



# Let's Eat: Recipes from My Kitchen Notebook

Tom Parker Bowles , Cristian Barnett (Photographs)

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The first cookbook from English foodie and author of *The Year Of Eating Dangerously*—comfort food from the country that invented it

Award-winning food writer Tom Parker Bowles is one of the world's most enthusiastic eaters. He's as over the moon for simple food—a perfectly melting bacon, egg and cheese sandwich, or a rich tomato soup—as he is for the exotic, the fiery hot, and the elegant. Like many everyday gourmands, he never wastes a meal. The dinners he puts together for his young family at home are as carefully thought-out and executed as anything he makes for company. His easy culinary style and winning writing will delight fans of his fellow Englishman Simon Hopkinson's *Roast Chicken and Other Stories*. The 140 recipes in *Let's Eat* are divided into extremely useful chapters, such as "Comfort Food", "Quick Fixes," and "Slow & Low" and include:

scrambled eggs roast lamb his Mum's heavenly roast chicken Asian noodle soup meatballs sticky toffee pudding

Rounded out with a weekday cook's shortcuts and basics, such as how to make stock and how to transform leftovers into entirely new meals, *Let's Eat* is one of the best curl-up-and-read-it-tonight cookbooks of the season.

## Let's Eat: Recipes from My Kitchen Notebook Details

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# From Reader Review Let's Eat: Recipes from My Kitchen Notebook for online ebook

## April says

Nice pictures.

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## Carol Smith says

Disclosure: Won on First Reads.

I received my copy on October 8th and spent a month reading and cooking from it. This review includes 10 recipe reviews with photos, followed by a summary review.

### RECIPES MADE

**Recipe 1: Orange, red onion & basil salad** (p. 132, made 10/20/12): Easy, colorful, fresh, tasty. For more efficient grazing, I recommend cutting up the orange into bite-size chunks and the onion into slivers.

**Recipe 2: Potted shrimps** (p. 49, made 10/20/12). We're pretty bold with our spices, but a full teaspoon of cayenne packs quite the kick. We both coughed several times as it hit our throats. Made molasses bread to go with it, as recommended. Yum, but then how can you go wrong with butter and shrimp? Easy recipe. My ramekins are 7 oz so this recipe filled only 3 of them. Would double next time. Calls for "brown shrimp", something we're not gonna find here in the states. Used 31-40 count shrimp but I think they should have been smaller.

**Recipe 3: A simple (chicken) dish for bachelors & widowers to impress their guests** (p. 103, made 10/21/12). Super simple with tremendously tasty aromatics and sauce. This recipe has great potential and I'll be making it again soon, but a few critical changes are in order. First, the recipe calls for skin side down, but this just yields pasty wet skin. Skin side up, folks! Also, 45 minutes at 350F just ain't gonna cut it. More like 400-425F for 1:15 hrs. [image error]

**Recipe 4: Peas with pancetta** (p. 94, made 10/21/12). Easy peasy perfection. Adding this one to our permanent repertoire.

**Recipe 5: A really good fish pie** (p. 40, made 10/22/12). This recipe illustrates a major challenge with the book as a whole: A major ingredient is smoked haddock; indeed, it is "the backbone of this pie" - but where is one to find smoked haddock in the States? You'll find related discussions on Chowhound - even those on the upper East side of Manhattan can't find it. What to do? The only smoked fish to be found in the local grocery store are all oily fish (kipper, mackerel) and this is a white fish pie. I took a cue from other fish pie recipes and introduced some anchovies to the milk broth (probably shoulda used entire can, not just 1/3rd). Also substituted nutmeg for the blade of mace, after first doing some Internet research to learn what "blade of mace" is (it's the outer hull of nutmeg, has a subtle nutmeg taste). And used a combination of white fish - cod, sole, fresh haddock in place of the smoked haddock and cod called for in the recipe. One additional variation - the recipe calls for dotting butter on top of the mashed tater topping, but I felt the recipe already had a lot of butter going on and was quite...beige....so I opted for a smattering of grated cheddar. The

comments for this article suggest that cheese is a common addition. Served with fresh peas, which swam enthusiastically in the rich bechamel sauce. So yes - I definitely played with the recipe, but mostly out of necessity.

