

FEAST Fall 2010, Printer-friendly, Text Only, no images, no active links

AH, FALL—the gilded season, the time of year when we prepare for the colder months ahead, take long life-affirming breaths of freshening air, and watch the natural world dress itself in reds and golds. It's a time when school years begin with all their as-yet unspoiled potential, when groups and committees begin plotting winter's events, and, glimpsed on the horizon, even holiday plans begin floating through our thoughts. It's also a wonderful time to begin planning for those days that will keep us cozied up indoors reading—and making a list and checking it twice of all the books we want to have on hand to carry us through the long nights and shorter days.

At FEAST, after completing four years of trying to get out quarterly issues and only irregularly meeting our goal, we have realized quarterly issues are unrealistic with our very small staff, especially since I read every book myself that appears in our pages. We also realize that, for most people, the number of suggestions in each issue will surely carry them through from spring to fall, from fall to spring. This issue is the first of our fifth year and will be followed in the future by one issue in the spring, one in the fall, with occasional mini-suggestions sent out in between. We hope you'll like this new, more realistic schedule.

This fall issue we have our usual wide-ranging group of novels for you to choose from, a handful of nonfiction to beef up your brain, some cookbooks to set you drooling, a few art books to satisfy your thirst for color and design, an extra large film section because we just couldn't cut a single one, and a dab of travel selections—a new guide and an fascinating armchair travel narrative. Just because it was irresistible, we've added a radio documentary about the music of New Orleans and south Louisiana, the “most musical 125 miles on earth.” I think you'll find there's something here for everyone.

We love to hear from you—both suggestions and criticisms, so if you feel like sending us a note, just click on the “What I think about FEAST” button below.

Wishing you many miles and many good pages to go—
-- Rosemary Carstens
Editor

FICTION THAT BLEW MY HAIR BACK

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky, Heidi W. Durrow. Algonquin 2010. Winner of the 2008 Bellwether Prize for best fiction manuscript addressing issues of social justice. One of the key things about this novel is the author's striking mastery of what is called “voice.” Durrow writes from several points of view in this story of a girl of mixed ethnic heritage—“white” and “black”—whose mother steps off a high-rise roof holding her baby and taking the girl and her brother with her. The girl is the miraculous survivor. Her voice as she tries to leave her painful past behind and become what she calls “the new girl,” is unique and clear and the perfect vehicle for exploring how race plays out in American society. Having been raised the first ten years of her life in Europe where her

heritage was not an issue, she goes to live with her grandmother in an impoverished, all-black area of Portland, OR, and is forced to absorb differences in language and culture that are at once painful and torturous. The story addresses very real issues of what it is to be perceived as nonwhite in the United States, of poverty, drugs, alcoholism, and the enduring ties of blood and love. A small book with a giant story to tell.

Author's website: <http://heidiwdurrow.com/>

Bone Fire, Mark Spragg. Knopf 2010. Modern life in Wyoming is far different than the iconic Old West images that often spring to mind when thinking of this sparsely populated state. Spragg's novels are beautifully written, literary, and include fully developed but flawed human beings that provide us with a range of insights into how to live, to survive more or less successfully in challenging times. Set in small-town Ishawooa, this latest book from this talented writer is no exception. Small town America is the perfect stage for characters that are complex rather than stereotypical and these are men and women we can identify with as we take pleasure in Spragg's mastery of the language.

Matterhorn, Karl Marlantes. El León Literary Arts and Atlantic Monthly Press 2010. Marlantes' 600-page literary tour de force about the Vietnam War absolutely blew me away. I think it's the best book I've read this year. It took Marlantes, a Vietnam vet thirty years to complete and it's sure to become a classic. It is being referred to as the Great American Vietnam War Novel, up there with Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. It has important pertinence today as we consider what is asked of our armed forces when our country goes to war, how war takes our beautiful young men and women into its maw and then spits them out, the course of their lives forever changed. This is a powerful, gripping tale that reveals so much of the boots-on-the-ground reality of the Vietnam War—its strange savage mixture of love and friendships formed under fire, the obscene waste of lives and potential, the heart-searing irresponsibility of politically motivated "leaders."

