The Oxford Companion to Food

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The Oxford Companion To Food is astounding in breadth and thoroughness, including 2,650 A - Z (dictionary-like) entries, detailing international food products and their preparation.

London food historian Davidson persevered twenty years to complete this tome with the help of fifty regional specialists. His skill is best measured both by the usefulness and intrigue of his descriptions: "…probably the cheese which Pliny, writing in the second century AD, described as "bearing off the prize at Rome." It is certainly the cheese which the monks of St Gall offered to the Emperor Charlemagne in the ninth century." Roquefort, of course. "One of the three most famous blue cheeses of the world…" Or, "…the presence of poison in the food might cause the unicorn horn—usually a piece of narwhal tusk, of dubious provenance—to change color or tremble or even exude a sort of sweat." This from an entry on Tasting, as if trying to detect poison in food in medieval times.

Davidson shys from nothing. His selections range from the flavors and styles of regional cuisines, past and present, from Inca, Mogul, Greek and Roman to Malay, Jewish, Caribbean and Celtic. He draws from 2,000 years of cook books and food writers; examines culinary terms, cooking techniques and food science; probes the use and consumption of exotic vegetables, spices, fungi, game, insects and more. Amateurs and professionals alike will relish this work.

Completely revised from the acclaimed 1993 first edition, The Oxford Companion to Wine arrives with 500 new entries to reach a total of over 3,500 in alphabetical form. As anticipated, Robinson's compendium has become the definitive reference book for the wine world, covering nearly all aspects of winemaking, wine appreciation, the science and history of wine and numerous listings of individual estates and appellations. The thirty-one maps will help travelers tour every major wine region in the world should they desire.

The Oxford Companion to Wine has won every major wine book award. Robinson also offers biographies of numerous wine-related personalities from Robert Parker, Robert Mondavi and Baron Philippe Rothschild to Dom Perignon.

It might be noted that pronunciations would be helpful to many, but overall this book continues to be a magnificent achievement.

SETH MCEVOY (November / December 1999)

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