Verdict? Yummy, time-consuming, pot-consuming, and VERY, VERY, VERY RICH. But again, it's really hard for a recipe to fail with butter, cream, milk, scallops, shrimp, taters, etc. I think I might like to try my hand at a fish pie again, but would like to explore some of the many other variations out there. There is no one fish pie standard; there are recipes that call for all kinds of interesting additions - breadcrumbs, dry mustard, grated veggies, lemon zest, etc... Is it indeed a "really good fish pie"? This can only be answered after future explorations.

**Recipe 6: Steak** (p. 92, made 10/25/12). First, kids, be sure to do it on the grill. Outside. Not indoors. In a word: smoke. We normal folk do not have industrial kitchen exhausts. Second, do pay heed to what I didn't: the part about bringing the steaks to room temp. Third, even at room temp, 2-3 minutes per side is not gonna do it. Took me 16 minutes in all (lowered temp after first 6 minutes), but seared to perfection thanks to my Thermapen.

**Recipe 7: Asian steak in lettuce** (p. 93, made 10/25/12). Sloppy, def not for guests. But an A1 kicker sauce. Used serranos as no Thai birds-eye chillies to be found anywhere in the vicinity.  
[image error]

**Recipe 8: Filipino beef stew (adobong baka)** (p. 241, made 10/27/12). Simple and really very tasty, but husband didn't feel it earned "repeat recipe" status. Used brisket. Substituted chicken broth for water (I usually do). It begged for something green and fresh, so garnished with chopped cilantro and served with lime wedges - both excellent improvements.

**Recipe 9: Chicken & mushroom stew** (p. 37, made 11/3/12). A true keeper! Five enthusiastic stars. And we actually still had some of our Montana morels left, although this pie would work just fine with a mix of mushroom varieties. I doubled the onions and mushrooms and was generous with the hot sauce and mustard, in keeping with my "more = better" stew rule. Subbed thyme and a touch of poultry seasoning for the tarragon, which worked great. Perfect served with peas. As you can see, two people eating at home don't care if puff pastry isn't rolled out nice and pretty. One could play around a great deal with this recipe.

**Recipe 10: James's "Old Bank" chili** (p. 155, made 11/10/12). I had to research to find out what "passata" is - yet another ingredient in this book not readily available to most Americans. It's basically fresh tomato puree sans seeds and skin. Brits can get it in a jar, but I had to invest in a food mill and make my own from scratch. And I had to mail order harissa. I made it myself once from Claudia Rodin's cookbook, but it was HORRIBLE. So the only ingredient I couldn't get my hands on were those darned Thai birds-eye chilis that Parker Bowles loves so much - had to use jalapenos and Anaheims. Results? First, this makes A LOT of chili. And I had to simmer it for HOURS longer to reduce all the liquid. And it definitely had to be defatted. But the results were excellent. Husband thoroughly approves. Lamb adds a wonderful complexity to chili. And the recipe promises it will taste even better tomorrow. Served more harissa on the side at the table. Love that stuff. The recommendation to serve it over brown rice was dead on - adds a lovely nuttiness in contrast to the spicy harissa and chilis.

## SUMMARY REVIEW

My rating wavers somewhere between 3 and 4 stars depending upon whether I'm reading it, cooking from it, or eating the results:

**Reading: 4 stars.** The book is filled with just the sort of food I adore at any time of the year: warm and mushy comfort foods, especially those that simmer for hours. Photos are wanna-dive-into. Layout is excellent with the exception of a few recipes that continue onto the backside of a page. Cooks don't want to turn pages with sticky fingers.

**Cooking: 3 stars.** Some people never proceed beyond reading a cookbook but I wanna work with one and there's nothing more frustrating than unattainable ingredients. Recipes for roast woodcock and roast grouse appear within the first 30 pages. When was the last time you saw either bird at your local American grocery store? Hmm. The author promises no fancy equipment will be required, stating that, "Too often, cookbooks are written by chefs who've long forgotten the constraints of the home kitchen," but recipes with mythical ingredients are just as much a barrier.

And it's not just because I'm stuck in the middle of Missouri. I found discussions on Chowhound where folks on the upper east side of Manhattan were unable to local smoked haddock, the central feature of his fish pie. Lol! The author himself couldn't locate eel for his eel salad.

