

'Twelve Recipes' is a not an ordinary cookbook

By Sam Sifton, New York Times

Cookbooks today fall largely into two camps. There is glossy art-house food erotica assembled by chefs eager to set down markers of regional pride, of particular aesthetic technique, of gastronomic genius. Cooking from those books is like making a paint-by-numbers Ingres or Hockney. You get the shape and the color and the line. But the dish is never really art.

And there are lifestyle bibles, aspirational guides to a better and often more ethical way of being. These cookbooks offer recipes for change, a chance to consider quinoa as a regular ingredient, the ability to alter your diet from selfish to one engaged with a wider story about health and happiness. Was that really what you wanted for dinner?

Rare is the cookbook that acknowledges the simple truth that there aren't really all that many recipes in the world. There is just technique, and practice, and joy and love, and at the end of it something simple and delicious on the plate, something that the reader may not have considered making before cracking the spine of the book.

Cal Peternell's smart new cookbook, "Twelve Recipes," recently published by HarperCollins, is one of the last type, a cookbook written for new cooks, for uncertain cooks, for good cooks looking for simple inspiration, for anyone wrestling with a New Year's resolution to cook more and better. It arose from conversations that Mr. Peternell, a longtime chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley had with his oldest son as he headed off to college: a kitchen rat who had never learned to cook, who had merely seen it all happen around him, who needed to be taught how to shop, how to warm garlic in a pan, how to make a

vinaigrette, how to braise.

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