



## Baltic: New and Old Recipes from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

**Simon Bajada**

Hardie Grant (Oct 15, 2019)

Hardcover \$35.00 (224pp)

978-1-74379-527-9

Simon Bajada's enticing and inspiring cookbook *Baltic* is an ode to a region that, though influenced by outsiders, remains all its own.

Bajada presents the post-Soviet cuisines of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as diverse and responsive. They draw upon tradition, playing with spices from periods of Byzantine trading and tricks learned under Soviet restrictions, but they also shift and change according to the bounty of the farmer's market and the local environment.

Bajada's text inveigles the senses, deploying the scents and appeals of Baltic kitchens—spicy from alder smoke and dizzying from “the forest, the mushrooms, the mint, the wild thyme.” Recipes are divided into sections focused on dairy dishes (the Balts like it sour), dishes specific to coastal and farming regions, baked goods and sweets, and drinks.

The brackish waters of the Baltic lead into dishes like Salmon Cured in Beer with Poppy Pancakes and Sprat and Herb Omelette, which are paired with dreamy photos of boxes teeming with fish and hemp nets drying in the air. Gardens that extend beyond the fence line into the Baltic woods and wilds mean that ingredients like nettles, dill crowns, and blackcurrants can be incorporated.

Recipes like that for Chilled Beetroot Soup take luscious twists to traditional dishes, while curd doughnuts and curd-filled chocolate arrive with their own strange appeals, bridging sweet, sour, and savory. Pear & Pollen Cake proves both straightforward and—by virtue of one pricey ingredient—lavish.

Simple food reigns, and it doesn't get simpler than the book's Cucumber and Honey dish, whose description waxes poetic on the primacy of bees and the necessity of choosing cucumbers “warmed by the summer's rays.” A sense of comfort is imparted by dishes like Lamb, Beer & Honey and Hakklihakaste (“essentially a meaty gravy served over boiled potatoes”), accompanied by pickled roots and crisp chicory.

Whether you dive into it craving “deconstructed Shepherd's pie,” Cranberry Manna Mousse, or the nectar sweetness of Rhubarb Kissel, the recipes of *Baltic* will awaken hunger for lands long shrouded in mystery and fed by the traditions of the earth.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2019)

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