My second issue with the book is that it's not been fully adapted for the American market. Spellings and measurements have been converted, but that's not enough. For example, several recipes call for passata. This might be a staple in a European cupboard, but not in the US. An explanation is called for at the very least, or perhaps a suggestion for an alternative ingredient. Similarly, the potted shrimp recipe discusses shrimp types, calls for a type not available in the US as far as I know, and explicitly identifies Americans as not the audience for this book. The reverse holds true as well. His Mexican stew advises mail ordering for chipotles. They may be exotic in the UK, but they're available everywhere in the US. These are just a few examples.

**Eating: 4 stars.** The author sets a high bar in the introduction, stating that the bulk of the recipes come from a leather-bound notebook into which recipes only go after a minimum of three attempts and the hard-won approval of his spouse. He is telling us that every recipe is a proven winner. While I wouldn't go that far (see above recipe reviews), I will say that we've eaten extremely well over the past month. I plan to make at least five more recipes from the book in the coming weeks (Mexican stew, bouef en daube, onion soup, meatballs, porcini risotto), and isn't that the hallmark of a successful cookbook?

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## Annette says

This is a great recipe book, but pretty far from traditional in terms of its content and layout, with chapter titles like 'Comfort Food' and 'Slow and Low'. Tom claims to have based most of this cook book on a small leather journal he's kept for years of thrice tested recipes, and being as well travelled as he is that makes for an interesting selection - British (Toad in the Hole), Thai, Mexican, Indian, Cantonese, etc.

Tom's concept of a 'recipe' is very broad, so you'll find everything here from simple 'Baked Eggs' (a great empty cupboard recipe he got from his mother) and 'A Really Good Fish Recipe' or a more complicated 'Haddock Parker Bowls', to recipes for a 'Hot Toddy' to ease colds and a 'Bloody Mary' for those who prefer a liquid diet.

Despite the fact that I don't eat meat (and Tom has some amazing meat based dishes here - from grouse to oxtail) I found plenty that I intend to try out for myself: 'Lemon Risotto', 'Hot Buttered Crab', 'Trifle', 'Shrimp Broth' etc. I was also really impressed with the blender recipes for kids's food, I will definitely be passing many of these along to friends!

This is more than a simple collection of recipes however, there are snippets of memoir, pop culture food references and pocket histories of recipes or ingredients as well. He isn't shy about promoting suppliers he likes, or other cooks' books either, so there's some really useful references tucked into the text. The combination of all these things serves to make this a much more engaging recipe book than most, despite the fact that not every recipe is accompanied by a photograph (although most are).

I laughed out loud at Tom's description of a 'British' bolognese, smiled when reading about the movie magic of meatballs, and shook my head when I heard about his week of living on eggs for the Mail on Sunday paper. Did you know you can test the age of an egg by placing it in a jug of water? (If it floats, bin it!) I didn't before reading Tom's book...

I was particularly interested in Tom's commentary on the debate about the origin of 'Sticky Toffee Pudding', because coming from Cumbria I had only ever heard the Ulswater version of the story... There's so many small gems of information in this book, that there's something here to spark everyone's interest, even a reluctant cook's!

I'm off to the bookstore in a bit to order the following books for friends, thanks to Tom's recommendations: 'A Passion for Mushrooms' by Antonio Carluccio and 'Thai Food' by David Thompson (who apparently once claimed "food is the only democratic institution in Thailand") .

If I had to list the things that disappointed me about this book they would be:

1. How difficult it is to navigate these recipes (the reference section at the back saved me, or I'd have plugged this thing so full of bookmarks it would have looked like a revision guide).
2. Tom's strange ideas concerning saturated fat - it would have been nice to see more 'low fat' workarounds in some of these recipes.
3. His love of chilli.

So, a fantastic, humorous recipe book full of tried and tested (by Tom) favourites from almost every continent on earth. Yes, there are 'traditional' recipes here, but also some very innovative ones too. A good book for tested or new cooks alike, who don't mind some topical commentary along the way.

This book was provided to me by Netgalley in exchange for a fair review.

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## **Ollie Reeder says**

Very meat-centric.

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