

HOW TO COOK A DEER IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Three Recipes and Eighteen Cookbooks

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Why is one driven to write about cooking and turn a practice into a text? This is a relevant question in British Columbia at the moment; here I review just eighteen of the cookbooks appearing between 1993 and 1998 that were either published in British Columbia or are about BC food and wine. If this seems like an astonishing number, keep in mind that this is only a selection; there are others (some of which are reviewed by Donnely 1997). The books vary from spiral-bound productions of desk-top publishers to glossy cloth-bound publications produced by major Canadian publishers. The intended audiences range from UBC graduates (who list the cinnamon bun among their top ten university memories) to a national, perhaps international, audience. (Umberto Menghi claims that his previous three cookbooks have sold just under half a million copies.)

Despite these differences, several common threads are woven throughout most of the cookbooks. Cultural hybridity is a recurrent theme. Introducing the Tahltans as a First Nations people whose territory is located in the vicinity of the Stikine River in Northern British Columbia, Louise Framst describes them as “middlemen”

between coastal and interior tribes who have drawn on elements of both cultures: “Note that this ‘borrowing’ from other cultures was (and is) a common practice among natives” (1994, 8). She herself is the granddaughter of Coenishma of the Wolf Clan and Walter Lancelot Creyke, the latter of Marton Hall in England. Trevor Hooper tells a different tale of hybridity. As a native of the Northwest Territories, he studied first at a cooking school in London, England, and then at a sushi school in Tokyo. He now practices izakaya-style presentation in his Vancouver restaurant in order to produce what has been described as Japanese tapas, or Asian eclectic. He attributes one recipe to a customer who wanted a Jewish sushi roll for her son’s Bar Mitzvah. In his cookbook of Tuscan cuisine, Umberto Menghi traces the importation of pasta to Italy from China. Chefs from the Salt Spring Centre write of their difficulties with cultural boundaries, created by their decision to have a separate section on “Worldfood” in their book: “Is Tabouleh a salad, or an ethnic dish? Is spaghetti still Italian? Much of the discussion revolved around semantics such as these” (1993, 70).

Likewise, a number of authors explore the blurry line between nature and culture. The Museum of Campbell River cookbook tells the story of oysters in British Columbia. Until 1923 oysters were both small and scarce; this changed when a Vancouver doctor named McKechnie set his son up in business at Pender Harbour cultivating oysters imported from Japan. These imported oysters soon became naturalized up and down the coast. Cynthia Nims and Lori McKean are particularly interested in tracing these histories of importation and naturalization, outlining them for the Walla Walla onion (in Washington), Manila clams, and a variety of berries and other fruits.

Despite these common sensitivities to the blurriness of boundaries, there are also significant differences among the cookbooks, which I classify as vernacular, historical, and cosmopolitan, respectively. Each category of cookbook caters to a different audience, has a different way of engaging with the region, and guides the reader in the preparation of different tastes and smells. To appreciate this, one need only compare three recipes for the same meat: deer, or, if you prefer, venison.

VERNACULAR COOKBOOKS

Barbecued Deer Back

Louise Framst

Whole deer back

½ C water

Salt and pepper

garlic

Strips of bacon (we use uncured bacon)

Prepare the whole deer back for making deer chops as usual (i.e., remove the

ribs) then trim off all fat. *Do not cut into chops.* Put a large sheet of tin foil on a pre-heated barbecue. Put the deer back on the foil, and turn up the edges. Pour about a half cup of water over the meat. Season with salt, pepper, and garlic. Lay strips of bacon along the back. Put a piece of tin foil loosely over this – don't seal it, the foil cover helps trap the heat. Cook until meat thermometer just reaches fresh pork. It should take about 3-4 hours. (Framst 1994, 58)

