



Books that Cook

By Michael Nagrant

APRIL SHOWERS NOT ONLY BRING MAY FLOWERS, BUT a flood of new cooking titles. While I'm usually psyched about all the new recipes, I also get overwhelmed to the point of a potential Xanax habit by the mountain of books to be read. Thankfully, there is a drinks portion of the cookbook market, and this year, inspired by Tony Abou-Ganim and Mary Elizabeth Faulkner's "The Modern Mixologist," it only took a few Negroni cocktails to calm me. Through the course of reading ten or so cookbooks, my recipe (and my liver) changed considerably. If you, like me, feel so inclined to lubricate your reading journey through the three tomes I recommend below, here's my final Negroni recipe:

- 1) Make your own compound gin: Hit Binny's for a 1.75-liter bottle of Smirnoff vodka (\$16.99). Hit Spice House and procure 2.5 tbsp juniper berries, 1/8 tsp fennel seed, four black peppercorns, 1/4 tsp allspice, 3/4 tsp coriander. Hit up grocery store for 1 tsp fresh orange zest, 1/2 tsp lemon zest, and one sprig rosemary.
- 2) Run 750 ml of Smirnoff through a Brita filter a couple of times to neutralize the flavor as much as possible. You can also skip this step, as Smirnoff is pretty clean already and I'm likely being OCD. Mix juniper berries with filtered vodka. Let the mixture sit for twelve hours. Add remaining ingredients to infusion for another twelve hours.
- 3) Filter the infused mixture through cheesecloth or fine mesh sieve into a clean bottle. You now have some bootleg gin that costs a third of most commercial varieties and tastes twice as awesome.
- 4) Fill rocks glass with thick ice cubes, pour in 1 oz of your gin, 1 oz Campari, and 1 oz Carpano Antica (you will never drink another sweet vermouth again). Stir the drink clockwise twenty times (or counter-clockwise if you distrust authority). Take a two-inch piece of orange zest and warm the skin with the flame from a match. Hold the warmed zest over a flaming match and your cocktail glass. Squeeze zest over flame to release essential oils and caramelize them. Be careful not to singe your eyebrows. Rub the flamed zest around the rim of your glass and toss into the drink. Sip.

"The Modern Mixologist" by Tony Abou-Ganim, Mary Elizabeth Faulkner (Agate-Surrey Books)

Despite the fact that the craft cocktail insurgency is at a fever pitch, we're still missing the coalescing game-changing modern primer that inspires home drinkers and seasoned bartenders, the analog to Thomas Keller's "The French Laundry Cookbook." With its concise cocktail history, storytelling and comprehensive bartending primer, Abou-Ganim and Faulkner's book comes pretty close to fulfilling my desires. The discussion of spirit infusions, fresh syrups and purees is nice, though one would also love a primer on making bitters, using fat washes and a discussion of molecular mixology—standard ideas in high-end cocktail bars these days. This book was ten years in the making, a real testament to persistence and the vision of Abou-Ganim, a Michigan boy who became the cocktail king of Las Vegas at the Bellagio. Despite his stature, Abou-Ganim's one of the more humble and passionate successful food people I've met. This comes across in the book. Most refreshingly, he's not judgmental or pedantic. He doesn't vilify vodka or make amateurs feel dumb. His only non-negotiable is the pursuit of quality.

"Amor y Tacos" by Deborah Schneider (Stewart, Tabori and Chang)

In a world of lumbar-threatening old-school Yellow Pages-thick coffee-table books, this tiny taco primer proves that size doesn't really matter at all. Jump right in and you'll be cooking up home versions of the treasures you've likely been scoring at Big Star. Whether it's roasting chilis or advocating for corn tortillas, Schneider, a California chef, pays attention to authenticity like her forebears Rick Bayless and Diana Kennedy. However the real appeal of her approach is the over-the-top late-night drunk-food recipes like Coca-Cola-braised beef tacos, bacon-wrapped chili-studded hotdogs and chicken-fried-steak tacos. My favorite indulgent recipe, though, is for the Taco Vampiro, basically what happens when a steak taco makes love to a quesadilla.

"Steak with Friends: At Home with Rick Tramonto" by Rick Tramonto and Mary Goodbody (Andrews McMeel)

Who'd thought we'd see the day where the old expense-account standby stereotype, a thick juicy steak, would once again, thanks to the national obsession with pork, be considered a unique proposition for a cookbook. Hell, even if it's not, Tramonto's approach to showcasing the oft-maligned red meat is. Along the way, the chef flashes his forearm tattoos like a Los Angeles gang-banger, drops quotes from the Bible, and recommends music to cook by ("hot appetizers demand high-energy music such as that by Metallica, Rush, AC/DC, Van Halen, and Alice in Chains"—Though, I'd argue Alice in Chains' "Rooster" seems more apt for poultry duty).

Select fashion shows, trunk shows, sales and events. See boutiqueville.com for more listings.

THU/13

HAK by FlyNerd presents the Nerd & the Runway

CEO/founder Kevin Hill of HAK by FlyNerd hosts a runway fashion show along with a meet and mingle networking opportunity. The show starts promptly at 9:30pm. Regular admission, \$20 includes: entry, private cocktail reception and raffle tickets and must be purchased in advance. VIP admission, \$75 includes: entry, exclusive private cocktail reception, appetizers and gift bags. Purchase tickets @ flynerdfashion-show.eventbrite.com. Lumen, 839 W. Fulton Market, 8-10pm.

