

BEYOND BANANA BREAD ~ noteworthy non-cookbooks of 2020

Bill Addison
Los Angeles Times

(TNS) — Cookbooks are always about connection — written to share the love of a cuisine or celebrate ancestry, or sometimes to eulogize broken bonds and safeguard history... If you're thinking about the broader context of food in our troubled culture, take heart and inspiration from these two noteworthy non-cookbooks.

Fermentation as Metaphor

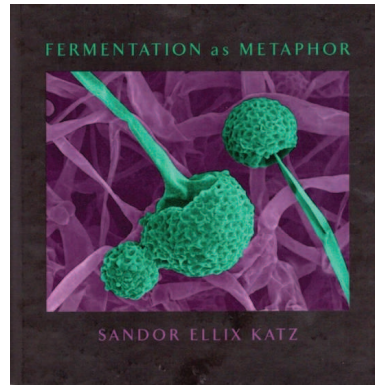


Sandor Katz calls himself a “fermentation revivalist.” He’s spent the last 25 years learning and practicing the microbial transformation of foods into sourdough starters, yogurt, kombucha, kimchi, beer, wine, cheese and cured meats. His dedication meets a moment in America when the food world has embraced fermentation as an aspect of culinary reclamation — which is to say, as a reaction against industrialized food systems.

With this slim, 118-page volume, Katz turns from recipes to philosophy. He considers the wider meanings of fermentation: “Anything bubbly, anything in a state of excitement or agitation, can be said to be fermenting.”

Later he is more specific: “When a group of people whose reality has been pathologized organize to claim respect for who they are, that is fermentation.”

“Fermentation as Metaphor” is a swift, spicy, timely read. Addressing viruses (including his own experiences living with HIV), our obsessions with cleanliness and borders, and the need for ferment in a time of social upheaval, Katz is provocative but also calm and reasoned. If his observations stoke your literal appetite, check out his bestselling books “Wild Fermentation” and “The Art of Fermentation.”



describes: the aching knees after hours of meditation, the disappearance into community, her struggles as tenzo (head cook) to please everyone’s tastes. Zen teaches you to observe the mind — your own as well as the commonalities of the human mind — and there’s a wonderful, ambling quality to the book’s flow that feels keenly influenced by Madison’s reclamation of her Zen years.

“What had been special about eating in the zendo (meditation hall) was the opportunity to experience food that was truly modest, even humble, and maybe not very well prepared, and have it be okay. Even more than okay,” she wrote. “For me zendo food was about having less and discovering that it was more.”

The intersections of food and spirituality are under-explored topics in American literature. Nourishment can be about more than an inventive recipe or a dazzling meal. Madison’s reflections remind us of larger, slipperier kinds of hunger that call to be satisfied.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

The cookbook portion of this article was published in the last two editions of GO! magazine.

An Onion in My Pocket



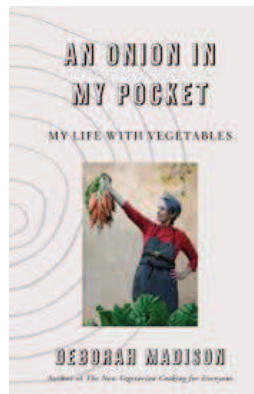
Since publishing “The Greens Cookbook” in 1987, Deborah Madison has been one of America’s guiding thinkers and instructors around modern plant-based cuisine. She cooked at Chez Panisse before becoming, in

1980, the founding chef at still-thriving Greens in San Francisco.

Her books mirrored the evolving California culinary ethos: eat what grows close to home, study the world’s cuisines for unending inspiration. Any serious cook should own her two knowledge-packed masterworks, “Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone” and “Vegetable Literacy,” if only to crib her gifts for flavor combinations.

“An Onion in My Pocket,” Madison’s foray into memoir, traces her upbringing in Davis, California, the path to opening Greens, the hard lessons she learned helming the restaurant and her transition to cookbook author. The kernel of the narrative, though, emerges from the nearly 20 years she spent as a student and practitioner at the San Francisco Zen Center. It’s a period of her life, she admits, that she’s spent little time examining until now. The self-inquiry pushes her writing into absorbing terrains.

Though I’m a lapsed Zen student, I recognize the existence Madison



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