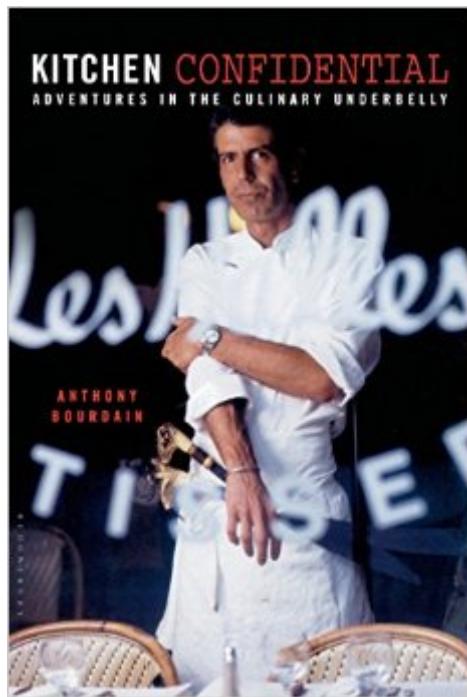


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Kitchen Confidential



Synopsis

Kitchen Confidential reveals what Bourdain calls "twenty-five years of sex, drugs, bad behavior and haute cuisine." Last summer, The New Yorker published Chef Bourdain's shocking, "Don't Eat Before Reading This." Bourdain spared no one's appetite when he told all about what happens behind the kitchen door. Bourdain uses the same "take-no-prisoners" attitude in his deliciously funny and shockingly delectable book, sure to delight gourmands and philistines alike. From Bourdain's first oyster in the Gironde, to his lowly position as dishwasher in a honky tonk fish restaurant in Provincetown (where he witnesses for the first time the real delights of being a chef); from the kitchen of the Rainbow Room atop Rockefeller Center, to drug dealers in the east village, from Tokyo to Paris and back to New York again, Bourdain's tales of the kitchen are as passionate as they are unpredictable. Kitchen Confidential will make your mouth water while your belly aches with laughter. You'll beg the chef for more, please.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this book, Anthony Bourdain, executive chef at New York's Brasserie Les Halles, takes us on a wild ride through that city's food supply industry that includes surprises such as heavy drinking, drugs, debauchery, Mafiosi and assorted seedy personalities. It is clear that Bourdain enjoys a true passion for both food and cooking, a passion he inherited from the French side of his family. He tells us he decided to become a chef during a trip to southwestern France when he was only ten years of age and it is a decision he stuck to, graduating from the Culinary Institute of America. Kitchen

Confidential is a surprisingly well-written account of what life is really like in the commercial kitchens of the United States; "the dark recesses of the restaurant underbelly." In describing these dark recesses, Bourdain refreshingly casts as many stones at himself as he does at others. In fact, he is brutally honest. There is nothing as tiresome as a "tell-all" book in which the author relentlessly paints himself as the unwitting victim. Bourdain, to his enormous credit, avoids this trap. Maybe he writes so convincingly about drugs and alcohol because drugs and alcohol have run their course through his veins as well as those of others. The rather raunchy "pirate ship" stories contained in this fascinating but testosterone-rich book help to bring it vividly to life and add tremendous credibility. The book does tend to discourage any would-be female chefs who might read it, but that's not Bourdain's fault; he is simply telling it like it is and telling it hilariously as well. In an entire chapter devoted to one of the lively and crude characters that populate this book, Bourdain describes a man named Adam: "Adam Real-Last-Name-Unknown, the psychotic bread-baker, alone in his small, filthy Upper West Side apartment, his eyes two different sizes after a 36-hour coke and liquor jag, white crust accumulated at the corners of his mouth, a two-day growth of whiskers--standing there in a shirt and no pants among the porno mags, the empty Chinese takeout containers, as the Spice channel flickers silently on the TV, throwing blue light on a can of Dinty Moore beef stew by an unmade bed." Apparently Bourdain made just as many mistakes at the beginning of his career as did Adam, but the book however, doesn't always paint and bleak picture. Another chapter entitled "The Life of Bryan," talks about renowned chef Scott Bryan, a man, who, according to Bourdain, made all the right decisions. Bourdain describes Bryan's shining, immaculate kitchen, his well-organized and efficient staff. It's respectful homage, but somehow, we feel that Bourdain, himself, will never be quite as organized as is Bryan, for Bourdain is just too much of the rebel, the original, the maverick. Kitchen Confidential can be informative as well as wickedly funny. Bourdain is hilarious as he tells us what to order in restaurants and when. For instance, we learn never to eat fish on Mondays, to avoid Sunday brunches and never to order any sort of meat well-done. And, if we ever see a sign that says, "Discount Sushi," we will, if we are smart, run the other way as fast as we possibly can. Kitchen Confidential isn't undying literature but it's so funny and so well-written that no one should care. It made me hungry for Bourdain's black sea bass crusted in sel de Bretagne with frites. It also made me order his novel, *Bone in the Throat*. If it is only half as funny and wickedly well-written as is Kitchen Confidential it will certainly be a treat.

