



TASTE MAKERS

Introduction Susan Low

Black food writing remains hugely under-celebrated, but there's a wealth of talent to discover. Here are some of the latest writers shining a light on African and Caribbean cuisine, plus a few of their favourite authors from the past

FOOD is personal. "Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are," wrote French gastronome Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin way back in the 1800s. It's a sentiment that continues to reverberate through generations of food writers. "Understanding your plate is understanding yourself," writes African-American Jewish culinary historian Michael W Twitty, author of *The Cooking Gene*, on his Afroculinaria blog. "Food is the most efficient means of helping people see themselves," echoes Stephen Satterfield, food writer and founder of Whetstone, the US-based food media company dedicated to telling the stories of global food origins and culture.

Stephen is also the host of *High on the Hog*, the eye-opening Netflix docuseries based on the book of the same name by food historian Jessica B Harris. The book and series trace the roots and culinary contributions of African-American people to US culture, all through the lens of food. It's a rich historical vein, and one that is only just beginning to be examined and appreciated.

"Until the lions have their own historians," an oft-quoted African proverb goes, "the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." It's an aphorism that can help to explain the relative dearth of cookbooks written by black authors in the English-speaking world. In *The Gemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks* (2015), Toni Tipton-Martin writes: "In that

span of over two centuries, an estimated 100,000 recipe collections made it into print – but only 200, give or take a few, were credited to black cooks and writers." For a bit of context, recent web searches of Amazon's Food & Drink books reveal some 6,000 books for 'African' titles and 4,000 results for 'Caribbean'. Compare that to 40,000 for 'Italian' and 50,000 for 'French'.

'AN EXUBERANCE OF NEW WRITERS ARE MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME'

Things, at last, are changing. That dearth is being replaced with an exuberance of new publications by writers who are making up for the tragedy of lost time imposed by history. And cookbooks matter. A good one is so much more than a collection of time-saving recipe instructions.

There's value in learning kitchen skills, obviously, but the books that stand out – and stand the test of time – do so much more than tell you how to turn out a flawless omelette. For the reader, a good cookbook can teach you a new cuisine, take your palate to far-flung lands and give you insight into what might otherwise be alien cultures or countries. For the writer, it may be about recapturing food traditions or making sense of where you belong – where 'home' is, was or may be.

The authors overleaf have all published books in the UK on African and Caribbean cuisine in the past four months. Each has a distinctive story to tell and a literary banquet to share. Served up, too, are the writers' own recommendations for books that have shaped them. Pull up a chair and enjoy the feast. »





MARIA BRADFORD

Sweet Salone: Recipes from the Heart of Sierra Leone

Born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Maria now lives in the more sedate surrounds of Kent, where she runs upscale catering company Shwen Shwen (Krio for 'fancy'). Maria's life, like her home country's history, is about the melding of cultures: 'Afro-fusion' is the description she gives to her cooking, and it just as aptly describes her life experience.

"Food is a lens for culture, and you have to taste culture to understand it," she writes; her debut book invites readers to do just that. *Sweet Salone* combines food and recipes with travel, history (some of it uncomfortable) and culture, intermingled with the author's own homecoming story. Maria presents African food in a way that challenges expectations, explaining how the cuisine of Sierra Leone is a coming-together of various pan-African and European traditions and influences. It's a book that's as rewarding as it is revealing.



DISH TO TRY Shapka (egusi soup), made with oxtail, smoked fish and melon seeds (egusi) and flavoured with fermented sesame paste (ogiri). It's a "Sierra Leonean classic" and a "labour of love", with the flavours of the country brought together in one warming dish.



MARIA'S TOP READS "Africa is the final frontier of food, and there is certainly a growing interest in the produce, ingredients, flavours and food culture the continent has to offer. Two books that mean a lot to me capture recipes and food culture from the Horn of Africa. First, *Ethiopia: Recipes and Traditions from the Horn of Africa* by Yohanis Gebreyesus. It is a beautifully written and photographed book on the various ethnic groups, diverse culture, traditions and food of Ethiopia. I see synergies with many African food cultures, as most traditional Ethiopian food is eaten with the hands; in Ethiopia, this is done by tearing off a piece of injera flatbread and using it to pick up morsels of food. Traditional meals are eaten from a central communal plate about the size of a pizza pan.

I also love *In Bibi's Kitchen: the Recipes and Stories of Grandmothers from the Eight African Countries that Touch the Indian Ocean* by Hawa Hassan. 'Bibi' means grandmother, and this book pays homage to these grandmothers and the kitchens in which they keep their cultures alive. Also included are these women's favourite recipes. My own writing features my grandmother, who was an important influence, so I can relate to this book.

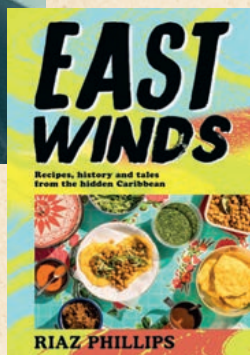
Hawa Hassan is from Somalia and the book includes a number of rice dishes and breads, so I can see that Afro-fusion cooking exists there, too. I recognise Arab, Persian, Indian and Italian nuances among the other flavours from the Horn and East of Africa, all of which are part of Somali food culture. It's fascinating to compare Somalia's cooking, history and culture with that of Sierra Leone.