Naem Khan Fall Trunk Show

Presenting designer Naem Khan's collection, which is known for cocktail dresses and evening gowns as well as separates for a dressier day look. Informal modeling from noon to 3pm. For more information, call (312)642-5900 ext. 2050. Neiman Marcus Michigan Avenue, 737 N. Michigan, Couture Salon, Second Floor, 10-4pm. Also, FRI/14.

Estee Lauder Foundation Matching Event

Find the foundation for you and receive a 10-day free supply of it, along with a consultation for a two-minute touch-up routine. For more information, call (312)440-4480. Bloomingdale's North Michigan Avenue, Cosmetics on 1. Through Sun/16.

Orlane Facial with Jade Stones

Rejuvenation of the skin is achieved during this facial with exfoliation. Warm jade stones are used to massage the face, increasing circulation and cellular nourishment. Invigoration foot reflexology is included. Services are provided with a \$50 prepay. For more information or reservations call, (312)440-4471. Bloomingdale's North Michigan Avenue, Cosmetics on 1, 10:30-5:30pm.

FRI/14

Linda Bergman Personal Appearance

Meet Linda Bergman as she presents her jewelry collection featuring pearls, semi-precious, and precious stones combined with sterling silver and all karats of gold. For more information, call (312)642-5900 ext. 2417. Neiman Marcus Michigan Avenue, 737 N. Michigan, Designer Jewelry, First Floor, 11-3pm. Also, SAT/15.

Oliver Peoples Trunk Show

Spex, luxury eyewear and sunwear store, will host an exclusive trunk show featuring the entire 2010 collection by Oliver Peoples. (773)975-7867; www.spexchicago.com. 2136 N. Halsted, 12-5pm.

Sisley National Artist

With over 20 years experience, Sisley's National Makeup Artist, Emilio Leyva will teach you how to enhance your natural beauty and how to recreate the results at home. This event has limited appointments available and it does require a reservation. Contact (312)642-5900 and ask for Sisley. Neiman Marcus Michigan Avenue, 737 N. Michigan. Also, SAT/15.

SAT/15

Frock Around the Clock Bridal Sample Sale

Chicago brides-to-be will have the opportunity to purchase wedding gowns at up to 75 percent off regular retail at The Frock Shop's first annual bridal sample sale. Each hour is filled with deals and the earlier you come, the deeper the discounts, including a \$99 wedding dress rack for the first hour only. The sale will also include refreshments from

Brown Sugar Bakery and free fitting consultations from The Secret Beneath the Gown. One attendee will win a \$100 travel voucher towards an airline of her choice for her honeymoon. For more info contact 877-FROCKS1. frockshopchicago.com. LifeStorage Facility, 2361 S. State, 5th Floor, 10-2pm.

Workout in the Park

Join thousands of women at Self Magazine's all-in-one event. Experience workouts, beauty and style consultations, gourmet bites and more. Special guest appearance by Maria Menounos, Access Hollywood and NBC News correspondent. Buy tickets at selfworkoutinthepark.com. Grant Park, Chicago.

MON/17

Bottega Veneta Accessories and Ready-to Wear Fall Trunk Show

View the collection. For more information, call (312)642-5900 ext. 4024. Neiman Marcus Michigan Avenue, 737 N. Michigan, Fashion Accessories, First Floor, 10-4pm. Also, TUE/18.

ONGOING-MAY

Chic Gems Online Trunk Show Benefits

Sarah Radford of Chic Gems, Etc. will be hosting two continuous online trunk shows to benefit The Avon Walk for Breast Cancer/Team Assassin and to benefit My Hope Chest, myhopechest.org. Shoppers can choose from any of the jewelry on Chic Gems site, ChicGemsEtc.com, and enter either code TEAMA (for the Avon Walk) or the code MHC (for My Hope Chest) while checking out to donate 20 percent of their purchase to either of these causes. As a special thank you, shoppers will also receive 10 percent off of their total purchase as well. Through MON/31 May.

Chicago Design Week

AIGA Chicago hosts the first-ever Chicago Design Week with hosted studio tours and juried exhibitions, to panel discussions and lectures. Members of the professional design community—along with students, teachers, businesses, and design-savvy members of the public—can attend. For more info: aigachicago.org/designweek. May 17-21.

Cut Drop Shop for Charity

Each month this online pop-up boutique features a temporary host brand, which offers discounts with the proceeds going to the charity of its choice. Current sales are Anoname denim and Skinny Vinny accessories. www.cutdown.com

I Do! Chicago Ties the Knot

Nearly every part of a wedding celebration is steeped in history and tradition. This new exhibition at the Chicago History Museum explores an array of wedding traditions through costume, and how some of those traditions were standardized by Chicago retailers to create the wedding industry we know today. \$14 adults; \$12 seniors/students; free general admission on Mondays. (312)642-4600 or visit chicagohistory.org. Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark. Opening May 22.

Ten Days of Discounts at Fix

Receive 20 percent off different summer-inspired items each day. Cocktails will be on the radar from 5-7pm each evening and guests that spend over \$500 throughout the promotion will receive a complimentary ecotote. Fix Boutique, 1101 W. Fulton Market, May 19 -29.