The vernacular cookbooks – the Tahltan cookbooks, *Treats To Remember*, and *Food for Burnt Souls* – are small-scale, desk-top productions consisting of (non-professionalized) recipes collected from and credited to friends and families. There are different geographies and communities written into each book. *Food for Burnt Souls* is a fund-raiser for organizations, located mostly in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, that provide food, shelter, and other services for those who are struggling from and with substance and other forms of abuse. The cookbook itself is interventionist, including definitions and signs of abuse. Authorship is submerged within this community; the editor is “Elaine, just Elaine,” and one of the inspirational quotations (which are scattered throughout the text) tells us that “there is no limit to the good a person can do – if he does not care who gets the credit.” Individual recipes are nonetheless credited to the contributor, and we can trace Elaine's history and travels through the many recipes she contributes that are both dated and given a geographic location: mid-1970s, Vermont; from 1980 to 1988, Plattsburg, New York; from 1989 to 1993, Boca Raton, Florida; and 1996, Vancouver. The community of

burnt souls is represented as mobile, urban, and ubiquitous: "In my travels through cities and neighborhoods everywhere, I see them – the addict, the alcoholic, the demented and abandoned; fragmented lives – abused, battered, the helpless and hopeless, they are like you and me – and they are a striking reminder that, from our boardrooms to our bedrooms, life can be ugly, and at some point, any one of us could slide into the abyss." (*Food* 1996, 2) The recipes are also drawn from scattered locations: they come from friends located throughout North America. (And some look very good indeed. There is nothing "burnt out" about the recipes, which include an interesting radish salad and a wonderful selection of soups, among others.)

Community is closely connected to the recipes in the Tahltan cookbook; many are for fish and game caught within Tahltan territory: "A certain Tahltan once told me, 'It must be time I made my 4 year trip back to Telegraph. I find myself walking by the frozen fish section of the supermarket so that I can smell the fish'" (Framst 1994, 9). Some of the recipes (Moose Nose, Bum Gut sausage [requiring the last several feet of a moose's large intestine], Piggy Puffs: "Take a beaver tail ...") require cuts of meat unavailable at my Vancouver butcher, but the reader is encouraged to substitute and experiment (just as the book's editor, who lives at Cecil Lake, does as she invents her own version of a cranberry sauce first tasted in a Granville Island restaurant in Vancouver). This book traces the Edizera family tree and includes stories written by and about the family members who have submitted recipes. The stories are diverse: most indicate where the person is now located, and many focus

on educational success, documenting degrees taken in Law, Social Work, and Biology from the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria (as well as other degrees from other colleges and universities). Louise's daughter, Cyndi, underlines this focus by submitting recipes for: "Studying Hard Iced Tea," "Cryogenic Slurpies," "Dormitory Spaghetti Sauce," and "Good Afternoon French Toast" (for those college weekend days that begin at 1:00 PM). But this show of professional credentials is distinct from the recipes and food: food is what the family shares in a domestic, non-professional context; this is very different from the use and presentation of food in the cosmopolitan cookbooks.

HISTORICAL COOKBOOKS

Roast Venison

Serves 8-10

Venison roast

- Salt and pepper
- Grated dried ginger
- 2 tbsp melted butter (30 mL)
- 3 bacon strips
- 1 onion
- 1 whole cloves

Preheat oven to 325 F (160 C).

Rub roast with salt, pepper and ginger. Place in pan and pour batter over roast. Lay bacon strips on top. Peel onion and stick with cloves, place in roasting pan. Roast for 20 minutes per pound for rare meat. Baste frequently.

- 2 tbsp butter (30 mL)
- ½ cup red wine (125 mL)
- 2-3 juniper berries (optional)

Half an hour before roast is done, add butter, wine and juniper berries to pan.

Dash Worcestershire sauce
Mace to taste
Flour

Removing roast, season with Worcestershire and mace. Thicken with flour to make gravy. [Submitted by] Margaret Margetts. (*Raincoast Kitchen* 1996, 154)

With the transition from deer to venison, we enter settler history. There are two explicitly historical cookbooks: *Flavours of Victoria* and *The Raincoast Kitchen: Coastal Cuisine with a Dash of History*. The latter is a hybrid vernacular/historical cookbook insofar as the recipes come from and are credited to individual Campbell River Museum staff and volunteers; the idea of the cookbook came from the many potluck meals shared at members nights, annual general meetings, fundraisers, and other celebrations. The museum staff drew upon museum oral histories and photographic archival material to produce a cookbook in which stories, over 100 beautifully reproduced photographs, and recipes are interspersed. The cookbook is regional insofar as the recipes come from people who live in the region, as do the stories and photographs, but a listing of the "Meat" recipes conveys the sense that regional cooking is loosely conceived (and never defined): Beef or Chicken Dijon, Carbonnade of Beef, Herbed Lamb Stew, Lamb Kebabs, Green Chili, Mexican Meat Pie, and Penang Beef Balls.