This is a fascinating, alternately hilarious and appalling account of one chef's career in the restaurant business. Bourdain, now the Executive Chef at Les Halles in New York, regales the

reader with a behind-the-scenes look at the kitchens of "gourmet" restaurants he has worked and the characters he has known. To call his account (and his fellow workers) "colorful" is an understatement. There is much to like in this book. Occasional insights into why ordering fish on Monday is not such a good idea (it's left over from Thursday's delivery) and the logistics of running a major restaurant are fascinating. Also, the anecdotes about management style and successful vs. unsuccessful restaurants make for interesting reading. Bourdain demolishes the mystique of cooking as an art to be mastered by only a few. From his perspective, cooking is a craft that can be learned through grit, endurance, and hard knocks. As he points out, the mainstays of his and many other kitchens are immigrants from Ecuador, Mexico, Bengal and elsewhere who are taught how to recreate consistently and under pressure dishes as directed by the chef. Restaurant work is not easy, and only the strong survive. It's a war out there--and the kitchen is the combat zone. That said, "Kitchen Confidential" is an uneven book that should have had a good editing. The individual chapters have the feel of freestanding pieces, and some of their content is repetitious. Much of the jargon and some of the details of how a kitchen is organized aren't explained until late in the book, even though he's been referring to them from the beginning.. By the time he finally does explain the slang and the esoteric details, the astute reader has already figured it out. My major complaint about the book, however, is that the book seems to be as much about the author and his excesses as about the places he's worked. Bourdain was a heavy-duty heroin addict and coke sniffer during the 70s and 80s, and he conjures up the craziness of the period with zest. He's always worked in kitchens where the culture was testosterone-drenched and the language beyond macho. Although I didn't find the coarseness particularly shocking considering the primarily male crew and the amount of pressure under which they work, it did get a little wearisome after awhile. Towards the end of the book, Bourdain gives examples of chefs and kitchens with entirely different ways of doing things. As he himself admits, his testosterone-drenched kitchens may be as much an offshoot of his own personality and experiences as restaurant culture itself. In the end, Bourdain comes across as a kind of kooky romantic--the kitchen staff is his family, albeit a dysfunctional one, and he loves their quirks and idiosyncrasies, even (and maybe especially) when they veer off into the criminal. Overall, I can't say I disliked this book--in fact I enjoyed parts of it immensely--but Bourdain's "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" attitude began to lose its appeal toward the end. This is quick, revealing and at times funny read, but take it with a grain of salt (fleur de sel of course). 3.75 stars.

Oh, you are really going to enjoy this book...while you're reading it, that is. Then afterwards you'll be torn between the memories of the hilarious antics Bourdain describes in his book...and memories of

the disgusting things that go on every day in restaurant kitchens. Believe it or not, it IS worth reading! (And take it from a former restaurant manager, it is, unfortunately, true - the after-hours shenanigans, especially!) Bourdain has put together a truly gonzo collection of restaurant tales that aren't all depraved...but, like his restaurateur/chef subjects, most of them are! Kudos to him for a book that is this honest while being this hysterical. If you have the, um, stomach for it, this is a book you'll remember fondly. Well worth digesting!

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