

6 REASONS TO READ THIS BOOK, EVEN IF YOU HATE COOKING (AS I DID)

The 4-Hour Chef (4HC) isn't a cookbook, *per se*, though it might look like one. Just as *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* isn't about changing oil, this book isn't quite what it appears.

Even if you hate cooking, here are six reasons you should read at least the first few chapters of this book:

#1 YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO BECOME WORLD-CLASS IN ANY SKILL IN RECORD TIME.

Whether you want to learn how to speak a new language in three months, how to shoot a three-pointer in one weekend, or how to memorize a deck of cards in less than a minute, the true “recipe” of this book is exactly that: a process for acquiring any skill. The vehicle I chose is cooking. Yes, I'll teach you all the most flexible techniques of culinary school using 14 strategically chosen meals, all with four or fewer ingredients, and all taking 5–20 minutes to prepare (literally, *The 4-Hour Chef*). But I wrote this book to make you a master student of all things.

#2 EATING (AND LIFE) WILL BECOME HIGH-DEFINITION.

In China, a common greeting is “*Chi le, mei you?*” or “Have you eaten?” This is the universal check-in. So I pose the question to you: have you *really* eaten? I now realize that before writing *4HC*, I hadn't. Back then, food

was either good or bad, hot or cold, spicy or not. Now, it's a million colors, and I can pick out the subtleties: the cilantro or tarragon, the umami savoriness, or the lack of vinegar. It's like going from a 7" black-and-white TV to HD. Before *4HC*, much of my **life** was in black and white. As you'll see, the awareness we build in the kitchen and in related adventures will affect everything. Life itself becomes high-definition.

#3 YOU WILL GET INTO THE BEST SHAPE OF YOUR LIFE.

The dishes you'll learn, apart from desserts for “cheat day,” are all compliant with the Slow-Carb Diet®, which has become a global phenomenon (page 74). Fat loss of 20 pounds in the first month is not uncommon. If you follow this book, you won't have to think of following a diet, since it's built in. If you ever decide to follow another diet, you'll be twice as effective, because you'll understand how to manipulate and maximize food.

#4 IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH TO BECOME IMPRESSIVE.

In the first 24 hours, I'll take you from burning scrambled eggs to osso buco, one of the most expensive menu items in the world. If 28% of Americans can't cook at all,[‡] and if another third are on some variation of mac and cheese, having even one seemingly difficult meal up your sleeve puts you in rare company. Make that two bulletproof meals and you can host impressive dinner parties for the rest of your life.

#5 COOKING IS THE MATING ADVANTAGE.

If you're looking to dramatically improve your sex life, or to catch and keep "the one," cooking is the force multiplier. Food has a crucial role in well-planned seduction for both sexes, whether in long-term relationships

("MLBJ," page 234) or on first dates (Sexy-Time Steak, page 186). For real romantic superpowers, learn how to teach the skill of tasting (Learning to "Taste," page 50).

#6 BECAUSE IT'S FUN.

The "practical" fails more than we'd like to admit. I'll take breaks in this book as often as necessary to keep you amused. Food marathons? Check (page 468). Hysterical kitchen lore anecdotes? Tons. Eating 14,000 calories in 20 minutes (page 454)? Why not?

This isn't a textbook. Think of it as a choose-your-own-adventure book.

As Bruce Lee said, "Adapt what is useful, reject what is useless, and add what is specifically your own."

THE EDUCATION OF A CULINARY IDIOT

1979, AGE TWO

I eat my first handful of crickets à la front yard. Life is good.

DECEMBER 1980

I stop eating crickets, to my mother's delight. Now I'm tall enough to chomp on Christmas ornaments.

1989

As a rat-tailed townie in East Hampton, New York, I start working part-time in restaurants. The small collection of Long Island towns known as the Hamptons doubles as a playground for the rich and famous, while also serving as the hometown for landscapers, fishermen, and alcoholics who loathe the rich and famous. As a busboy, I worked at some of the highest-volume (The Lobster Roll) and highest-priced (Maidstone Arms) restaurants. For every Billy Joel, who smiled and tipped \$20 for coffee, there were 20 wannabes in polo shirts with popped collars asking, "Do you know who I am?" I learned to hate restaurants and, by extension, cooking.