The Museum of Campbell River cookbook tells a story of White settler history; we hear something about Japanese, Chinese, and Native men and women working in canneries and logging camps (often as cooks), but the stories are generally told by White settlers and the recipes reveal little of

the rich cultural past of non-White peoples. The oral histories have the strengths and weaknesses of their genre: some are amusing, and many are both interesting and convey the texture of pioneer life. Some have the feel of romantic, nostalgic reconstructions that have been retold many times and serve the function of entertaining as much as of recording "the past." The museum cookbook thus negotiates the limitations of its archival and oral histories as it attempts to reproduce the vernacular, everyday histories of small coastal settlements.

The Flavours of Victoria sketches a more conventional "official" history: we begin with Natives in a "natural world," next come Fort Victoria, Gold Rush City, and on down the temporal line. Recipes are woven into this linear historical narrative. So, for example, a recipe follows a story of Louis the Lush, a South American macaw owned by Miss Victoria Jane Wilson, a reclusive Victoria "personality." Louis "thrived on a diet of brandy, walnuts, almonds, apples and hard-boiled eggs," and so: "Finding a recipe featuring Louis the Lush's list of ingredients was a challenge, but Nut Chocolate Fondue matches pretty well. (The hard-boiled egg is optional.)" (Spalding 1994, 87).

The book appears to be targeted towards the tourist to Victoria, and it includes suggestions about where to shop for non-food items. The tourist is presumed to be White. We are told: "Labour came cheap, and many established settlers could afford farm help and \$25 a month for a live-in Chinese servant to help around the house. This made time for recreation [taken in the form of elaborate picnics and social teas] ... Not having a servant, you might not wish to cart everything out into the country" (46). The Bengal

Room at the Empress Hotel is “a sheer delight, colonialism gone mad, curry British pukka sahib style!” (Spalding 1994, 70). In the section on “China-town,” the reader is told: “Don’t be deterred by hearing only Chinese spoken, most of the residents speak English if you need to ask a question” (124). (We are also assured that they are friendly – really.) In the chapter on “Ethnic Flavours” we are told that the multiplicity of cultures adds “pizzaz to the so-called British roots,” produces “unusual buildings,” and “reflect[s] Victoria’s more exotic side.” (136). The authors anticipate criticism, as they make frequent references to what is or is not “politically correct.” The book is clearly written with some awareness of debates about multiculturalism; despite this, one can read it as a neo-colonial text rather than as a text about our colonial past.

COSMOPOLITAN COOKBOOKS

Medallions of Venison with Savoury Chocolate Raisin Sauce

Tuscan hunters used to make this dish using wild boar, and Michael Allemeier [Bishop’s chef] learned the recipe when he worked at a Tuscan restaurant. To buy venison, ask your local butcher. If you can’t find it there, try a German butcher.

Sauce

- 2 Tbsp. butter (30 ml)
- ½ cup shallots, chopped fine (125 ml)
- 2 tsp. garlic, minced (10 ml)
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar (60 ml)
- ½ cup red wine (125 ml)
- ¼ cup fresh rosemary, chopped (60 ml)

- 2 cups veal demi-glace (page 149) (500 mL)

To prepare the sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan, then saute the shallots and garlic until tender. Add the vinegar and reduce by half. Add the demi-glace and simmer 30 minutes. Strain. (This sauce can be made a day in advance and will taste better after the flavour has developed for a day. Refrigerate until needed.)

Serves 4

- 1 cup vegetable oil (250mL)
- 2 Tbsp. fresh rosemary (30 mL)
- 1 ½ lbs. venison leg cutlets (750 g)
- ¼ cup raisins (60 mL)
- ¼ cup white wine (60 mL)
- 2 Tbsp. cocoa powder (30 mL)
- ¼ cup warm water (60 mL)

Combine the oil and rosemary in a bowl. Add sea salt, freshly ground pepper, vegetable oil, and marinate venison overnight in the refrigerator.

