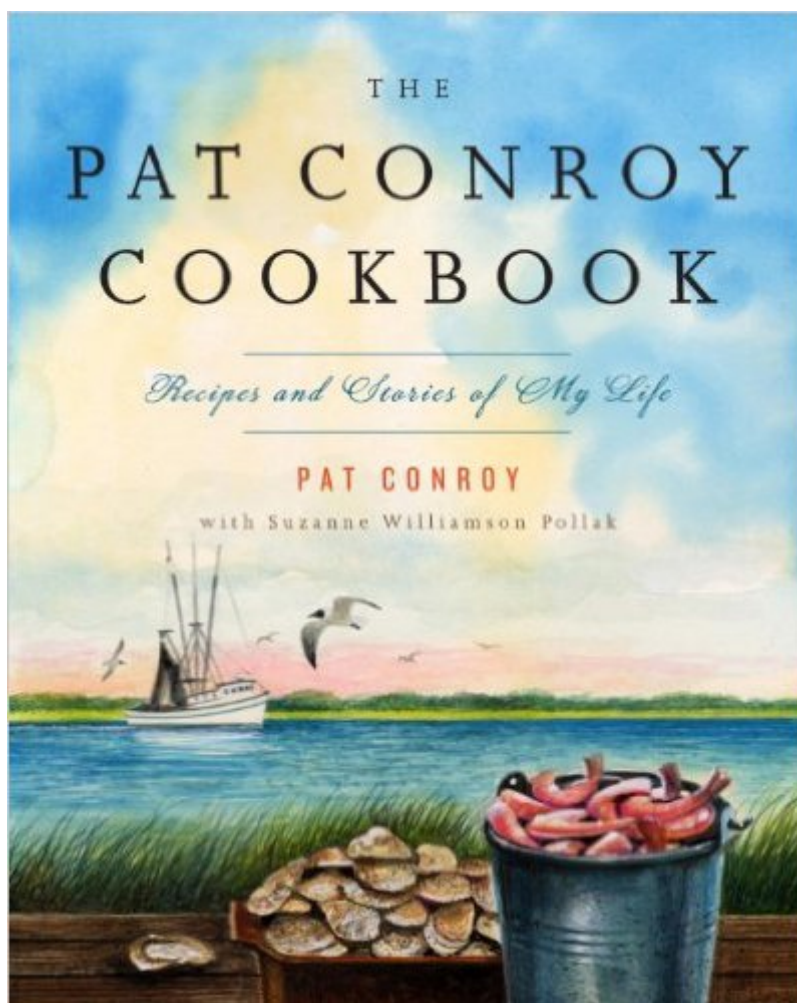


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The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes And Stories Of My Life



