

Copyright 2006 Globe Newspaper Company
The Boston Globe

May 03, 2006 Wednesday
THIRD EDITION

SECTION: FOOD; Pg. F1

LENGTH: 1004 words

HEADLINE: ADD A PINCH OF TESTOSTERONE;
FOOD WRITING IS BIG BUSINESS THESE DAYS, AND MEN ARE DIGGING INTO THE
SUBJECT WITH GUSTO

BYLINE: BY ALISON ARNETT, GLOBE STAFF

When Irma Rombauer set out to write "The Joy of Cooking," the 20th-century home cook's bible, she was a widow who suddenly needed an income. With the Depression setting in, Rombauer had to scramble. Food was the realm of women, and though Rombauer, a society woman in upper class St. Louis, wasn't known for her kitchen skills - a male relative grumbled that "Irma is a terrible cook"- writing a book about cooking seemed like something she could do.

As the 21st century gets rolling, the tables have turned. This is no longer women's domain.

Anthony Bourdain heated things up with his "Kitchen Confidential" in 2000, which shot up the bestseller list with its swashbuckling tales of drugs, sex, and not-so-fresh fish in a restaurant kitchen. It opened the floodgates and spawned a genre: food through a guy's eyes. Now it seems like testosterone rules.

A.J. Liebling, Calvin Trillin, and other men had written about food before, and there were plenty of cookbooks by men (James Beard and Richard Olney among them), but until Bourdain, who became a bad boy TV celebrity, food writers weren't stars.

The new wave of books are wide ranging from serious studies of our society through food, such as Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" (see related story), to adventure-style romps like "Heat," New Yorker writer and former literary editor Bill Buford's chronicle of three years as a kitchen slave in superstar Mario Batali's restaurants.

There are books about the corporate end of the business, like "The Reach of a Chef," by Michael Ruhlman, who studied the need for today's chef to be a CEO, and books on the "sport" of competitive eating ("Horsemen of the Esophagus" by Jason Fagone); a treatise urging preteens away from fast food ("Chew on This" by Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson); and the history of New York through oysters ("The Big Oyster" by Mark Kurlansky). Bourdain is coming out with "The Nasty Bits," featuring more of his kitchen adventures, this month.

The gender shift has to do with the rise of a food culture in the United States that has "absolutely" legitimized food writing, according to former Globe columnist Alan Richman, who writes about food for GQ and Bon Appetit and teaches the subject at the French Culinary Institute. "Twenty years ago, I didn't want to write food because

I thought it would undercut my credentials," he says.

When serious journalists took on the subject, it was often viewed through a comic lens. Trillin, who admits he doesn't read other food articles or books on the subject, found that food gave him a chance to "write about the country in a lighter way." "I was doing a piece for the New Yorker every three weeks," he says on the phone from New York. "I realized I didn't have to write about a murder or a controversy every time." Bourdain's books "are among the many I haven't read," he says. "I don't exactly have any interest in it" beyond a way into the culture.

The culture of food is what seems to interest all these writers. "Food is no longer a minor field," says Maria Guarnaschelli, the high-powered book editor at WW Norton who shepherded "The All New, All Purpose Joy of Cooking" into print in 1997, and has edited many books, including Ruhlman's "Charcuterie." Houghton Mifflin executive editor Rux Martin agrees that there has been a huge rise in interest in food-related books. "Ten years ago you could go to the bank that none of them would sell more than 10,000 copies," she says. Now such books can be "very, very big."

The recent wave of books is no surprise, says Richman. The pay for magazine pieces is terrible: "If you do the math, you might make \$20,000 to \$35,000 a year for six articles," he says, and there are few staff food writers on newspapers. "You might as well take a shot at a book."

David Kamp, a contributing editor for Vanity Fair and GQ, explores the explosion of interest in all food-related subjects in "The United States of Arugula," coming out in September. "I've never really written about food before," says the New York-based writer, "except as a book review." But he loves cooking and eating, and reading about food is his private passion. "I've been seeking out this book to read, so I thought I'd enjoy writing it."

He describes "Arugula" as a pop culture book that traces the birth of the foodie and the emergence of dining, cooking, and shopping as an avocation. James Beard, he says, "took our food culture by the lapels, took it out of the realm of housewives, womens' pages, and wealthy gourmands."

It's a "fundamentally positive cultural development," Kamp says. He marvels that in 1939, Clementine Paddleford introduced New York Herald Tribune readers to an Italian pastry called pizza, and less than a century later "we're all conversant with sushi."

It happened quickly, he says, and now "men who might have been disinclined to treat it as a reportorial subject are beginning to take it on."

Guarnaschelli doesn't think men are overcrowding the foodie landscape. "I think it's a mixed field," she says, pointing to the success of Gourmet editor Ruth Reichl's three memoirs and the upcoming food memoir by Gabrielle Hamilton, chef and owner of the popular Prune in New York. Hamilton says her book, scheduled to come out in 2007, garnered a "life-changing" advance of hundreds of thousands of dollars. It will try to capture a time when there wasn't the "look at me eating my artisanal" greens attitude, says the restaurateur, who spoke by phone while cradling her 3-day-old son, Leone.

Women have published hard-hitting food books: New York University nutritionist **Marion Nestle**, who writes about the corporate control of our food supply, has a new volume called "What to **Eat**: An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating." But the silly side usually belongs to the guys.

Just try to imagine a woman listing grasshoppers as a recipe ingredient, as British writer Stefan Gates does in "Gastronaut," or including a chapter called "A Personal Journey Into Extreme Flatulence" and then getting the book published.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO DRAWING

LOAD-DATE: May 4, 2006