In a small bowl, soak the raisins in white wine for 2 to 3 hours, until swollen and puffy.

In another bowl, mix the cocoa with the warm water until very smooth. To prevent lumping, add the water a little bit at a time.

Remove the venison from the marinade and wipe off the excess oil. Season. Heat a small amount of vegetable oil in a heavy frying pan, then sear the venison for 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until browned but still quite rare. (Venison cooked more than medium will be tough.)

Remove the venison from the pan and place on plates.

Add the raisins and white wine to the pan, stirring to deglaze. Add the cocoa mixture, whisking until smooth, then add the sauce. Simmer until hot.

Spoon the sauce over the venison and serve.

Wine suggestion: A Merlot from Washington state. (Bishop 1996, 91)

With Bishop's recipe for medallions of venison, we engage the cosmopolitan cookbook, which is the largest category. We are presented with medallions of venison; the inspiration is Tuscan, the butcher is perhaps German. The meal should be accompanied by a fine wine. Cosmopolitan cookbooks are written by professional chefs or food critics. Rather than tracing family trees and networks of friendship, we learn about the genealogies of celebrity chefs. Gothe, a food critic for the *Vancouver Sun* and "award winning host" of DiscDrive on CBC Radio, attributes many of his recipes to key chefs in Vancouver. We learn a great deal about individual career paths: "I would most certainly have asked Anne Milne for her recipe [for crab cakes] too, had she not been off in Beijing setting up that city's first full-blown Italian trattoria in a Shangri-la Hotel" (Gothé 1995, 37).

A number of these books showcase a restaurant – a public rather than a domestic space. These public spaces are represented as spaces of the celebrity and the artist. From John Bishop we hear: "I'm constantly amazed by the people who turn up at my restaurant. When we pick up the phone, we never know who's coming – movie star, prime minister, prince, artist, tycoon, author, diva" (Bishop 1996, 9). At the Tomato Cafe, artists are on both sides of the counter: "At the Tomato, artists, actors, musicians, and writers have found a home either as staff, customers or performers" (Clement 1995, 50). There is even "a long and distinguished list of dishwashers, including teachers, stand-up

comics, investment bankers, disk jockeys, Olympic athletes, financial analysts, actors, dancers, painters, students, musicians, and a physiotherapist but, as I once pointed out, the Tomato is probably the only restaurant to have a recipient of the Order of Canada on its weekend dishwashing roster" (91).

Academics writing about the new professional services classes have stressed the importance of stylish, artistic consumption in the formation of this class (e.g., Ley 1996). In these cookbooks, restaurateurs are clearly establishing their own credentials and marketing their restaurants, and they provide considerable information about food and wines that functions as "cultural capital" for their readers. They openly mock "low brow" recipes that are found in the vernacular cookbooks. For example, Gothe remarks that his recipe for Steamed Pomelo Peel with Shrimp Puree "beat[s] your cousin Brenda's hollowed out sour dough loaf with the spinach and sour cream" (Gothé 1995, 29). (The latter recipe appears in one of the vernacular cookbooks.) The cookbooks also engage the reader's fantasies about class inclusion. Umberto Menghi narrates a long story about the opening of his first restaurant, Umberto's. As his story goes, on opening night he had no money left to buy sufficient food and wine. Nothing was prepared, and he had only "one piece of veal, a box of rack of lamb, a box of tortellino and some salad makings" (Menghi 1995, 5). There was a lineup of customers outside at 8:00 PM who were "begin[ning] to get impatient, even irritated." Menghi approached them: "I'm sorry, but I'm unprepared for the evening. I have enough food to feed you all, but the only choice is mine. If somebody, instead of getting aggravated, could go

up to the liquor store and get a bunch of wine – we'll deal with it afterward – let's have a party. I'll cook the same for everybody. And it will be good.' And everybody said 'Great idea.'" So one male customer brought back five cases of Beaujolais while Menghi cooked. The other men and women served: "Everyone was getting into the act and having fun. There was an instant feeling of participation and a party mood" (5). What Menghi weaves is a fantasy of inclusion, of the domestication of the public realm, of the public dinner party, of belonging. Other fantasies are provoked by other books. *The British Columbia Wine Companion* is structured as a dictionary, with many entries tied to individuals in the BC wine industry. A good number of such individuals come to their careers as grape grower and/or winery owner at mid-life, after careers as actuaries, electric sign manufacturers, potato farmers, and high school geography teachers. Part of the book's appeal is that it fuels escape fantasies that wed the rural idyll to urban high culture.

