Scholium II.1: Subjective practical principles lead to the creation of recipes that serve individual tastes. Each of these recipes is determined according to a principle of self-love that declares the recipe best which most pleases the pizza-maker. This determination of deliciousness is grounded in the lower faculty of desire and negates the possibility of a higher, law-giving faculty which could legislate for a universally delicious pizza. Recipes created according to this lower faculty are solely based on the extent of pleasure received from the resultant pizza. It therefore concerns only the effect of the represented pizza and not its cause (i.e. the lower faculty of desire).

Scholium II.2: Variations on these recipes can only alter the intensity and duration of pleasure felt by the pizza-maker, but cannot become an example for the creation of a universal law since they do not look to the causes of said pleasure. Even if one were to declare a loftier appreciation for a preferred recipe (i.e. not only the general taste, but the contrast of unique flavors or

ethical selection of ingredients), this preference would still be predicated upon the effect of pleasure stemming from the lower faculty. These determinations are essentially flawed because they are irrevocably linked to the principle of self-love which places one's pleasure first.

Scholium II.3: Either no higher faculty of desire can exist that determines universal laws, or the *a priori* ground of the pure pizza must also offer practical principles. Since the latter case is the only solution impervious to the contingent inclinations of diverse pizza-makers, it must be able to serve our purpose of finding a universally delicious pizza recipe. Although pleasure will undoubtedly attend the ideal pizza, it will not intervene in the creation of practical laws for making the ideal pizza. Thus, the general principle of self-love is unfit for legislating these practical laws.

Theorem III: If a pizza-maker can turn her recipes into a universal law, it will only be through utilizing the formal aspects of the recipes and not their specific ingredients.

Scholium III.1: The ideal pizza may not be made with mushrooms or a spicy sauce. It is not the responsibility of the principles that determine the creation of a universally delicious pizza to decide which ingredients are appropriate. These principles can only identify the transcendental grounds for creating universal deliciousness. As such, they can inform, for example, the ratio of primary ingredients to secondary ingredients, but never what kind of ingredients should be selected. However, certain pairings of ingredients may be universally delicious. Thus, the practical principles of the ideal pizza do not completely forgo instruction on particulars. In other words, only the form of particulars can be determined by universal laws, never the material. For if

the material (e.g. pepperoni) were to be legislated as a component of the ideal pizza, one would resort to the insufficient principle of self-love.

There is a profound insight in the Categorical Pizza Imperative. It is never the content of the ingredients that the chef must contend with, but their form. Recent trends in food service, from certified organic produce to farm-to-table “ethically” raised livestock, want the consumer to believe that good means always leads to a good end. Yet, it is the end one should focus on, or else the chef becomes superfluous. A cuisine of means alone is pure mechanism. The chef doesn’t create, but rather assembles. The most efficient chef in such a situation is a machine. Hence the reason why we see a startling surge in automated cooking apparatuses at the same time that ingredient-based food trends appear.

There is, however, an irreducible magic in composing, rather than assembling, a dish. Regardless of the ingredient, a little technique turns roots and grains into a delicious meal. Anyone who has lived modestly will tell you this. As the Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca the Younger argued, there is no excellence without adversity. Nevertheless, the techniques featured in the following recipes can be used and mastered by anyone. They will improve your ability to make virtually any recipe. Also, they will give you the confidence to improvise with whatever ingredients you have on hand.

The alchemical act of culinary composition calls for a different kind of attention. One is only able to master technique and improvise if one can translate a particular experience into other unique situations. This doesn’t mean generalizing from one’s limited experience or searching out a universal method for cooking anything, but learning how to interpret the signs of the alimentary

elements that you prepare, combine, and transform in your kitchen. Like the carpenter who modulates the stroke of her hand based on the grain of the wood, the chef interprets the state of the composition based on its taste, smell, feel, sight, and even sound. You must cultivate what the ancient Greeks called *phronesis*, the practical knowledge that one gains through hands-on experience. Technique is entirely phronetic.

Everyone knows a well-balanced sauce must be taste-tested, but the other senses are called to work in all kinds of other ways. To cook a poached egg perfectly every time requires feel. The smell of sauteed garlic alerts you to when its flavor has been released. The sound of the frying oil lets you know its hot enough. When all five senses work together, the chef can be attentive to the dish in its process of composition. This attention is important to create delicious meals, but it is even more important for mistakes.

Amateur chefs have the counterproductive tendency to throw out “mistakes,” or meals where something has gone awry in the composition. Yet mistakes, however awful they may taste, can instill a sense-memory that reminds you how to adjust your recipe next time. A dish tasted once and tossed in the trash will never form such a distinctive memory. Perfecting any dish takes several attempts. Each attempt cultivates the *sense*, or what chefs sometimes reductively call the *taste*, for the proper method of preparation. For this reason, the categorical imperative of any cook should be: EAT YOUR MISTAKES. Only by eating them can you develop the sense for what went wrong and how to fix it next time. Eating your mistakes is, in itself, the very cultivation of technique.

Before trying any of the recipes in this book, you must promise yourself to eat all of your mistakes. Of course, you need not eat something that has gone so far afoul that it is truly

agonizing (or dangerous!) to eat, but such a sacrifice should be met with the most melancholy of resignations. You will be able to cook to your full potential when you attend to the alchemy of the kitchen. That is, after all, what this cookbook is about. Not a few tasty recipes, but maximizing your culinary potential. Accomplishing that means owning up to your mistakes. I close these speculations with the immortal words of Julia Child:

I don't believe in twisting yourself into knots of excuses and explanations over the food you make. ... Maybe the cat has fallen into the stew, or the lettuce has frozen, or the cake has collapsed—*eh bien, tant pis!* Usually one's cooking is better than one thinks it is. And if the food is truly vile ... then the cook must simply grit her teeth and bear it with a smile—and learn from her mistakes.⁷

Part II

Practical

Preparation

Vegetarian Scotch Eggs

Technique: encasing

Makes 4 scotch eggs

Scotch eggs are notoriously difficult to make. The difficulty lies in the egg. Cooking an egg is a delicate procedure if you want it just right, especially when you boil it and cannot see its progress. A scotch egg requires you to cook an egg without observing its progress *twice*! No wonder so many TV chefs are content with a hard yolk when they display their scotch eggs to the audience. Now, imagine you won't use meat to encase the egg. There comes a whole other set of issues with making a vegetarian scotch egg. But this easy-to-follow recipe solves them.