PORTRAIT RIAZ PHILLIPS PHOTOGRAPH CAITLIN ISOLA



RIAZ PHILLIPS

East Winds: Recipes, History and Tales from the Hidden Caribbean



Riaz grew up in London as a part of the Caribbean diaspora community and now lives in Berlin. His hugely respected work is dedicated to making people outside of the Caribbean community more familiar with the region's culture – something he achieves through food.

After journeying to Jamaica in his previous cookbook, *West Winds*, Riaz widens the culinary lens in *East Winds* to celebrate other parts of the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname. "This book aims to pull that food and culture out from the shadow of Jamaican cuisine and give them the limelight they deserve," he writes. Far more than a collection of recipes, this is a carefully researched exploration of the diversity of Caribbean food and culture that touches on everything from the lasting influence of European countries to the inherent joy of roti. It's an immensely powerful read and a pleasure to cook from.



DISH TO TRY Jeera pork: "There is a joke that Europe colonised the world for its spices only to barely use them," Riaz quips. This recipe for cubed pork served as a 'cutter' (a type of sandwich) lets the flavour of jeera (cumin) shine through.



RIAZ'S TOP READS
"Cookbooks have never been hugely important in the Caribbean; more important is the oral and visual passing-on of recipes. Given this, *Naparima Girls'*

High School Diamond Jubilee Cookbook has become a Caribbean classic, especially in Trinidad, where it was published in the late 1980s. It has little prose, but what is fascinating about it is the vast spread of cultures, from Indian to African, English, French and Syrian – all represented in the Caribbean, even if many people don't realise how diverse the region is.

The Groundnut Cookbook by Duval Timothy, Jacob Fodio Todd and Fodayemi Brown was one of the first cookbooks in the UK dedicated to foods from West Africa (sprinkled with inspiration from across the whole continent). A page-turner of beautiful and simple dishes that combine into a series of menus that dazzle all the senses. »



'BEAUTIFUL AND SIMPLE DISHES THAT DAZZLE THE SENSES'





ALEXINA ANATOLE

Bitter: Flavour-Packed Recipes to Impress



Alexina is the granddaughter of Cambridgeshire chicken farmers on one side and Saint Lucian immigrants of the Windrush generation on the other. She grew up in Paris, later settling in south London, and it wasn't until she was 29 that she applied to *MasterChef* – a decision that not only took her all the way to the final, but defined her food philosophy, too.

“I am a cook who researches, writes and talks about flavour,” she says, and her debut book is a deep dive into 10 bitter ingredients (coffee, grapefruit, tahini, walnuts...) and how to make them shine. Alexina educates, inspires and cooks with huge approachability. Readers will learn how bitter flavours vary across cultures, and get lost in the pages of colourful, playful recipes.

DISHES TO TRY Rarebit mac 'n' cheese (right) and no-churn tahini ice cream with caramelised walnuts (overleaf).

ALEXINA'S TOP PICKS “I have a deep love for cookbooks, but it isn't lost on me that most food traditions are not passed down through print – instead, they're learned by the side of a grandma or auntie or uncle, through sight, touch and smell. Naturally, cookbooks can't teach us in that way, but if any comes close, it's *In Bibi's Kitchen* (see page 36).

Then there's *The Taste of Country Cooking*, first published in 1976, by the doyenne of Southern US cooking, Edna Lewis. A special collection of recipes and memories from Freetown, Virginia, a small farming community settled by freed slaves, this cookbook is all about remaining in touch with food and nature. Few cookbooks contain such evocative anecdotes – Freetown sounds like a veritable Eden – and the focus on seasonal, regional eating feels fresh and relevant. The peach cobbler with nutmeg sauce is a must!

Rarebit mac 'n' cheese

Mac 'n' cheese offers unadulterated comfort: it is milky and silky, cheesy and soft. In this version, I invite you to make your cheese sauce with stout – as in Welsh rarebit (aka posh cheese on toast) – because it imparts a savouriness that makes this particularly moreish. You can make this up to 24 hours ahead of baking and store it in the fridge.

Serves 4 as a main or 8 as a side

Prepare 20 minutes

Cook 45 minutes

- 60g unsalted butter
- 60g plain flour
- 440ml can Guinness (or another stout)
- 100ml whole milk
- 500g mature Cheddar, grated
- 100g Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp hot paprika
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper (optional)
- 400g macaroni pasta
- 10 sage leaves (optional)

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, gas mark 6.

2 Melt the butter in a pan over a medium-low heat, then add the flour and stir until a thick paste forms. Cook out the flour for 4-5 minutes, then gradually add the Guinness, whisking as you go until you have a thick, smooth sauce. Gradually add the milk, followed by ¾ of the Cheddar, all of the Parmigiano Reggiano, the Worcestershire sauce, paprika, cayenne pepper (if using) and a good grind or two of black pepper. Stir until the cheese is fully melted. The texture should be thicker than double cream but still very pourable. Leave the sauce over a very low heat until you're ready to use it.

3 Part-cook the pasta for 6 minutes in well-salted water. Just before draining, scoop out a mugful of the pasta water and set aside.

4 Stir the drained pasta into the rarebit sauce and stir in some of the reserved pasta cooking water until it's your desired thickness (bearing in mind that the pasta will absorb more sauce while it bakes). Transfer to a baking dish (about 31 x 25cm) and top with the remaining Cheddar, then the sage leaves (if using). Bake until golden and bubbling (around 25 minutes).

Per serving (for 4) 5024kJ/1203kcal/67g fat/41g saturated fat/86g carbs/9.7g sugars/5.6g fibre/55g protein/3g salt »

