

The Cool Mountain Cookbook: A Gourmet Guide to Winter Retreats

Gwen Ashley Walters

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With her folksy, enthusiastic style and rich assortment of recipes, Walters could be one of the keepers of the twenty inns she highlights in this travel guide/cookbook. Walters divides her book into sections by ski lodge. Each section contains a description of the lodge, color photos of the lodge and its food, a restaurant menu, and selected recipes.

The lodge descriptions are lively, detailed, and informative, written as if they were from your neighbor who just happens to be a travel agent. Walters says of Sundance in Utah: "Inside, the homey rooms are dressed in Native American fabrics and patterns, with warm wood furniture, and most with rock fireplaces waiting to crackle and pop and heat your soul." She gives contact numbers, information on rooms and activities in or near the lodge like horseback riding, snowshoeing, exhibits, massage, and film.

Walters collected her recipes from chefs and reworked them in her home kitchen. The recipes are mostly well written and clear with a few exceptions. The Potato Gnocchi with Butternut Squash and Wild Mushrooms asks for two baked potatoes, one egg yolk and ½ cup of flour for the gnocchi. A guideline for the weight of potatoes or the yield of the cooked potatoes would make this recipe closer to foolproof. In a recipe for Potato-crusting Halibut with Mint Green Pea Puree, Walters says, "Divide the grated potatoes into 4 equal piles and place on a flat skinless side of the halibut." She doesn't give the cook any details on how to arrange the potatoes on the fish and goes on to tell them to saute the fish potato-side down, a tricky procedure for even experienced chefs.

These bits of imprecision are scattered throughout the book but they don't dim the excitement of the dishes Walters offers. Readers feast on thoughts of Blackberry Stuffed French Toast, Honey Soy-glazed Chilean Sea Bass, Pan-seared Venison with Apple Brandy Pear Sauce, Caramel Pecan Cheesecake, Roasted Banana Split, and Oven-roasted Tomato and Avocado Soup.

Walters' book is one that will grace coffeetables and even sneak into kitchens on weekends. Most of the recipes are too complicated and rich for everyday cooking, but the lush collection will be food for the eyes and mind. The lodge descriptions are nourishment for the soul and dream material for the winter blahs or a summer too hot to handle.

NANCY K. ALLEN (January / February 2001)

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