

## ‘Bold’: Old ingredients in new ways

By **T. Susan Chang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 20, 2014

ARTICLE



MICHELLE KODIS (LEFT); RICK WIS

**In “Bold,” Susanna Hoffman (left) and Victoria Wise provide creative recipes and generous nuggets of food history.**

[PRINT](#)   [REPRINTS](#)   [E-MAIL](#)   [SHARE](#)

Although every cookbook proclaims it is new, not that many really are. I’m always on the lookout for truly innovative flavor combinations, the unfussy yet deft marriage of old ingredients in new ways. “Bold: A Cookbook of Big Flavors,” by former Chez Panisse chefs Susanna Hoffman and Victoria Wise, is just that: page after page of recipes where citruses, nuts, greens, spices get juggled into new constellations, each one a winner.

If that weren’t enough, the book is jammed with history and context — how the Coke bottle got its shape, the history of Walla Walla onions, why we call it an “eggplant.” Within half an hour of picking it up, I’d studded “Bold” with a hundred stickies. I was in love.

But would it hold up at the stove? The short answer is: When it's good, it's very, very good. A bruschetta comes strewn with lively scallion, lemon rind, and black sesame seeds over pureed edamame so smoothly satisfying you remember that hummus, too, is only smashed legumes. Shoulder lamb chops, served with heaps of scallions and glazed with, of all things, Coke, are a succulent and acidic surprise hit.

While cauliflower couscous with smooth dill yogurt, fiery harissa, and a swooning lemon-apricot relish seems like a lot of work for a vegetable dish, its complex argument cajoles and persuades. Caramelized carrot coins and walnuts in maple syrup blister nicely in the pan for a quick side.

But other dishes fall short of dazzling. A standing rib roast with mushrooms, shallots, walnuts, and red wine results in a pleasant combination of textures that nevertheless don't add up to more than the sum of the parts. A boozy starter of whiskey-soaked figs turns almost cloying when stuffed with a mint-currant pesto with strong sweet notes of its own. (But on a salted cracker, the pesto rocks the house.)

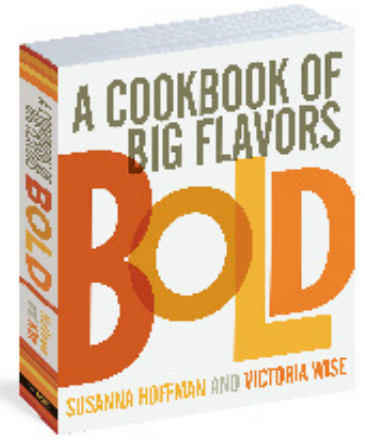
For a pink grapefruit pie, 13 graham crackers yields a ridiculously thick 1/2-inch crust for a 9-inch pan; the custard is very sweet with condensed milk and takes longer to set than projected. Ground pine nuts make for a fairly tender, rich-tasting exterior on pork schnitzel, but a couple tablespoons of warm dressing is just not enough to wilt its chicory side.

There were minor technical glitches in the instructions for several recipes. Pancetta and tangerine steal the show when paired with Brussels sprouts, but how do you "saute" vegetables that have been doused with juice? A butterflied duck is to be browned in a skillet and roasted for 11 to 14 minutes, resulting in very uneven doneness for both skin and flesh — though the caraway flavor is delectable in the good parts. I tried blowtorching the paler bits of skin, but surely a bird as magnificent as a duck deserves better.

And what does "saute until crisp on both sides" mean when chicken breast halves are mostly bone on one side? Are they are not likely to cook through evenly in 12 minutes? At least the sauce — a coffee, vanilla, sun-dried tomato, and currant cream — combines into a soaring whole, a little dark and sweet, a little bitter, and very deep.

I'm sure that these recipes sang right onto the plate in the authors' kitchens. But I can't help but surmise that they were never cross-tested by a variety of home cooks. I like to think that I'll take "Bold" 's brilliant ideas and wed them to elements I already know work, say, another book's crisp graham crust or a blanched and slow-roasted duck. But realistically, this book, at first so full of promise, may well end up taking a back seat to newer arrivals.

*T. Susan Chang can be reached at [admin@tsusanchang.com](mailto:admin@tsusanchang.com).*



**Bold: A Cookbook of Big Flavors**

**Author:** Susanna Hoffman and Victoria Wise

**Publisher:** Workman

**Number of pages:** 416 pp.

**Book price:** \$19.95