

Soul: A Chef's Culinary Evolution in 150 Recipes

Todd Richards

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Todd Richards's *Soul: A Chef's Culinary Evolution in 150 Recipes* is a thoughtful introduction to African American food, though it is only the launching point for Richards's inventive cooking repertoire. Chapters begin with base recipes for food staples like stone fruits, pork, and corn; as heavy as these recipes are, they are just warm-ups for the maestro restaurateur as he crafts increasingly complex dishes, easily riffing to transform classics with global flavors, techniques, and unexpected ingredients like pea tendrils, beet powder, and sambal oelek.

Aside from being a well-illustrated, well-organized, and well-written cookbook, *Soul* defines Richards's core philosophies about food, creativity, and society. His heartfelt opinions about race in America and the importance of sharing food at the table as an expression of love and fellowship infuse this book with extra meaning. He is also passionate about avoiding food waste and makes a tasty and persuasive case to save collard green stems for pickling, as well as for trying often-unloved products like gizzards, chitlins, and okra seeds.

Menus for a variety of festive events show off Richards's virtuosity, from a homey fish fry to a fancy brunch fueled with such inspired dishes as Strawberries with Champagne Aspic, Whipped Cream, and Honey. It would take a family emergency (something really dire) to skip an invitation to the Chef's Table menu at his house for some Smoked Catfish Dip with Parmesan Tuiles and dazzling Sea Urchin with Smoked Tomato Broth.

The simple titles belie the elegance and layers of flavor, color, and texture that Richards builds up in his recipes. He divulges many tricks of the trade, offering advice for home cooks on everything from how to rescue overdone calamari to a persuasive discussion of how to cook pork jowl. Recipes come with advice on appropriate side dishes and beverages, and the menus even have suggested soundtracks.

Most of all, *Soul* distills many years of cooking, improvising, and learning about different ingredients. Richards is a masterful chef who generously doles out his expertise and perspective in this inspiring book.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May/June 2018)

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