Ingredients

~26 frozen tater tots
2 tsp garlic powder
2 tsp smoked paprika
2 tsp celery salt
5 eggs
canola oil
plastic cling wrap

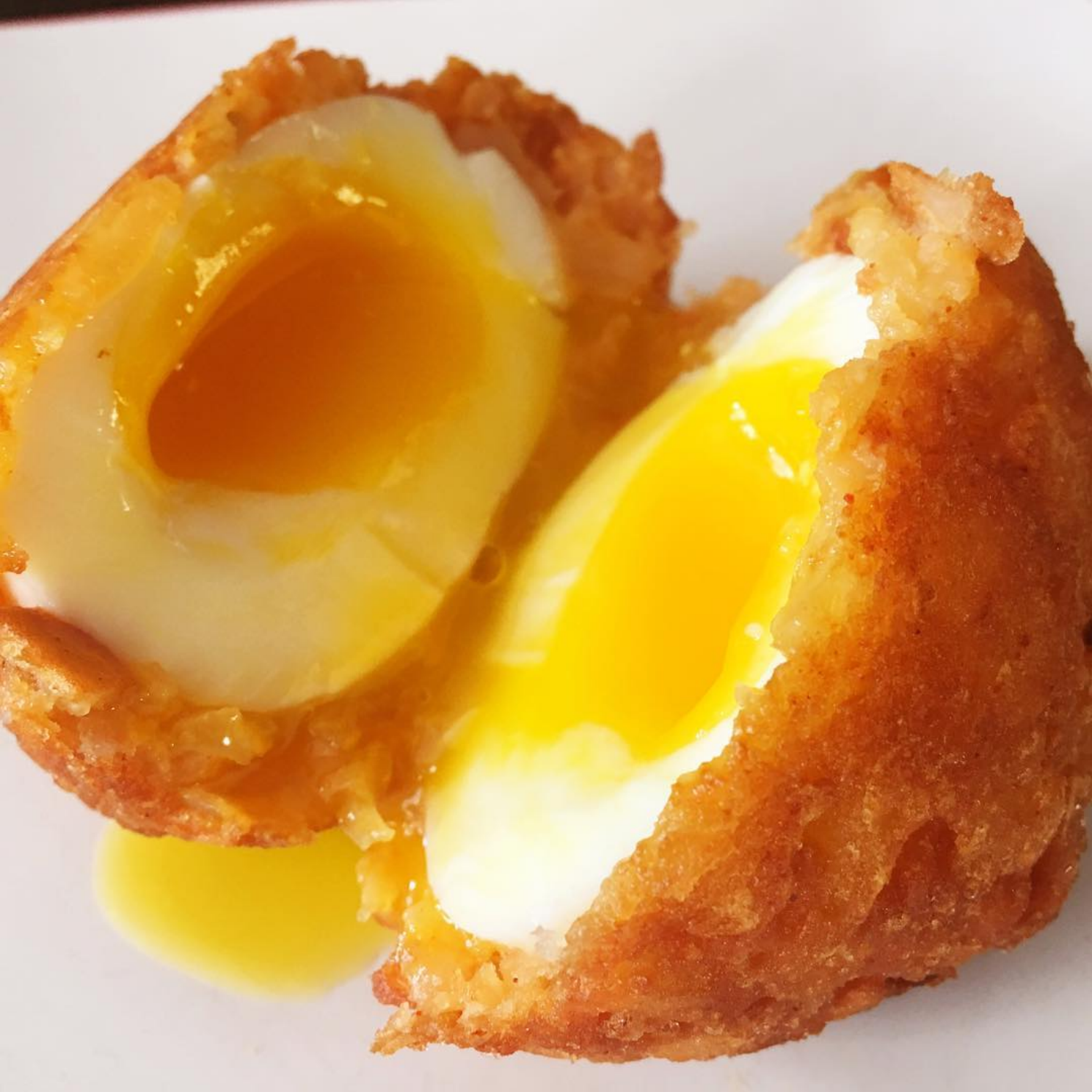
There are many vegetarian scotch egg recipes out there, but none like this one. After trying the alternatives (breaded, tempura-battered, covered in mashed potatoes or shredded hash browns and then breaded), I was disappointed. None of these options delivered the crispy shell of the original with the sponge-like quality of the meat to soak up the rich, runny yolk. The breaded and battered options lacked anything to soak up the yolk, and the others didn't deliver a crispy enough or consistent coating. Essentially, they were the wrong ingredients to encase the egg. Then it dawned on me: smashed tater tots. Talk about the best of both worlds! And the best part, you don't need to bread them before frying, making this recipe even easier than the original.

Directions

1. Fill a small pot with half an inch of water and bring to a boil. Place 4 eggs in pot and cover. Cook for 6 minutes. The eggs will cook with the steam, so they don't need to be submerged. Once done, run eggs under cold water until cool and then peel.
2. Thaw (or microwave for ~5 minutes) tater tots. Mash with a fork or potato masher. Do not over mash, keep them slightly chunky. Beat the last egg and combine it with the tots along with the seasonings.
3. Spread out a sheet of plastic cling wrap (roughly 9in by 9in). Take about 3 teaspoonfuls of tater tot mix and flatten on the plastic wrap into a rectangle big enough to wrap around the egg. Place an egg on top and use the plastic wrap to encase the egg completely. This can be done by first

covering it horizontally, then bringing the vertical ends up and twisting together the excess plastic wrap. Repeat for all eggs and place them in the fridge.

