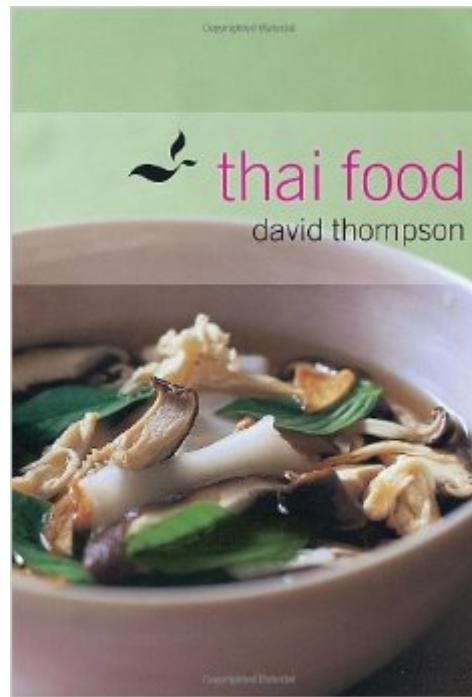


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Thai Food



Synopsis

Renowned chef David Thompson first went to Thailand by mistake: a holiday plan had to be changed at the last minute, and he ended up in Bangkok, where he was seduced by the people, culture, and cuisine. Since that fateful trip some 20 years ago, Thailand has become David's second home. Working alongside cooks who perfected their craft in the Thai royal palaces, he began to document the traditional recipes and culinary techniques that have been handed down from generation to generation. The result is THAI FOOD, the most comprehensive account of this ancient and exotic cuisine ever published in English. David writes about Thailand and its food with an easy erudition, encouraging readers to cook and experiment, while simultaneously fostering a respect for the food and its stewardship through the ages. Although all the classic, well-loved recipes are here, this magnum opus features hundreds of lesser-known but equally authentic and delicious Thai dishes that will inspire cooks to go beyond green curry chicken and Thai fish cakes. David's passion and conviction are infectious; complemented by Earl Carter's superb photography, THAI FOOD captures all aspects of the dynamic Thai culture and cuisine. Ten years in the making, this groundbreaking work is one of the cookbook publishing events of the decade. The author's London restaurant, nahm, received a Michelin star in 2002, making it the first Thai restaurant to receive such an honor. Photographed at David's restaurants in Sydney and London, and on location in Thailand, Earl Carter's superb images capture both the essence of Thai food and its rich cultural milieu. Awards 2003 James Beard Award Winner 2003 IACP Award Winner Reviews "Stands out, dauntingly massive, brilliantly magisterial, and, at the same time, bustling with charm, observations, life." "Saveur" "Set a new standard for Asian cookbooks." "Saveur (Top 100 Home Cook Edition)

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Customer Reviews

'Thai Food' by Australian chef, restaurant owner, and Thai food scholar David Thompson is one of those books which, if you have an enduring interest in food, you genuinely regret it took any more than a few days since its publication to acquire, read, and assimilate the book's material. It is one of those books where you can open it to virtually any page and find evidence of its quality. I recall some reviews of this book which noted that although it was certainly comprehensive, it may be criticized for giving recipes containing hard to find ingredients. While I think this is a valid criticism of a book advertised as having recipes for the home cook such as 'Vatch's Thai Kitchen' by chef Vatcharin Bhumichitr, it is not a valid criticism of a scholarly book where the object of the author is to present an accurate picture of a national cuisine. And, Thompson has done this as well or better than virtually every good survey of national cuisines I have reviewed such as Diane Kochilas 'The Glorious Foods of Greece', Jean Anderson's smaller book on 'The Food of Portugal', Marcella Hazan's 'Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking', Diana Kennedy and Rick Bayless various books on Mexican cuisines and the granddaddy of them all, Julia Child's 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking'. This may be just a bit unfair to these authors, as not all of them were aiming at a grand scholarly treatment of an entire cuisine. Child, for example, was giving us 'cuisine bourgeois', leaving the three other types of classic French cooking to others. Kennedy and Bayless have covered Mexico in not one, but in at least two or three different books, with Kennedy's latest, 'From My Mexican Kitchen' being a model treatment of some special subjects in a national cuisine. Thompson has covered the whole range of Thai cooking, including very good essays on Thai history and geographical regions and the regional influences on Thai cuisine. One look at the map of Thailand and you can see how broadly different one part of the country may be from another. The northern section virtually pokes its head into the China, and Chinese make up about 11% of the population, as they seem to do in virtually every country on which they border or every nearby island group such as the Philippines. Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam surround the Northeast. The southern peninsula borders on Malaysia. The central rice-growing region is close to Burma and India. There are some parts of the country such as the far north and northeast to which it was literally impractical to travel from capital Bangkok until the mid-1920's when a railroad was built from Bangkok to Chiang Mai on the Ping river. While China, India heavily influences Thai cooking, and it's Southeast Asian neighbors, it is also different from China and India in important ways. While

