

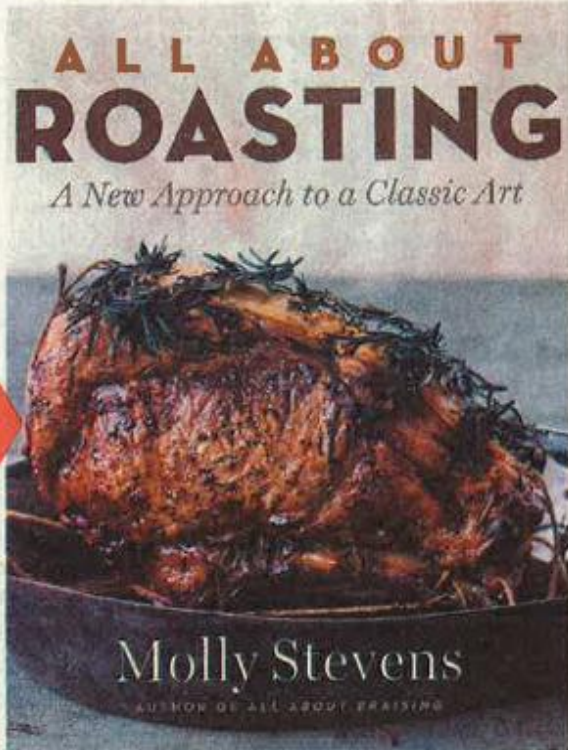


## Looking at cooking by the book

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From this year's crop of cookbooks, here, in no particular order, are my 10 favorites.

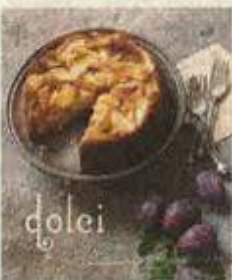
**1** If you have an oven, you need Molly Stevens' **"ALL ABOUT ROASTING: A NEW APPROACH TO A CLASSIC ART"** (Norton, \$35). Stevens wrote 2004's award-winning "All About Braising," and this new volume is equally essential. Stevens offers 200 splendid recipes for meat, poultry, fish and vegetables, but her approach is much more concerned with "why" than "how to." "There is no single path to perfect roasting," she writes. "It's a process, a conversation between you the cook, the oven heat and the food you're roasting."



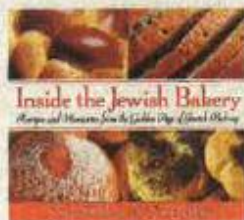
**5** This gorgeous book grew, almost literally, out of the small backyard garden planted about 10 years ago by Nigel Slater, the British food writer. In **"TENDER: A COOK AND HIS VEGETABLE PATCH"** (Ten Speed, \$40), he proves to be an unbridled vegetable masher, writing lovingly about the "glowing saffron flesh of a cracked pumpkin; the curling tendrils of a pea plant..." Slater explores 29 vegetables — through prose and more than 400 recipes. Jonathan Lovelkn shot the extraordinarily evocative photographs.



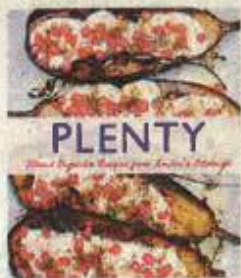
**7** Don't just take it from me: When Mario Batali (who wrote the foreword) first ate at Marc Vetri's eponymous Philadelphia restaurant in 1998, he thought it "the best meal of true Italian deliciousness..." I had ever had outside of the boot." Tom Colicchio considers Vetri "the best Italian cook working in America today." Vetri has written a cookbook devoid of professional pretensions and chef-y flourishes. His **"RUSTIC ITALIAN FOOD"** with David Joachim (Ten Speed, \$35) offers a master class in bread, pizza, pasta, salumi preserves, meats and fish, vegetables and desserts.



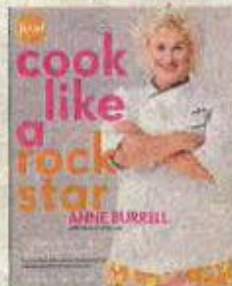
**2** "None of these recipes are actually mine," writes Francine Segan in **"DOLCI: ITALY'S SWEETS"** (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$35). The intrepid author gathered them from home cooks, professional chefs, cooking teachers and fine bakeries, then she refined them for the American kitchen. Segan's confectionary bias, like mine, favors the plain, the humble, the assertive. How could you go wrong with hazelnut-chocolate kisses, almond granita and sweet rosemary-grape focaccia?



**3** The era of the Jewish Bakery is almost gone with the wind. Future generations wanting to savor a true corn rye, pletzl, schnecken or flomenkuchen will have to rely on their own baking chops and the expert counsel offered by books like **"INSIDE THE JEWISH BAKERY: RECIPES AND MEMORIES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF JEWISH BAKING"** by Stanley Ginsberg and Norman Berg (Caminno Books, \$24.95). This is a book geared to serious bakers; the recipes can be lengthy and complex (though always clear). But even non-bakers will enjoy the passages on history and baker's lore.



**4** Yotam Ottolenghi had me at the cover. The pomegranate-seed garnished eggplant pictured on the cover of his **"PLENTY: VIBRANT VEGETABLE RECIPES FROM LONDON'S OTTOLENGHI"** (Chronicle, \$35) was one of the best dishes I've made all year. Ottolenghi not only owns four London catering shops, but he writes a vegetarian column for London's Guardian newspaper (from which these 120 recipes were drawn). He seemingly has never met a vegetable from which he can't make something unexpected and wonderful.



**6** With her punk hair, Twitterized shorthand (POC = piece of cake) and boisterous bravado (which translates, in print, to much CAPITALIZATION and exclamation points!), Anne Burrell isn't the likeliest guide to Italian cooking. But, in fact, the Food Network star (and former sous chef to Mario Batali) has written, with Suzanne Lenzer, the imaginative, practical and thoroughly engaging **"COOK LIKE A ROCK STAR: 125 RECIPES, LESSONS AND CULINARY SECRETS"** (Potter, \$27.99). Not everything's Italian here, but even recipes such as "my big fat chicken soup" are infused with the Italian love of clear, fresh flavors.



**8** Jennifer Reese's acerbic drollery put me in mind of Peg Bracken's "I Hate to Cook Book," except that Reese clearly loves to cook. Her **"MAKE THE BREAD, BUY THE BUTTER"** (Free Press, \$24) purports to advise, as the subtitle says, "what you should and shouldn't cook from scratch." In fact Reese makes things — marshmallows, mustard — that I happily buy. But the book succeeds on the basis of her clever prose and more than 120 compelling recipes. Reese came up with the idea for the book while sampling an Un crustable, "a stupid little sandwich" made by Smucker's to relieve cooks of constructing their own PB&Js. "If this is the best Smucker's can do," she observes, "civilization is safe."

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