

From ‘Little Paris Kitchen’ come some simple, delicious meals

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 05, 2013

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Long after Julia Child and friends published their definitive work on French cookery, we saw other French volumes: bistro books, baking books, regional books, and for one shining moment a couple of years ago, lots of books on macarons. But there’s one category of French cookbook that keeps coming back each year, the one I think of as easy French, and these include “Barefoot in Paris,” by Ina Garten, “The Bonne Femme Cookbook,” by Wini Moranville, and “My French Table,” by Dorie Greenspan. Readers have cried “Magnifique!” to each of them.

This season’s offering comes from Rachel Khoo, a photogenic British former fashion publicist who went to France to study pastry at the Cordon Bleu. Her first cookbook written in English (following two pastry books in French), “The Little Paris Kitchen,” has a surplus of charm and chic. Recipes are not particularly original — similar versions appear in many cookbooks and online — but they’re tasty, and basically, they work. They’re also easy. Khoo has just two gas rings and a mini-oven in her kitchen, so there’s no 3-day brown sauces or laminate dough construction.

Soupe au pistou is made with whatever is around, gently simmered with aromatics, green and white beans, pasta. Pistou is a nutless, cheeseless pesto, and (along with a judicious pinch of sugar added to the pot at the end) it makes the dish.

If you like your roast chicken sweet and smelling of Provencal fields, Khoo’s lemon and lavender chicken is a short route to satisfaction. It’s nothing but a marinade and a roast, which you probably already know how to do. Poulet aux champignons is quick and easy, little more than chunks of turkey or chicken



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Rachel Khoo is a British former fashion publicist.

breast with mushrooms, simmered with wine and cream. Beware of overcooking. In one step, Khoo falls back on the infamous “fry till golden” instruction, which means all things to all people.

Marinated duck legs slide into the oven for a slow, uncomplicated roast; a sauce thrown together at the end combines orange soda and Cointreau (with red vinegar for a sort of gastrique). Grate celery root and apple in a food processor and you have a salad that is the definition of simplicity, tossed in a light mustard vinaigrette. It’s a side that goes with everything, including sandwiches for tomorrow’s lunch, and takes minutes to assemble.

Spring lamb stew works wonders with lamb neck, an uncommon but flavorful cut. A long simmer yields up a light stock for bathing the vegetables, scented with thyme and bay. One instruction — “Brown the meat, garlic, and onions” — is a problem, since a flame that’s hot enough for the meat will burn the onions. But if you separate the steps out, it works perfectly.

Meatballs in spicy sauce with Alsatian pasta are trouble at first, as Khoo trusts bacon lardons to provide enough oil to sweat the mirepoix, and it’s not enough. But add a tablespoon of oil and this slightly fussy recipe sits up and behaves, delivering a sauce that’s satiny, rich, and made piquant with cornichons and capers.

The one dessert we attempt, grapefruit and pepper meringue tartlets, turns out to be worth the half-a-dishwasher’s dishes it involves. The bite of pepper is a happy match for sweet-sour grapefruit, though I wonder how Khoo pulled off the intensive prep (biscuits, citrus curd, Italian meringue) in her tiny kitchen.

Portions are on the small size (as is the type), and many dishes would be improved by judicious seasoning throughout the cooking process, instead of at the end, where it’s usually added. Directions can leave much to a cook’s discretion. Neither a beginner’s book nor a food fanatic’s guide, “The Little Paris Kitchen” falls somewhere in the broad and easy middle.

All in all, it’s a stellar example of what I call “the package argument.” There may not be much that’s new in this book, when you come right down to it, but it does have nicely curated and fairly reliable

THE LITTLE PARIS KITCHEN 120 Simple but Classic French Recipes

Author: Rachel Khoo

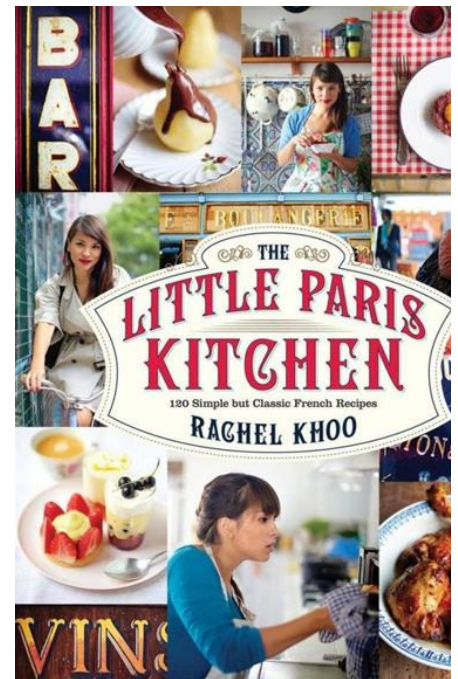
Publisher: Chronicle Books

Number of pages: 288 pp

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Little Paris Kitchen.

recipes, winsome photographs, a charming voice, and whimsical endpapers (drawn by the author herself) . In other words, an irresistible package. For some, that will be enough to make it a keepsake.