



## ★ **Saka Saka: South of the Sahara—Adventures in African Cooking**

**Anto Cocagne**

**Aline Princet, Photographer**

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In *Saka Saka*, Gabonese and French chef Anto Cocagne celebrates sub-Saharan African cuisine. The invigorating recipes, including for Baobab Crème Brûlée and Papaya Gazpacho, spotlight fresh, nourishing staples with creative flourishes.

Representing a culinary ethos based most on vegetarian selections and easy, everyday preparations, the book distinguishes a continental African diet from plural African diets, the latter of which encompass cultural and regional variations. It details foods that are pertinent to both, with a helpful pantry list, and dispels misconceptions about African food being too oily or spicy, encouraging everyone to explore its bold tastes.

This clear, organized text spans bases and appetizers, mains, sides, street food, desserts, and drinks. These are photographed in festive colors with wax-print textile accents that complement the dishes' artful plating. Down-to-earth selections, like fried fritters, are paired with elegant accompaniments, like homemade ketchup made with a hibiscus reduction. Elsewhere, a hearty beef stew with plantains will appeal to home cooks.

But dishes for the more experienced abound, too, from a sea bass carpaccio, which requires knife skills, to a peanut-crusted chicken that first calls for carving a carcass. Throughout, chef's tips add background information and suggest ingredient substitutions. Tubers, peanuts, okra, and other trademarks of African cookery are made fresh through different savory combinations.

The book is interspersed with profiles of African cultural figures with strong ties to France, including a radio host, an Afro-pop singer, and actors; these portions highlight the focal person's favorite ingredients and share gastronomic memories, prompted by Proust's madeleine. These interviews evoke nostalgia for home and reinforce the book's underlying belief that food is best when it's eaten in good company.

*Saka Saka* is a congenial, welcoming cookbook that celebrates Africa's culinary profile with tantalizing dishes and eye-catching photographs.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2022)

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