4. Heat up about 1-2 inches of oil in a heavy-bottomed pan. The oil should be 350-375° F, or hot enough to immediately pop when a drop of water is placed in it. Once hot, unwrap the scotch eggs and use a slotted spoon to transfer them into the oil. Fry 1 or 2 at a time until golden brown on each side, about a couple minutes each. When done, place on a rack to dry.



Southern Fried Chick'n

Technique: dredging

Serves 2 people

Ingredients

1 block extra-firm tofu
1 cup vegetarian chick'n broth
1 cup buttermilk
2 cups flour
2 tsp garlic powder
2 tsp smoked paprika
2 tbsp hot sauce
1 quart canola or vegetable oil

Whenever you see a vegetarian substitute for chicken, it's usually tofu. Tofu is a decent stand in, but it just doesn't have the same scrumptious qualities as real chicken. Tofu, even when it's seasoned well, can have a bland, soy taste. Furthermore, when it's fried (and usually breaded beforehand), it doesn't get the same crunch as a crispy piece of chicken. This recipe fixes both of those problems. By marinating in chick'n flavored broth, the "meat" of the tofu actually tastes like chicken throughout.

Besides marinating, the other secret to this recipe is the double dredge. It coats the tofu in a perfectly crispy, crunchy, and flaky shell. The buttermilk batter is preferable to other methods

(like corn starch coating or breading) because it delivers crispiness and body. The crust is not just a hard layer of gluten, but an essential element of the dish and a necessary compliment to the chewy, chick'ny tofu inside it.

Directions

1. Drain water out of the tofu package and wrap the block of tofu in a tea towel or paper towels. Place a baking sheet or other flat object on top of it and stack with heavy objects until the tofu yields slightly from the weight. Press for at least an hour, changing towels halfway through. By pressing the tofu in this manner, you will remove all excess water and allow the marinade to penetrate deeper into the tofu. (Note: Some stores will sell pre-pressed extra-firm tofu in vacuum-sealed bags. This kind saves time and works great with this recipe as long as it is not pre-marinated or fried.)



2. Cut tofu into irregular shapes, just big enough to get a few bites out of. Place in a plastic bag with the vegetarian chick'n broth and let marinate in the fridge overnight.

3. In a bowl, mix buttermilk and hot sauce. In a second bowl, mix flour, garlic powder, smoked paprika, and salt. Remove tofu pieces from plastic bag. One at a time, dip tofu in buttermilk and then coat in flour. The flour coating should cover the entire piece in a fairly even layer. Repeat buttermilk dip and flour coating a second time for each piece. The second dredging will ensure a thick, flaky crust.

4. In a heavy pot or dutch oven, pour in oil until it is 2 inches deep. Heat oil to 350-375° or until it pops when a small drop of water is dropped in. (If it starts to smoke, it is too hot. In this case, lower the heat, add a bit more fresh oil, and slowly return it to the correct temperature.) Fry dredged tofu in batches so as not to crowd the pot. They are done when they are Golden, Brown, and Delicious (GBD), about 3-5 minutes, depending on size. Sprinkle with salt as soon as they leave the oil.



Butter Biscuits and Soysage Gravy

Technique: cutting in fat

Makes about 8 biscuits with gravy

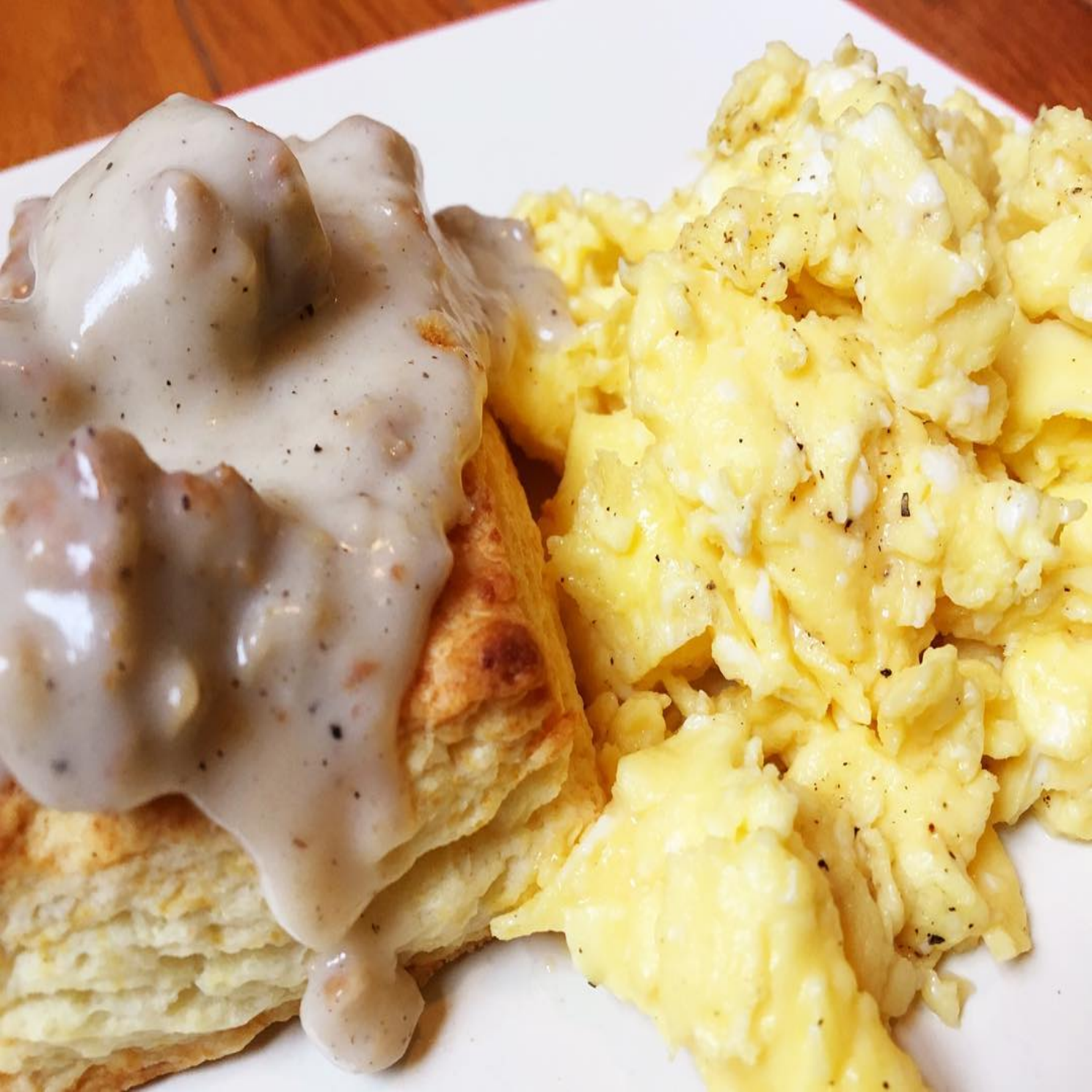
Baking is the final frontier for many home cooks, and often the most confusing. It may not even be alchemy at all, but black magic. However, some secrets of this craft can be divined by the culinary alchemist. I made and happily ate biscuits as hard and flat as hockey pucks until I found out a crucial technique for cutting fat into flour. The trick is to use a food processor to quickly cut the fat in. Processing it also helps keep the butter cool, which is essential if you want the glutenous spirits to breathe airy lightness into your biscuits.

