FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ COOKING

From the Wood-Fired Oven: New and Traditional Techniques for Cooking and Baking with Fire

Richard Miscovich
Chelsea Green Publishing (Oct 15, 2013)
Hardcover $44.95 (416pp)
978-1-60358-328-2

Passionate thoughts combine with a spectacular range of ideas for using wood-fired ovens to make this guide a must-have for anyone curious about this well-loved cooking method.

Although wood-fired ovens are best known for crispy pizza crusts and rustic breads, they can be utilized for a much wider array of tasks, from drying wood to roasting meats. Richard Miscovich's extensive guidebook on using these types of ovens celebrates the stunning breadth of tactics while also providing insights into history, homesteading, and masonry.

Miscovich kicks off with musings about his start as a baker in the mid-1990s. As he transitioned from an American style of baking, which is heavily dependent on yeast, to a more sourdough-focused European style, Miscovich encountered wood-fired ovens more and more often in his research. By the time he saw one of the ovens in action—heated with oak and eucalyptus—he was hooked. And he wasn't the only one; wherever he went, Miscovich witnessed a boom in wood-fired ovens, built by everyone from affluent foodies to off-the-grid enthusiasts, leading to "an exciting time in wood-fired ovens, fueled by a sense of community focused on fire."

Although there are several guides to building ovens and books that offer baking techniques, it's Miscovich's expertise at fusing these two worlds that proves especially helpful. In straightforward language, he breaks down factors like conduction, convection, radiant heat, thermal breaks, and other important aspects of wood-fired ovens.

Guiding readers through the "full heat cycle" and its uses, he provides instructions on cooking everything from roasted vegetables to seared fish, and his in-depth sections on breads are particularly stunning. The step-by-step directions are easily understood, and there are so many variations to basic recipes that it would likely be challenging to tackle everything included. Accompanying photos capture the delicious results.

Beyond the nuts-and-bolts approach to utilizing the ovens, Miscovich's guide returns often to the idea of sustainability. He writes about self-sufficiency, creating a reliable food supply, traditional skills, and community building. Cooking with fire isn't just a fun technique, he believes, but it's also a way to get back some of the wisdom and fellowship that's been lost: "Wood-fired ovens fulfill resiliency's requirements: flexibility, diversity, and a backup system to ensure self-reliance instead of helplessness … Generous sharing of information among bakers, millers, and oven builders increases our community's resilience."
ELIZABETH MILLARD (November 30, 2013)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.