It is in the cosmopolitan cookbooks that one finds the most overt attempts to define a regional cuisine. The creators themselves are nomadic and international: John Bishop is from Wales, his chef from South Africa; Umberto Menghi is from Tuscany; Karen Barnaby is from Ottawa (with a resume that includes top Canadian restaurants in Toronto and Vancouver); and Gothe is from Germany. The "alternative" cosmopolitan cookbook, from the Salt Spring Centre (the existence of which the authors credit to the straightforward advice of their yoga instructor, Baba Hari Dass: "Buy land") encourages all of us to travel: "A difference of attitude toward the whole notion of food comes from the

change in mental setting when you travel" (Polden and Thornley 1993, 69). This type of travel is advanced against the worldwide expansion of McDonald's, the spread of transnational industrialized eating, and the homogenization of diet and culture associated with it. And our regional cooking evolves precisely as a crossroads for diverse cuisines. Attempting to define a Northwest cooking tradition, magazine food editors Nims and McKean cite a willingness to experiment with ingredients. Ultimately it is the ingredients that are regional: salmon, crab, oysters, wild mushrooms, cranberries, apples, asparagus. Regional cuisine is defined by its use of these ingredients. Our attention is drawn to the use of organic local vegetables: John Bishop claims such a close relationship with a local organic farmer that he is able to influence what is grown.

Cultural theorists have coined the (awful) term "glocalization" to describe the seemingly paradoxical process of promoting local differences in a globalizing world, and we can see it here: international artists/chefs working with local materials – in season. The recovery of the seasons (which ties the chef to the local) runs through a number of the cosmopolitan books (*Pacific Passions*, *Northwest Best Places*, *Bishop's*). *Asian Tapas and Wild Sushi* is structured by season and geographic orientation (e.g., Spring: Looking East; Spring: Looking West, etc.). The scale that is missing from these books – and indeed all of the cookbooks reviewed here – is the nation. *The Northwest Best Places Cookbook* presents the Northwest as a region, without noting national borders. In a number of the cosmopolitan cookbooks stories are told of chefs who move between Vancouver and Seattle.

Attempting to understand the proliferation of cookbooks in India in the 1970s, Appadurai (1988) argues that they were part of the project of building a national urban middle class. In British Columbia in the 1990s, cosmopolitan cookbooks are part of a related but distinctive project. The production of the region and a distinctive regional cuisine in the cosmopolitan cookbooks no doubt allows some "product differentiation" in the global marketplace of tourism and culinary professionalism. They appear to transmit cultural capital to middle-class readers.

But to analyze these books solely in these terms is too reductive. There is something very interesting about the enthusiastic experimenting with crossing cultural borders that is neither blasé nor exoticizing, that is both self-conscious and matter-of-fact. Appadurai (1988, 18) also writes that "to some degree generically, cook-books appear to belong to the literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss." While this may be true of some, cookbooks are more plural than this; they are ciphers for a multitude of genres and aspirations. Different historical narratives are written into the cookbooks reviewed here: both vernacular working-class, and bourgeois-official settler histories. The Tahltan books are about loss but also celebrate change and educational success. As such, they "talk back" to colonial primitivizing narratives. The cosmopolitan books are tied up with middle-class formation and status distinctions, but they are also experiments in multiculturalism, functioning as small utopic tracts that "offer a style of cooking that brings the world closer together" (Hooper 1997, 3).

Hooper quotes an "unknown author": "When the old pond gets a

new frog, it's a new pond." As old and new frogs are (re)written into BC food traditions, the pond changes; we can rejoice that there nevertheless remain (at least) three ways to cook a deer in British Columbia.

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