Synopsis

America's favorite storyteller, Pat Conroy, is back with a unique cookbook that only he could conceive. Delighting us with tales of his passion for cooking and good food and the people, places, and great meals he has experienced, Conroy mixes them together with mouthwatering recipes from the Deep South and the world beyond. It all started thirty years ago with a chance purchase of *The Escoffier Cookbook*, an unlikely and daunting introduction for the beginner. But Conroy was more than up to the task. He set out with unwavering determination to learn the basics of French cooking—stocks and dough—and moved swiftly on to veal demi-glace and *pâte brisée*. With the help of his culinary accomplice, Suzanne Williamson Pollak, Conroy mastered the dishes of his beloved South as well as the cuisine he has savored in places as far away from home as Paris, Rome, and San Francisco. Each chapter opens with a story told with the inimitable brio of the author. We see Conroy in New Orleans celebrating his triumphant novel *The Prince of Tides* at a new restaurant where there is a contretemps with its hardworking young owner/chef—years later he discovered the earnest young chef was none other than Emeril Lagasse; we accompany Pat and his wife on their honeymoon in Italy and wander with him, wonderstruck, through the markets of Umbria and Rome; we learn how a dinner with his fighter-pilot father was preceded by the Great Santini himself acting out a perilous night flight that would become the last chapters of one of his son's most beloved novels. These tales and more are followed by corresponding recipes—from Breakfast Shrimp and Grits and Sweet Potato Rolls to Pappardelle with Prosciutto and Chestnuts and Beefsteak Florentine to Peppered Peaches and Crème Brûlée. A master storyteller and passionate cook, Conroy believes that a recipe is a story that ends with a good meal. This book is the story of my life as it relates to the subject of food. It is my autobiography in food and meals and restaurants and countries far and near. Let me take you to a restaurant on the Left Bank of Paris that I found when writing *The Lords of Discipline*. There are meals I ate in Rome while writing *The Prince of Tides* that ache in my memory when I resurrect them. There is a shrimp dish I ate in an elegant English restaurant, where Cuban cigars were passed out to all the gentlemen in the room after dinner, that I can taste on my palate as I write this. There is barbecue and its variations in the South, and the subject is a holy one to me. I write of truffles in the Dordogne Valley in France, cilantro in Bangkok, catfish in Alabama, scuppernong in South Carolina, Chinese food from my years in San Francisco, and white asparagus from the first meal my agent took me to in New York City. Let me tell you about the fabulous things I have eaten in my life, the story of the food I have encountered along the way. . . .

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Nan A. Talese; Reprint edition (August 11, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385532717

ISBN-13: 978-0385532716

Product Dimensions: 7.4 x 0.8 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (154 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #62,517 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #84 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Regional & International > U.S. Regional > South](#) #106 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Culinary](#) #109 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Cooking Education & Reference > Essays](#)

Customer Reviews

Pat Conroy is my favorite author, and it is fitting that he dedicates the same passion for cooking as he does for his writing in his new book, *The Pat Conroy Cookbook*. The fact that Conroy is so fascinated with food is in itself ironic. Conroy grew up in a house where food was important, but good food was not. In fact, he regrets that his mother "looked upon food as a necessity, not a realm of art." Her idea of seafood every Friday night was fish sticks. This all changed when his wife announced that she was going to law school, and he would have to start preparing the meals for his family (consisting of three young daughters). Conroy is an avid reader and a keen observer, so he began his education in earnest. First, he went to the local bookstore. Instead of recommending something basic and easy (like Betty Crocker), the owner talked Conroy into purchasing a book by the French chef, Escoffier. Soon, he was immersed in the world of making stock, roux and exotic foods. He discovered that cooking could be great fun, and combined the skills of being an artist with those needed to become a mad chemist. As part of his culinary education, Conroy also became an avid collector. He collected cookbooks, and especially enjoyed those homey books published by churches and civic groups. They not only offered great recipes, but also precious nuggets of knowledge such as "store mushrooms and string beans in a brown paper bag in the refrigerator, not in plastic." Next, he started a collection of culinary friends. Some were cooks, some were chefs, and others just enjoyed good food. Then he started collecting recipes. Many came from friends and family, others he created or recreated. He added foods to his repertoire (things such as white asparagus and escargot). He took a number of cooking classes, and finally, he started traveling.

Living in Rome and France for extended periods introduced him to whole new cuisines. While I'm not sure that Conroy has become a master chef, he certainly must be an accomplished one. But you can bet that Conroy would not be content to just compile recipes for a book. The Pat Conroy Cookbook reads more like a memoir with a generous helping of recipes sprinkled here and there. Each chapter describes a story, saga or anecdote about his life, and is then followed with related recipes. He tells of preparing a bridesmaid's luncheon for his daughter, cooking for his dying father, and foods to make for funerals. He talks about foods from Italy and France, and honeymooning in Umbria. He provides chapters on oyster roasts, pig roasts, Vidalia onions, and grilling. He regales us with the best meals that he has eaten-both in restaurants and out. And he tells us of the relationship between food and his writing. The recipes themselves are interesting, intriguing and not too intimidating. For those that are more complicated, Conroy takes us through them step by step. He also provides the reader with some of those nuggets of wisdom he so admires in church cookbooks, such as drain fried foods on paper bags and not paper towels. I will definitely try a number of them-especially the low country specialties like shrimp and grits, crab cakes, and pickled shrimp. So whether you like Pat Conroy or cooking, you will love this cookbook. Not only will it tempt your palate, but it will also provide the reader with a generous dose of "The World According to Pat Conroy." What a tasty treat, indeed.