Biscuit Ingredients

2 cups bread flour
1 tbsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
½ tsp sugar
1 stick unsalted butter, cold
¾ cup milk

Gravy Ingredients

4 round vegetarian “sausage”
patties
4 tbsp unsalted butter
4 tbsp all-purpose flour
3 cups milk



Directions

1. In a food processor, pulse together flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt. Cut the stick of butter into cubes and add to food processor. Pulse the mixture again until the butter is fully incorporated into the flour. Pour into a medium mixing bowl.
2. Pour milk into dry mixture while stirring with a fork. Mix until a consistent, yellow dough is formed. Be careful not to over-mix the dough! Pour dough onto a clean, floured surface and gently role it out until it is half an inch thick. With a knife or cookie cutter, cut into desired shapes.
3. Transfer biscuits to a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. Brush the tops with melted butter or olive oil. Place in a 425° F oven for 25 minutes or until GBD.
4. To make the gravy, microwave or thaw the vegetarian “sausage” patties until soft enough to cut. Chop patties into small bits. Add to a skillet over medium heat with the butter. Cook until slightly crispy, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the flour and thoroughly combine. Continue whisking for 1-2 minutes (the flour-butter mixture, called a *roux*, should turn a nutty brown color), then slowly pour in the milk. Bring gravy to a simmer and cook until thickened, whisking often.

Çilbir (GERD-friendly)

Technique: poaching eggs

Serves 1 person

Ingredients

1 egg
1/3 cup Greek yogurt
1 tbsp tahini (sesame seed
paste)
1 tsp turmeric powder
1 piece of crusty French bread
1/2 tbsp butter
1 tsp distilled white vinegar

Çilbir is a Turkish breakfast dish made with poached eggs and seasoned yogurt known to be eaten by health-conscious people. The health benefits might be hard to believe, however, after you've tasted this decadent mix of rich fats and bold flavors. As a fan of all things poached egg, I first tried this at home when I learned of the recipe. It has been my favorite breakfast ever since.

Last year I was diagnosed with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), the primary symptom of which was excruciating, endless heartburn brought on by a diet predominantly composed of coffee, whiskey, and spicy food. I've had to change my diet a lot

since then. Fortunately, with its yogurt, tahini, and turmeric, I didn't have to cut back on eating çilbir at all. Leaving out the garlic that is traditionally in çilbir ensures a GERD-friendly recipe.

Technique is critical to this recipe. Without a perfectly poached and runny egg, you may as well not even bother. Although there are many gadgets and tricks out there that claim to help anyone poach a perfect egg, the only method that gets it absolutely perfect every time is one based on alchemical *phronesis* (as discussed in Part I). The freshness of the egg, the temperatures of the water and air, the intensity of the simmer, the number of eggs being cooked, the space inside the pan—all of these factors affect the overall cooking time of your poached egg. The only way to make it perfectly every time is to watch, listen, and feel the egg throughout the process.

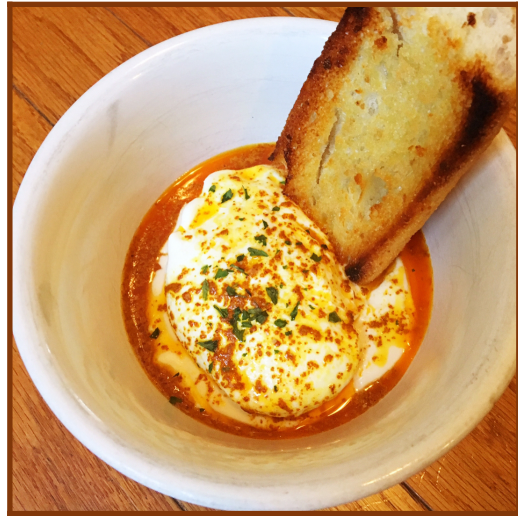
Sooner than you think, you will learn the sight and feel of a runny yolk encased by cooked white. With this foresight, you will be able to poach as many eggs as you want in any conditions and still have each one come out flawless. This method may require some trial-and-error, but that is what cooking is. And when you mess up, always remember to eat your mistakes.

Directions

1. Fill a small pan half-way up with water. Pour in distilled white vinegar. (Note: if the vinegar is old and has over-soured, it will impart a sour flavor to your egg.) Bring the water to a firm simmer.