Stories of war and battle details are not my usual choice of reading material, but I found myself drawn into these men's struggles, challenges, and often short-lived victories, absorbing every detail and even dreaming about the characters. This is tough stuff, but as someone of the generation whose men went to that war, it filled in blanks that support my view of war as a tool of ambitious, driven politicians and brass, who have insufficient understanding of the effects of their decisions I can't recommend this book highly enough.

Commentary from the author with a ton of input from readers: "Why I Write"
<http://blog.lemuriabooks.com/?p=6601>

Another fascinating interview: <http://living.scotsman.com/books/Interview-Karl-Marlantes-Author-Vietnam.6475927.jp>

Publisher's website and details and comments about the book:
http://www.elleonliteraryarts.org/b_matterhorn2.php

Island Beneath the Sea, Isabel Allende. HarperCollins 2010. Translated from Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden. Another one of those delightful novels from the author of one of my long-time favorites, *House of Spirits*. As with many of her previous books, this artful storyteller mixes class, race, and history in a tale about Haiti's fight for independence and freedom from slavery—with a dash of voodoo thrown in. The story centers on a young mulatta who is sold to a plantation owner, treated humiliatingly like property—as was the norm of the day—and becomes the only friend and caregiver of the man's wife and, later, his son. What happens as the colony's slaves are incited to take over the island in order to be free, the story of who she loves and who she must endure, is an engrossing read. Whether already a fan of Allende or coming to her work for the first time, you'll love this book.

<http://www.isabelallende.com/>

Remarkable Creatures, Tracy Chevalier. Dutton 2010. May Anning began life with a lightning strike that killed others around her and spared her to become one of the foremost discoverers of fossil remains in the 19th century. Although poor, uneducated, and considered "lower class," Mary has the eye to discern fossils buried for eons in the rock cliffs at the edge of her town. Through her friendship with a "lady"—Elizabeth Philpot, a middle-class spinster recently exiled from London who shares Mary's passion for finding evidence of creatures who existed long ago, May's knowledge and talent is spread far and wide. Her recognition, in a time when women were considered "spare parts" in science, came hard and with consequences. Once again Chevalier allows us a detailed look at an era, this one a time when religion trumped science and the thought that God had not created every living creature in seven days, making no mistakes whatsoever that would allow any to become extinct, reigned supreme. Fascinating, well-researched.

<http://www.tchevalier.com/>

The Space Between Us, Thrity Umrigar. HarperCollins 2005. This finely written book is about the gap between reality and the preconceived ideas or unthinking reactions we all share about race and class. Focusing on two women who live dramatically different lives in modern-day India, Umrigar casts them in sharp, telling detail. She is a master of showing rather than "telling" and she knows the landscape of the Indian culture like the back of her hand. The two main characters are close friends in spite of their differences: Sera Dubash, an upper-middle-class Parsi housewife whose opulent surroundings hide the quiet terror of her abusive marriage, and Bhima, her stoic illiterate maid hardened by a life of despair and loss. Bhima has worked in Sera's household for more than 20 years. In spite of the fact that for each woman the other is their closest female friend, throughout the book flashes are seen of class barriers each is not comfortable crossing. What is even more ironic, is that each character in this book at various times reveals

prejudices based on nothing more than feelings. It proves once again that it's almost an integral aspect of human beings that they seek out someone they can feel superior to, no matter how dire their own circumstances. A beautiful, poignant, and compelling story brought to us by one of the finest writers of our time.

<http://www.umrigar.com/>

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows. Dial 2009. I loved this book. The letter style for it was a perfect choice, partly because the idea of getting to know people through letters is something that has fallen by the wayside in this era of instant messaging and sound-bite reading and writing. From the back cover: "January 1946: Writer Juliet Ashton receives a letter from a stranger, a founding member of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society. And so begins a remarkable tale of the island of Guernsey during the German occupation, and of a society as extraordinary as its name. This book gives a glimpse into conditions for residents of this British isle during WWII, and it reinforces the power of words and books to transform lives.