the wok is important to Thai cooking, it is not used in the same way as their Chinese neighbors. The most traditional Thai wok is actually earthenware, replaced by brass upon contact with European traders. 'Traditional Thai stir-frying was not the fierce and furious method of the Chinese, but gentle frying over radiant heat in an earthenware pot.' It is obvious in this very same paragraph that Thompson is not a 'scientific' food scholar, as he correctly states that the proper technique is to heat the wok before adding the oil, but describes the level of heat as 'white hot'. White-hot temperatures are found only in the centers of stars, not in Bangkok kitchens. Nevertheless, his cooking advice is solid and entirely consistent with observations made by Shirley Corriher on heating metal pans before adding oil. Every major cuisine has their classic techniques for preserving food. In fact, one may almost measure the sophistication of a cuisine by their representative preparation and preservation methods. The Italian cuisine is one of the world's leaders because of their cheese-making for milk preservation, salumi techniques for preserving meats, drying and curing methods with ham, winemaking and olive oil techniques, and salting techniques for fish and capers. While salt is a signature ingredient of Mediterranean cuisine, it is simply not as common in southeast Asia, so Thailand and surrounding countries extending as far north as Korea use fermentation as their primary preservation technique. It seems they simply ferment everything they can get their hands on, such as bamboo shoots, bean curd, fish, rice, watercress, and soybeans. Like the Italians with Parmesan and anchovies, the fermented products are often sources for adding saltiness to dishes. When I go to a Thai restaurant or look at recipes in popular Thai cookbooks, many Thai dishes seem to be a mix of a great number of ingredients. Thompson, on the other hand, states that the ideal of a Thai salad is simplicity, but it is also about a balancing of ingredients, as exemplified in Alford and Duguid's book title, 'Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet'. I will venture the hypothesis that this great mix of tastes comes from the intersection of the sour of fermented ingredients and the strong capsasian chiles used to combat the oppressive Thai heat. Some people, even some foodies, may be inclined to dismiss this book as simply not a type of cooking with which they have any interest. I would recommend they get and read much of this book anyway. One example is the chapter on salads. In spite of the great difference in ingredients, I find a remarkable similarity between Thai and French salad making. This means that Thompson's essay and survey of Thai salads contains some insights into saladmaking that you simply may not get anywhere else. Even if you never go out of your way to find red shallots, holy basil, or Kaffir lime leaves, there is much you can learn here! This book should be on the shelves of anyone who wishes to be sophisticated about food.

When I first came across this book in the stores, I have to admit I was highly skeptical about the authenticity of the recipes contained in this book....was it by another Westerner who declared himself an expert on Thai food after one or two short vacations to the country? An Australian restaurateur you say? With an award-winning restaurant in London? Was the award judged by Thai people? Thailand has a rich culinary heritage which has, in part, been shaped by foreign influences. Thai food in turn is a highly complex intermingling of tastes: salty, sour, sweet, spicy and umami (a Japanese term to identify the 5th 'taste'). Furthermore it is a fairly impenetrable cuisine least of all because of the language barrier and the mysterious ingredients. To top things off this book was written by a non-Thai. That said, my initial concerns turned out to be completely unfounded and I am happy to say that this is one book that I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone who is serious about real Thai food. Needless to say, the book extends far beyond just Tom Yum Kung and Pad Thai! At the beginning of the book, Thompson gives a brief (but highly informative) introduction to Thailand and its history, religion and regional cuisine which sets the tone for the rest of the book. There is also a whole chapter about the most common cooking techniques as well as ingredients. His recipes are written in a fairly conversational manner, which I really like, and, most importantly, he does not advocate taking shortcuts or making substitutions which the Thais wouldn't normally make/take themselves. Thompson clearly explains in his introduction that his reason for doing this is so that he doesn't compromise his goal of accurately capturing the Thai cuisine. Personally I don't understand the other reviewer's gripes about ingredients being hard to find! Don't bother cooking those recipes then!?! Anyway I digress....the recipes produce highly authentic and tasty results. I have travelled extensively in Thailand and the results I've had with this book match my wonderful dining experiences there. One final point to bear in mind: some recipes are laborious, others less so. However, that is keeping with the true spirit of the Thai cuisine! In short, this is an excellent book well worth the space on your bookshelf. I'll even add that it'll probably become a classic cookbook!

I recommend this book only for serious enthusiasts who are truly passionate about authentic Thai cooking/food and are not looking for quick, adapted recipes! Having enjoyed authentic Thai food during my trips to Thailand, I am repeatedly disappointed with the adapted versions found in most local restaurants here. Since I am an avid cook, I have been experimenting to replicate the dishes I had in Thailand. After some research I found David Thompson's "Thai Food" to be a rare find. Most Thai cook books I have come across provide adapted recipes with shortcuts and suggested substitutes for ingredients! How dreadful! Undoubtedly, Thai food involves much effort and can even be tedious. But the taste is well worth it. More importantly, ingredients in Thai cooking CAN NOT be

substituted if the REAL flavor and aroma are to be achieved. For example, if you are going to substitute regular ginger for galangal (Thai ginger), or lime zest for kaffir lime zest, as many books suggest - you may as well not cook Thai food! This is what sets David's book apart from the rest - he sticks to the real stuff! He painstakingly explains all the details of real Thai cooking, discussing each ingredient and various techniques followed by the recipes. While some recipes are quite cumbersome or require ingredients which are not easily available, the book is worth the insight it provides into authentic Thai cuisine. Once you understand the basics, you can be creative by combining basic Thai ingredients with techniques and create your own recipes without straying from the flavors, tastes and aroma of REAL Thai cuisine! One complaint however: where is the recipe for Yum Woon Sen??

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