If you are not sure about buying "Recipes of My Life" here are a few guidelines I would use in recommending the book to anyone: If you like any of Pat Conroy's writing, buy this book. If you enjoy food, buy this book. If you enjoy cooking, buy this book. If you have no clue who Pat Conroy is, if you have no particular interest in good food, or fine cooking, but you love to hear a good story, buy this book. If you are in search of outstanding recipes - from down-home Southern cooking to fine Italian cuisine...BUY it. And for God's sake if you are like me and can't make a good stock, BUY the book! Above all I find Pat Conroy to be a master story-teller, and for that reason alone I recommend this book to anyone. A delight to read, from front to back. And now I can make a stock to be proud of!

Tres Magnifique, Pat. The introduction to each chapter reads as easily and with as much anticipation as his novels. Once the recipes were introduced, I had to spend the rest of the day in my kitchen preparing stock and sauces for a post script meal. I have just finished this book and as usual I want for more.

This little gem is wonderful in a literal sense - it inspires wonder. First, how terrific to see a great photo of Pat standing tall on the cover with a bucket of low country oysters. It's hard not to look at him and see all the leading characters from his books - the young teacher from *Water is Wide*, the scared and brave cadet from *Lords of Discipline*, the brave lost survivor from *Prince of Tides*, etc. This book is for anyone who loves Pat's books. It's truly a story of his life, but amazingly, threaded together by the food and meals he's experienced, and friends who've shared those meals with him. Many of the real-life characters from Pat's fiction weave in and out of these meals - his beloved fish-hating mother, his feared but irreplaceable fighter-pilot father, his 'paysan' roommates from *The Citadel*, his Roman neighbors from *Beach Music*, etc. The most pleasant surprise for me from this book, is Pat's stories breathe rich life into his recipes, making them more full and sensual than recipes on the flat page of most other cookbooks. For example, his recipe for pickled shrimp is fairly straightforward in ingredient and preparation, but for Pat, this is a signature dish he brings to memorials when a friend dies. His story lets us see and feel the food hungrily devoured by the friends and loved ones of the deceased, as Pat feels the pride of feeding them in their time of grief. I began the book thinking the recipes would be throwaways, and ended with a dozen or so recipes I plan to try. Bravo Pat! Someday I hope to read *The Boo* - your one story I have yet to track down. As long as you write and I read, I will be reading the terrific stories you tell.

One of my friends once aptly described Pat Conroy as a cross between Thomas Wolfe and Alan Alda. She was absolutely right--no noun is ever left unmodified and most of the time there's a darn good punchline. This cookbook is a random selection of stories--many funny, some sad, interspersed with recipes. As a Conroy fan and as someone who reads cookbooks for fun, I loved it. Warning. If you make the recipe for the incredibly rich pound cake in the book, double the amount of vanilla the recipe calls for. When I make it again, I'll add lemon zest and soak it in lemon-sugar syrup.

This has now moved into my all time favorite Pat Conroy book, and I'm a big Conroy fan. It's not so much a book of recipes, though that is definitely a part of it, as short vignettes of life in Mr Conroy's world. And since our world overlaps, and we know some of the same individuals, it was even more delightful. Mr czuk took one look at the picture on the front and said "You'd read a book about food by a man who looks like that?" Well, yes. And better him than some anorexic yuppy chic in a glam kitchen. Bring on the hush puppies, baby!

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