2. Mix yogurt and tahini in a bowl. Slice French bread in half length-wise and toast it. A toaster will do fine, but you can also toast it on a griddle or in a skillet with some butter to get a better result.

3. Once the water is at a simmer, tap the egg on a flat surface to crack it, then gently pull the egg shell apart directly over the water. Let the egg cook until the whites are mostly formed. The yolk will still be visible on top and there will be some uncooked white around the yolk. At this point, take a slotted spoon and carefully roll the egg over. From here on, lift the egg out of the water every minute and softly push on the yolk to feel for doneness. A perfectly runny poached egg will give some resistance, but will still have a little bounce. (Take note of the feel for the next time you poach an egg!) Once finished, remove the egg from the water completely and place it on a paper towel to dry off excess water. Trim off any dangling pieces of white. Then, place the poached egg in the center of your yogurt-tahini bowl.



4. In a small sauce pan or a cup in the microwave, melt the butter with the turmeric powder and stir together. Pour the turmeric butter over the egg and salt liberally. To finish the dish, you can also add your favorite fresh herb.

Homemade Fettuccine Alfredo

Technique: homemade dough

Serves 4 people

Homemade dough is one of the most difficult techniques for the amateur culinary alchemist to master. Not only is every individual ball of dough different since its elasticity and stickiness depend on the precise ratio of wet to dry ingredients and the humidity, but different kinds of dough require different treatment. Earlier, it was recommended to not knead the biscuit dough too much. For pasta dough, however, it is necessary to knead it for an extended period

of time to develop its elasticity. It is easy to become frustrated with dry dough that doesn't come together or sticky dough that entraps the adventurous home cook. To create the perfect ball of pasta dough, attentive care is necessary. Attentive care is the only way to master this technique because the culinary alchemist must learn to communicate with the dough, both reading its signs and responding to its needs.

Ingredients

1 cup semolina flour
1 cup All-Purpose flour
3 eggs
2 tsp olive oil
1 cup heavy cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese
8 tbsp unsalted butter

Unlike most recipes that recommend you use only All-Purpose flour, this one includes half semolina flour. Semolina is coarsely ground wheat that is commonly used in Italy. Due to its grit, it makes the pasta dough less sticky, allowing you to use almost no additional flour after forming the dough. This recipe produces a sturdy, versatile noodle that is easy to work with and has a delectable mouth feel when prepared. Think of this recipe as a blank canvas for all of your pasta pursuits. This recipe is best enjoyed with a sunny-side up egg on top for pure and utter decadence.

Directions

1. In a medium mixing bowl, pour 2 cups of flour in the shape of a pile. Make a well in the middle of the flour. Crack the eggs into a separate small bowl or cup and add olive oil. With a fork, beat the eggs gently until homogeneous, then pour the mixture into the well of flour. Mix with the fork, incorporating flour from the outside of the well little by little, until nearly all of the white flour is incorporated and the dough has formed a yellowish ball. Don't worry if there are



still small crumbs in the bowl, they will be incorporated into the dough during the next step. Turn out the contents of the bowl onto a floured work surface (wood works best).

2. With your hands, flatten the dough and begin folding it in half and smashing it down. Continue to do this until all of the crumbs are worked into the dough and you have one cohesive ball. From here, knead the dough for 10 minutes. The classic one-hand kneading motion is to grab the top of the dough ball and fold it over on itself (top to bottom) and roll it forward with your palm. If it's not elastic enough for a fluid motion, don't worry. Just keep pushing on it and folding it into itself the best you can. After kneading, tightly wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let rest for at least an hour.



3 Bring 4 quarts of water and a few tablespoons of salt to a boil.

Add color to your pasta by mixing pureed vegetables into the dough. This pink fettuccine was made with tomato paste.

4. Roll out and cut the dough. (It is highly recommended that you use a pasta machine to do this, but you can also use a rolling pin and knife. It is just much more difficult to get the pasta even in width and thickness.) Pass the dough through the machine a couple times on the lowest setting, folding in half each time. Once your sheet is close to the shape of a rectangle with flat edges, continue to pass through the machine while increasing the roller setting each time until the dough is the desired thickness. (On an Atlas Marcato, number 7 is perfect for fettuccine.) Sheets of dough can be run through the machine cutter or folded over and cut by hand. (Toss the noodles in flour or starch if you do not plan to use them immediately. They can be refrigerated them for 3 days or frozen for up to 3 months.)

4. In a pan large enough to hold the amount of pasta being cooked, melt butter over medium heat. Add heavy cream and whisk frequently until it comes to a simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low. Stir in Parmesan cheese until completely melted. Salt and pepper to taste. Turn off heat.

5. When the sauce is ready, sprinkle the noodles into the boiling water in small batches. Fresh pasta cooks quickly and should only take about 2 or 3 minutes. Taste test the noodles: they will be light and chewy without being gummy when done. When done, scoop the noodles from the water into the sauce. A little excess pasta water getting into the sauce is completely fine. Shake the pan back and forth then *gently* fold the noodles over themselves to incorporate the sauce. If the sauce is too dry and stiff, add more pasta water to loosen it up. Enjoy immediately.

Explication

Lemon Broccoli Orzo Soup

Technique: building flavors

Makes about 10 cups

Ingredients

1 carrot, sliced
1 jalapeño, seeded and sliced
2 celery stalks, diced
½ medium white onion, diced
1 large head of broccoli,
separated into bite-size florets
½ cup orzo pasta
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
2 quarts vegetable broth
2 cups water
4 tbsp olive oil
4 tbsp all-purpose flour

Some recipes get better with age, and that is the story of this soup. What began as a simple vegetable soup became one of my spouse's favorite dishes. Small adjustments and modifications to the dish completely transformed it. The addition of lemon zest and juice played so well with the broccoli, that the broccoli had to take center stage. Later, the additions of orzo and the roux made the soup heartier and a meal all to itself. When you take a bite, each of these flavors come to the fore, but with a subtle elegance that enhances the other flavors as well. There's no shame in making a simple dish, because it can blossom into something memorable through a few, critical additions.

