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Travel

Knives on the Cutting Edge: The Great Chefs' Dining Revolution
Bob McDonald
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As hobbies go, eating in all of the three-star Michelin restaurants in France, plus a few other countries and a handful of American cities, beats reruns of any food program on TV. For Minneapolis attorney, wine collector, and serious foodie Bob MacDonald, who chronicles his twenty years of table hopping in this book, nothing is more interesting than the plates—except for the chefs who labor over creating them.

MacDonald, along with his wife, Sue, writes a popular culinary blog on AndrewZimmern.com, and is active in wine societies and the James Beard Foundation. But it is his gloriously unbridled appreciation for great chefs, their fabulous restaurants, and the adventurous food that has passed over his palate that informs and infuses the tales in this tome.

Highly innovative gourmet meals and the exquisitely selected wines to accompany them may be as intricate as a symphony, and as tricky to explain, but here the author has taken an orderly approach to describing the hunt for culinary perfection. A little more than one-half of the book is devoted to dozens of chefs who have been awarded (and at times, lost) the coveted three-star distinction from the influential and rigorous Michelin Guide.

The author eats, often many times, in every such restaurant in France, from Paris to the remotest countryside, as well as many in Switzerland, Spain, England, Italy, and three US cities—New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. In the next half, Meeting Grape Expectations, he discusses the wines which accompanied some of the meals, accented by surprisingly frank reviews of several questionable sommeliers. Think they are always eager to sell any diner the most expensive vintage on their list? Think again. Finally, MacDonald takes on new culinary trends, the emergence of the megastar TV chef, and a mixed stew of related topics.

Entertaining as it is to lap up the backstory on many of the most driven master chefs in the world, and as inviting as it is to feel one is virtually a guest at the table of this indefatigable eating adventurer, there are times when the rather predictable format of each chef/restaurant

review veers to the formulaic and feels a bit list-y. Yet, just when one eating tale seems like another, MacDonald lets loose with an unexpected account, often brimming with intrigue, that puts a reader in mind of the ultimate dining compliment: “I’ll have what he’s having.” At least, in a vicarious way, his hungry readers can.

Lisa Romeo