1999

While on the no-carb Cyclical Ketogenic Diet (CKD), I develop an insatiable desire for anything crunchy and start experimenting with low-glycemic baking. Pacing up and down the aisles at Safeway, I'm unable to find baking powder and conclude it must be the same as baking soda, which I grab. The chocolate-and-macadamia-nut cookies come out looking incredible, just in time for my friends to return from work. As manimals do, they each eat three cookies in seconds, promptly followed by power chucking on the lawn.

2000

To avoid starvation, I buy my first microwave.

2001

Subsisting on microwavable Lean Cuisines, I start watching the Food Network for 1–2 hours a night to decompress from my start-up. Half-asleep one evening, I overhear Bobby Flay say, "Take risks and you'll get the payoffs. Learn from your mistakes until you succeed. It's that simple." I type this up and put it on my desk for moral support during moments of self-doubt. There would be many.

2007

The 4-Hour Workweek is published after being turned down by 26 publishers. I'm still enjoying the Food Network six years later, and I still haven't made a single dish.

2008

I become YouTube-famous for microwaving egg whites in plastic containers, which earns me the scorn of foodies worldwide. My follow-up act is a how-to video on "how to peel eggs without peeling them," which gets more than 4 million views. Being too lazy to cook is apparently popular.

JANUARY 2010

My friend Jesse Jacobs wants to catch up on business and insists we cook dinner at my place. I respond that *he'll* cook and *I'll* handle wine. Unbeknownst to me, Jesse was a sous-chef (second in command) at a top restaurant in a former life. He insists on walking me through the meal. Pointing at a large Le Creuset pot he brought, he begins:

"Put those chicken pieces in the pot." Check.

“Put in the veggies and potatoes. No need to cut them.” Ten seconds later, check.

“Pour in some olive oil and salt and pepper, and mix everything around with your hands to coat it. You don’t need to measure anything.” Ten seconds later, check.

“Now, put them in the oven.” Check.

“We’re done.”

I can’t believe it. “That’s it?” I ask, incredulous.

“Let’s catch up for two hours and drink some wine,” he says. It’s one of the most delicious meals I’ve had in years. Inspired, I decide to give cooking another chance.

JUNE 2010

My enthusiasm dies a quiet death. Overwhelmed by contradictory advice, poorly organized cookbooks, and unhelpful instructions (e.g., “Cook until done”), I throw in the towel yet again.

APRIL 2011

I meet my girlfriend, Natasha, who learned how to cook by imitating her grandmother. She didn’t do this as a child, but when she was in her mid-20s. She decides to teach me how:

“Smell this. Now smell this. Do they go together?”

“No. Gross.”

“OK, now smell this and this. Do they go together?”

“Yep.”

“Great. That’s cooking.”

Great sex ensues, and I decide I’ve been unfair to cooking. Groundhog Day.

AUGUST 2011

I commit to writing a book on learning, using cooking as the vehicle. Fun! My girlfriend can help!

SEPTEMBER 2011

Over the course of one week, I ask my girlfriend, “Is this basil?” 20 times. I want to punch myself in the face 20 times. Crisis of meaning. Revisit Bobby Flay quote.

OCTOBER 2011

After four weeks of nervous breakdowns and practically zero progress, I land in Chicago. Two days later, I replicate a two-Michelin-star entrée (sea bass, Ibérico ham, watercress, butter, and olive oil) in my hotel bathroom sink with next to nothing: scalding-hot tap water, Ziploc bags, and a cheap Polder thermometer. It’s ready 20 minutes later and finished with a gorgeous crust, courtesy of the iron in the closet. I had learned the technique by watching a chef’s eight-year-old son. All is not lost.

NOVEMBER 2011

I hit the inflection point. Sitting at the Polaris Grill in Bellevue, Washington, I am suddenly able to see food in HD—as if someone had handed me prescription glasses and corrected lifelong blurred vision. All the random pieces come together; I can clearly “see” pairing through taste and smell (e.g., orange and fennel), I can tell if the steak is 100% grass-fed or grain-finished by the waxiness on the palate, I correctly guess the origins of the Dungeness crab, wine, and oysters (three types), and the cooking methods for the scallops, pork chops, and more. The waiter asks me if I’m a chef (answer: no), and the executive chef comes out to introduce himself. It is otherworldly.

NOVEMBER 24, 2011

I cook Thanksgiving dinner for four people. Graduation day. For a lifelong noncook, I feel on top of the world.

JANUARY 2012

I start eating crickets again, this time roasted. I’ve rediscovered the wonder of food . . . and the childlike curiosity I thought I’d lost.