Of course, not everything you add will make the dish better, and it is possible to go too far. But this is the very nature of experimentation, which is the labor of culinary alchemy.

Directions

1. Heat olive oil in a large pot until shimmering. Add in carrots, onion, and celery. Season with salt and pepper. Cook on medium-high heat for a couple minutes.
2. Sprinkle flour over the vegetables and stir in until all the powder is absorbed. Cook, stirring, for one minute.
3. Pour in vegetable broth and water. Bring to a boil. Add in broccoli florets. Reduce to a simmer. Simmer for 30 minutes.
4. Bring back up to a boil to cook the orzo. Add in orzo and cook until al dente according to package instructions. Stir continuously so that the orzo does not get stuck to the bottom of the pan.
5. Turn off heat. Cool for 5 minutes. Stir in lemon zest and juice. Salt to taste.

Poblano Hot Sauce

Technique: fermentation

Makes about a cup

Fermentation, a quintessential alchemical process, was most likely discovered by accident, as is the case with most culinary inventions. Primarily used for storing food for long periods, fermentation also modifies the flavor of food, giving it a slightly sour taste. More interestingly, fermentation brings out many of the subtle flavors that a person may have not noticed in the food before it was fermented. Due to its acidity, hot sauce (or rather, the pepper mash used to make hot sauce) is an excellent, low-risk option for home cooks new to fermentation. In fact, many popular hot sauces on the market (like Tobasco) are fermented to increase their flavor and shelf life.

This recipe lays out the basic process of fermentation. It can be replicated for almost any firm fruit or vegetable. Although it is quiet mild, the poblano chile is a great candidate for fermentation because of its deep, earthy flavor. But don't kid yourself, this stuff is hot!

Equipment needed: digital scale and a fermenting pot or any air-tight glass or ceramic vessel.

Ingredients

3-4 poblano peppers
5 habenero peppers
2 cloves of garlic
½ cup vinegar
Good, finely ground salt
without preservatives or
anti-caking agents (e.g. sea
salt, Himalayan salt, etc.)



Directions

1. Wash your hands thoroughly and make sure that all of your utensils, bowls, instruments, and surfaces are clean.
2. Rinse and dice peppers, removing some or all of the habanero seeds if you want a milder hot sauce.
3. Weigh the diced peppers on a digital scale. Calculate 3% of that weight and add that much salt to the pepper (for example: 100g of peppers will need 3g of salt). Sprinkle a little at a time, mixing it into the peppers, so that it coats them evenly.
4. Pour mixture into a freshly cleaned and dried fermentation pot. Fill a plastic bag with water and use it to press down the mixture, making sure that there are no air gaps underneath it or around the sides. Seal the pot and leave it on your counter away from direct sunlight for about ten days. If your vessel is air-tight and does not have an airlock, “burp” it every couple of days by opening the lid and closing it so that the CO₂ produced by the ferment can escape.
5. Taste small bits of the ferment along the way (starting at about 4 days) to figure out when its done. Essentially, it depends on your taste. It will continue to get more funky and sour as it sits. *If fuzzy or colored mold grows on the ferment, or it just smells or tastes off, throw it out! Mold is a sign that it has already gone wrong due to low salt level, contaminated environment, or many*

other reasons. Thin, white, web-like film (kahm yeast) floating on the top is harmless and can just be skimmed off. When in doubt, throw it out. Once the taste has changed to your liking, blend together the fermented peppers, garlic, and vinegar. You will not likely need to add salt since it was included in the fermentation process. You can add more vinegar or water to adjust the consistency. Pour into woozy bottles or a Mason jar to store.

6. For shelf-stable sauce: check the pH level of the sauce with a reliable pH meter. It will need to be below 4.6 to prevent the growth of *clostridium botulinum*, the bacteria responsible for botulism. Due to the high acid and salt content, this recipe should be fine on the shelf, but it is recommended to store it in the fridge to preserve freshness.

Ashley's Quick Microwave Mac and Cheese

Technique: microwave cooking

Serves 1 person

Ingredients

1 ½ cups cooked noodles
(elbow macaroni or shells)
½ cup sharp cheddar cheese
(more or less based on
preference)
½ tbsp unsalted butter
1 tbsp milk

Microwave cooking is disdained by almost everyone who does not cook most of their meals in appliances. The disdain is warranted, since a microwave can only make monstrosly disfigured versions of classic dishes. Yet, microwave radiation is a powerful tool if used strategically. My partner, Ashley, has harnessed this tool to make the quickest, cheesiest mac and cheese in under 15 minutes. I would never

make a pizza in a microwave, but there is no denying that it can melt cheese more efficiently than any other technique. This dish is a perfect weekday staple that comes together with minimal effort.

Ashley did not invent the microwavable mac and cheese, but she perfected it. The secret is to sneak in a little butter and milk to give the cheese that creaminess that it would not get from just being melted. This gesture should apply to anything cooked in the microwave. A fresh ingredient

goes a long way toward reviving leftovers or instant meals. However, it is important to keep in mind the most important virtue of microwave cooking: moderation.

Directions

1. Cook pasta to *al dente* according to package instructions. Strain, but do not rinse.
2. Place the butter in a microwave-safe, single serving bowl. Pour the hot noodles over the butter. Microwave for 30 seconds. Add salt and stir. Next, add cheese and milk, but do not stir! Microwave for another 1 to 1.5 minutes. When cheese is melted on top, stir with a fork until the cheese, butter, and milk all combine to form a stringy, creamy coating on all the noodles.

Note: You must use sharp cheddar cheese as the main cheese in this recipe. Other cheeses such as pepper jack or colby tend to clump up.

