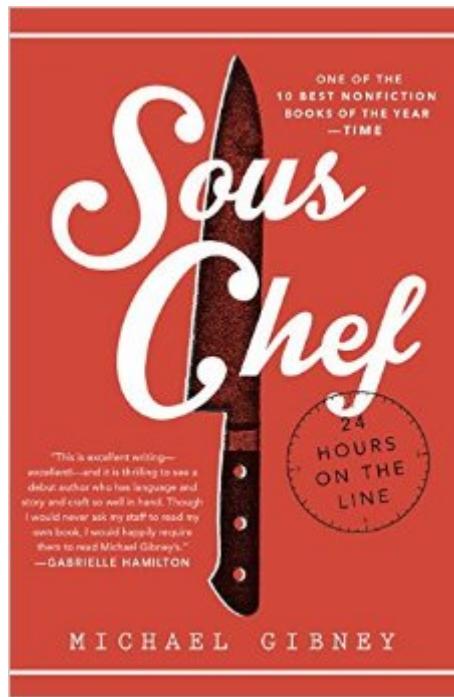


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Sous Chef: 24 Hours On The Line



Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE TEN BEST NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY TIME

The back must slave to feed the belly. . . . In this urgent and unique book, chef Michael Gibney uses twenty-four hours to animate the intricate camaraderie and culinary choreography in an upscale New York restaurant kitchen. Here readers will find all the details, in rapid-fire succession, of what it takes to deliver an exceptional plate of food—“the journey to excellence by way of exhaustion.” Told in second-person narrative, *Sous Chef* is an immersive, adrenaline-fueled run that offers a fly-on-the-wall perspective on the food service industry, allowing readers to briefly inhabit the hidden world behind the kitchen doors, in real time. This exhilarating account provides regular diners and food enthusiasts alike a detailed insider’s perspective, while offering fledgling professional cooks an honest picture of what the future holds, ultimately giving voice to the hard work and dedication around which chefs have built their careers. In a kitchen where the highest standards are upheld and one misstep can result in disaster, *Sous Chef* conjures a greater appreciation for the thought, care, and focus that go into creating memorable and delicious fare. With grit, wit, and remarkable prose, Michael Gibney renders a beautiful and raw account of this demanding and sometimes overlooked profession, offering a nuanced perspective on the craft and art of food and service.

Praise for *Sous Chef*

“This is excellent writing—excellent!—and it is thrilling to see a debut author who has language and story and craft so well in hand. Though I would never ask my staff to read my own book, I would happily require them to read Michael Gibney’s.” Gabrielle Hamilton

“[Michael] Gibney has the soul of a poet and the stamina of a stevedore. . . . Tender and profane, his book will leave you with a permanent appreciation for all those people who desire to feed, to nourish, to dish out the tasty bits of life.” The New York Times Book Review

“A terrific nuts-and-bolts account of the real business of cooking as told from the trenches. No nonsense. This is what it takes.” Anthony Bourdain

“A wild ride, not unlike a roller coaster, and the reader experiences all the drama, tension, exhilaration, exhaustion and relief that accompany cooking in an upscale Manhattan restaurant.” USA Today

“Vibrantly written.” Entertainment Weekly

“Sizzling . . . Such culinary experience paired with linguistic panache is a rarity.” The Daily Beast

“Reveals the high-adrenaline dance behind your dinner.” NPR

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In his illuminating book SOUS CHEF, Michael Gibney grabbed both of my vulnerables, reading and eating, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Who knew of the wild rumpus I created in the kitchen when I placed my food order. I didnâ™t know my arroser from hot pommes until I read this book that describes a busy night in a starred NYC restaurant. Bravo to a true artist and thanks for inviting me to dinner. Incidentally, an extensive glossary is included in the book to acquaint the reader with culinary terms in case youâ™re not familiar with your own pommes. Behind that swinging door to the kitchen is a community of white clad lunatics. The only redeeming feature they all share is their dedication to providing quality food to the customers gathered out front. Unlike Dennyâ™s, where a couple of gum chewers grill hamburgers, fry hash browns, and dip soggy spaghetti, the fine restaurant has a strict hierarchy of many employees with a myriad of complex tasks. The failure of a single duty spells disaster with the possible downgrading of the restaurantâ™s standing. But the back staff is highly individualistic and slightly paranoid about their presence, making cohesiveness a real challenge. So the big time cooks and chefs start planning, prepping, chopping, and slicing early. Fragile fish, unwieldy raw meat, temperamental fruits and vegetables, and fragile herbs and fungi must all be prepped. Delicate pan sauces, complicated confits, and large quantities of house-made pastas must be concocted. This entire bee-like bustle is aimed at making the evening dining rush manageable and smoothly accommodated. On a busy Friday night five hundred people will receive their orders and gasp at the looks and taste of the specially prepared meal set in front of them.

Unlike most memoirs I've read, or avoided, about restaurant life, Gibney's isn't self-centered. In fact by writing in the second person, he puts the reader firmly at the center of the kitchen. That's just the

most obvious thing that makes this book great. It depicts 24 hours in the life of a Sous Chef in a three-star New York restaurant. This gives the book that compactness in time of a great play as well as providing both a natural rhythm and climax to the book. Since you know it takes place in one day, you know it will build to the dinner service and then taper down. Built in, a perfect structure and focus for the book. That's the second thing that makes it great. Unlike too much creative non-fiction, Sous Chef has elements of a great novel: a central character (you), compactness of time, and a real climax, all combining to give the book focus, lacking in so many other books. There are so many other great qualities to Gibey's book. He does a fantastic job of describing the other workers in the kitchen, drawing them with quick strokes and small touches that bring them alive. They may be composites of many of the people he's worked with, but each is an individual, not a cardboard cut-out or placeholder. Because he wants diners to be reading his book, not just people inside the industry, he does a great job of explaining this somewhat unknown world. Like a good teacher, he explains things as he goes along, deftly putting the definitions and explanations into the text. His zeal for bringing you into this world goes even deeper, he wants the reader to be able both to picture and understand this place and its organization.

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