Seitan Stir Fry

Technique: stir fry

Serves 2 people

Stir frying is the best technique of explication when you want a hot meal fast. The problem is that, despite its apparent simplicity, it is one of the most misunderstood techniques. First, traditional stir frying as it is done in many Asian cuisines requires extraordinarily high heat, which a standard household stove cannot produce. Unless you're willing to invest in a high-powered cook top, then this is a problem that cannot be solved with ingenuity. Another common mistake, however, can be.

Ingredients

8 oz seitan
8 oz cremini mushrooms
1/2 lb linguine
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsp sesame oil
2 tbsp tamari
2 tsp soy sauce
3 scallions, sliced

Many a stir fry has been ruined by the lack of its most important ingredient: fat. What gives stir fried rice or noodles its delectable crispiness and also prevents it from sticking to a hot pan is the substantial amount of oil added to the starch right after it is placed in the pan. This vegan version

of a classic uses an oil-based sauce to coat the noodles in the much needed fat while also imparting a deep, umami flavor. Instead of the standard egg noodles, this recipe calls for the more accessible linguine noodle, but any long noodle can be used.

Directions

1. Whisk together minced garlic, sesame oil, tamari, soy sauce, and half of the scallions. This mixture will be the stir fry sauce.
2. Cook linguine according to package instructions until just *al dente* (not a minute more, or it will overcook in the stir fry). Strain the pasta when done and immediately rinse with cold water. Continue to drain while proceeding to Step 3.
3. Cut seitan and mushrooms into bite-sized chunks. Add one tablespoon of canola oil to a cast-iron skillet on medium-high heat and begin sauteing the mushrooms in it. Spread them out evenly in the pan and let them get brown on one side before stirring them. After they finish cooking (about 3-5 minutes), remove the mushrooms and set them aside. Add another tablespoon of oil and the seitan to the pan and toss to coat. When the surface of the seitan begins to get crispy (about 5 minutes), return the mushrooms to the pan.

4. Add linguine to the skillet. Immediately dump the stir fry sauce over it and mix to combine, making sure to evenly coat everything with the sauce (tongs are a great tool for this step). Fry for 1-2 minutes, mixing constantly. Serve with a generous garnishing of sliced scallions.





Transformation

Basil Mayo

Technique: emulsion

Makes about a cup

Ingredients

1 egg (room temperature)
1 bunch of basil leaves
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1.5 tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp salt
2/3 cup canola oil
1/3 cup olive oil

Mayo is hard to make, but homemade mayo, when done right, is incomparable to those supermarket plastic bottles of white dry-wall paste. One of the best things about making mayo at home is that you can work in any additional ingredients you want, like the basil I use in this recipe. I've had my fair share of mayo failures, but have discovered a fool-proof method for making mayo.

The secret is to use the whole egg, rather than just the yolk. The white of the egg helps the emulsification process and, if the egg is at room temperature, there aren't many ways for this to go wrong (short of adding too much oil too fast, of course). This recipe requires an immersion blender, which is an incredible tool for much more than just making mayo, but it can also be done by hand using a mixing bowl and a whisk. To make by hand, follow the same steps, but keep all of the oil separate from the rest of the ingredients. Whisk the main ingredients together, then

begin adding oil a few drops at a time while whisking. Adding oil too fast will break the emulsion, so be sure to take your time with this method.

Directions

1. Blanch the basil leaves by placing in boiling water for 10 seconds then cooling off in a bowl of ice water. Thinly slice them after they've cooled. You can also complete this step by grinding the leaves to a paste with a mortar and pestle if you have one.

2. Crack the egg into a sturdy jar. (Mason jars work great for this recipe because you can easily store your mayo after it's made. The jar's diameter should not be much wider than the immersion blender.) Add in basil, Dijon mustard, apple cider vinegar, and salt. Measure out the canola and olive oil carefully and gently pour them into the jar on top of everything else.

3. Slowly lower your immersion blender into the jar, placing the blade directly over the egg yolk. Keeping the blender in place, pulse quickly until the mixture begins to emulsify and form a thick white cream. At this point, you can run the blender continuously. Carefully begin to tilt the base of the blender from side to side, letting more oil get underneath it. When most of the bottom-half of the jar is emulsified, lift the blender a little, then push down. Continue lifting and pushing down as you blend and gradually work your way to the top of the mayo. This process helps incorporate oil little by little so that the emulsion doesn't break. As soon as you don't see any more pools of oil at the top, the mayo is done.



Triple Smoked Spicy Miso Vegan Ramen, Part I: Noodles

Technique: homemade alkalines

Serves 4 people

Ramen noodles, when made correctly, have a very special texture. In Japan, the textures can vary from slippery to starchy and springy to chewy, but one constant holds true: the noodles retain their firmness in the hot broth. They are able to do so because of a special alkaline added to the dough called *kansui*, or sodium bicarbonate. This ingredient is not widely

available in the United States, so many home cooks turn to egg pasta (which turns to mush) or blocks of instant ramen (which are a poor and unhealthy substitute). I'm not sure how this journey began, but at some point I decided to make a perfect bowl of ramen from scratch. After two years of tinkering, I've come up with the most savory vegan ramen you can find. What makes this bowl so slurpably delicious, however, is the homemade noodles.

This noodle recipe benefits from knowledge shared by other cooks. Harold McGee discovered a way to make sodium bicarbonate at home by baking baking soda. This ingredient is essential for

Ingredients

2 cups bread flour
1 tbsp vital wheat gluten
2 tsp baked baking soda
2 tsp salt
150 ml room temperature water

making noodles that withstand the broth. Additionally, amateur chef Mike Satinover (aka Ramen_Lord) has released many of his own ramen recipes and helped thousands of other ramen fans with making their own. This recipe is indebted to their discoveries and hopes to add to the rising popularity of homemade ramen in the United States.

Equipment needed: pasta machine.

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Take about a cup of baking soda and spread it on an aluminum foiled sheet pan in as even and thin of a layer as possible. Bake for an hour. Let cool, then pour into a non-reactive container for storage. *Be careful not to touch the powder with your bare skin since it can cause irritation.*

2. Mix bread flour and vital wheat gluten in a medium mixing bowl. Separately, mix together salt, baked baking soda, and water. Slowly pour the wet mixture into the dry ingredients while stirring with a wooden spoon. Continue to stir the mixture until most of the ingredients have formed a dough (about 3 minutes). Some loose flour is okay and will be worked in during the next step.

3. Pour out the dough onto a clean surface and begin to knead it, working in any excess flour from the previous step. (See step 2 of the Homemade Fettucine recipe for tips on kneading

dough.) Knead for about 10 minutes. The longer you knead, the more gluten is developed in the dough, leading to a chewier noodle. The ball of dough should be smooth and elastic by the end.

4. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap or cover with a tea towel and let sit for an hour.

5. Cut dough in half. Roll each half into a ball, flatten with your palm, and begin feeding it through the pasta machine on the lowest setting (0). After each pass, fold to dough sheet in half and continue until it is rectangular in shape. You will have to add more flour as you go to keep the dough from getting sticky. Begin gradually increasing the machine setting and thinning out the dough. Once you reach 4, cut the sheet in half, flour the two pieces, and set them aside. Repeat the process with the other half of the dough ball.

6. Feed all four sheets of dough through the pasta machines spaghetti-sized cutter. Dust the noodles lightly with some more flour and gently fold them into little balls. At this point, they can be used right away, stored in the fridge for a day or two, or frozen for long-term storage.

7. To cook: add fresh noodles to boiling water for 2 minutes (3 minutes if from frozen). Gently stir occasionally to keep them from clumping. Strain the noodles and add directly to your favorite broth. Enjoy immediately. (Note: do not reuse the water that you cooked the noodles in. It will be extremely starchy from the flour on the noodles.)



Give your noodles a blood-red color and slightly bitter taste by adding a tablespoon of turmeric.

Triple Smoked Spicy Miso Vegan Ramen, Part II: Broth

Technique: infused oil

Serves 4 people

The allure and taste of ramen derives from its unexpected complexity. Ramen traditionally has five components: noodles, broth, tare, toppings, and aroma oil. Each of these parts must be painstakingly perfected on its own, then expertly paired with the rest to form a cohesive dish. Noodles were discussed in the previous recipe. Now, I will focus on the other three essential ingredients: broth, tare, and aroma oil.

The broth is usually a rich and flavorful stock made from vegetables, fish, chicken, or pork. Instead of being seasoned directly, the broth earns its flavor from the *tare*, a seasoning paste added to the dish during composition. Every ramen chef has their own unique tare, it is said. The tare in this recipe is slightly spicy with multiple layers of depth from smoky, sweet, and savory ingredients. The final component is the aroma oil, which lures the nose to the bowl and adds a delectable sheen to the broth. This oil is also usually picked up by the noodles as one slurps them up, adding another layer of flavor. The heart of a bowl of ramen is in the balance of these three components.

Since most of the flavor for this dish comes from the tare and the aromatic oil, the broth is a basic shiro miso broth. Combine 8 cups of water and 8 tablespoons shiro miso in a pot and bring to a

boil, then reduce to simmer. Keep the broth simmering while you compose the dish so that it can go into the bowl hot. The order of composition for a single serving is the following: 1-2 tbsp aroma oil, 2 tbsp tare, a splash of broth to mix it all together, noodles, 1-1.5 cups broth, toppings, and finally a few drops of aroma oil if desired.

Many different toppings go well with this dish. I recommend bok choy, fried tofu, and scallions. Soft-boiled eggs are also a lovely addition for non-vegan folks. While most of this recipe should be followed to the letter, the toppings are a place for you to get creative.

Tare Ingredients

2 tbsp gochujang paste
¼ cup soy sauce
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp liquid smoke 1 tsp
1 tsp ground white pepper 1 tsp
1 garlic clove, grated
1 tbsp rice wine vinegar
1 tbsp vegan brown sugar
1 tbsp dry vermouth

Tare Directions

1. Whisk all ingredients into a small sauce pan. Bring to a boil over medium heat, then reduce to a simmer. Let the tare cook down for a few minutes while whisking often. Once it starts to thicken, turn off the heat and let it cool. Tare can be stored in the fridge for up to 3 months.

Aromatic Oil Directions

1. Add oil to a small pan and heat on medium until the oil becomes streaked and glossy. It should be hot, but not boiling. Turn off the heat and add in the sage and lemongrass. Steep the oil for about 20 minutes.

2. Strain out the sage and lemongrass and use the oil immediately or store in fridge for at most a week.

Note: There are many ways of making infused oils, all of which have some risk of botulism. Do your research before experimenting with this component. The safest option is to use the oil immediately and discard whatever is leftover. Never infuse oil with garlic unless you absolutely know what you are doing.

Aromatic Oil Ingredients

1 cup olive oil
1 bunch sage leaves
1 stalk lemongrass, chopped
and smashed



Toppings (like the soft-boiled egg pictured here) are optional.



Endnotes

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- 5 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 25.
- 6 bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 21-39.
- 7 Julia Child with Alex Prud’homme, *My Life in France* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 71.

Chefs and food writers have adopted the commonplace of comparing cooking to science. Authors like Alton Brown and Harold McGee defend the view that flavor is a chemical event, and must be studied as such. *Kitchen Alchemy* (KA) swims against this hegemonic current to recall a time before modern chemistry transposed its atomic worldview on food. Part theory, part cookbook, part manifesto: KA calls on professional and amateur cooks alike to reimagine the practice of cooking, and it teaches them how! With twelve original recipes, KA showcases essential cooking techniques divided into the three alchemical phases of preparation, explication, and transformation. As the first and only theory-cookbook ever written, KA illustrates and invites the reader to participate in the everyday alchemy of the kitchen.

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