Some additional information about the authors:

<http://www.anniebarrows.com/otherbooks/authorsbio/>

Breakfast with Buddha, Roland Merullo. Algonquin 2007. What a gem of a book! One of those that somehow appeared on my list to check out and ended up being something I especially enjoyed. In a way, it's Eat, Pray, Love with a male protagonist. It's fiction, but feels real. A middle-aged man with a successful career in publishing, Otto Ringling's parents have died suddenly in a car crash and now he must head from his urban, east coast life out to settle things at the remote North Dakota farmhouse where he grew up. He decides to drive so that his sister—who he thinks of as "flaky" and is sort of a hippie living an alternative lifestyle—will travel with him since she won't fly. When he arrives at his sister's home, he finds she is *not* going to accompany him but convinces him to give a ride to her guru, a crimson-robed Skovorodinian monk to whom she plans to give her half of their inherited 2,000-acre farm. And then the fun begins as two very different men find common ground as they wind their way in anything but a direct route across the country. It's a delightful read, with some laugh-out-loud sections and some thoughtful insight into living our lives with meaning.

<http://www.rolandmerullo.com/>

The Favorites, Mary Yukari Waters. Scribner 2009. A truly lovely story about shifting loyalties within three generations of women in post-WWII Japan. Waters writes from the point of view of fourteen-year-old Sarah Rexford, half Japanese, half American, as she observes the differences in her mother when seen in her native cultural environment, compared with her life in the United States. The extreme care with which her mother and grandmother's generations deal with the feelings between the diverse individuals in two related households, reveals a sensitivity that today seems to have fallen out of favor. There are secrets dating back to the war that are known to all, yet never

discussed. Through the years, Sarah learns to recognize the beauty to be found in such empathic though restrictive customs, and to reconsider her own position of favor within the family.

Noah's Compass, Anne Tyler. Knopf 2009. Tyler always writes about human struggles and foibles—she has a deep understanding of our efforts to understand and navigate life. In this story, Liam Pennywell has been “downsized” and, at 61, feels tired, ready to just quietly live out the rest of his days. He moves to a smaller, less expensive apartment after getting rid of most of his things. On moving day, he unpacks boxes, arranges his belongings and, finally, realizing how tired he is, climbs into bed. He awakes in a hospital with his head bandaged and no memory of how he got there. Finding his way through the days and months that follow are a roadmap for the intricacies of memory and of life, of entering one's elder years and finding meaning in the smaller events of daily living.

More about the author: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Tyler

JUST THE CAPTIVATING FACTS – RECOMMENDED NONFICTION

The Glass Castle, Jeannette Walls. Scribner 2005. Memoirs come and go; some are gripping and others not so much. But rarely is a childhood portrayed as openly and honestly, yet with so much love, as this one is. Wall's individualistic and often dysfunctional parents loved her and her siblings deeply, yet equally often endangered them with their careless and sometimes indifferent approach to parenting. Her father, when sober, appears to have been highly intelligent, charismatic, a dreamer in many ways detached from practical concepts of raising and supporting a family. As his dependency on alcohol progressed, he became dishonest and destructive. Wall's narcissistic mother envisioned herself as an artist and provided little emotional support for her children or appropriate guidance and care. The Wall children grew up feeding, clothing, taking care of, and protecting each other—surviving through their togetherness. It's an inspiring and poignant story of resilience and redemption against great odds.

More about the author: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeanette_Walls

Resilience, by Elizabeth Edwards. Broadway Books 2010. I usually avoid “celebrity” books like I do cow paddies in a pasture—for all the symbolic reasons that simile evokes. But this book is deeply sincere and human as Edwards places herself right there in the mess of life along with the rest of us. For me, it came to my attention at a time when I needed a little bit of personal courage and my own concerns seemed so mild when compared to what she has been through. She speaks candidly for the most part about her son's tragic death, her terminal diagnosis, and even about her husband's shocking infidelity—although about the last, I thought she was more sympathetic toward him than he deserves and more blaming of the woman than she deserves. It's convenient to blame a woman who is instrumental in setting in motion events that will

tear our lives apart—I've been there and done that—but it is the man who has made the commitment to you and it is him who does the betraying. Nevertheless, addressing those issues is just one small part of this book that is aptly subtitled: *Reflections on the Burdens and Gifts of Facing Life's Adversities*. I think there's something here for anyone to consider and I came away with an even deeper respect for this woman whose challenges would overwhelm most of us.

Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age in America, Helen Thorpe. Scribner 2009. A powerful account of four young women from Mexico who have lived most of their lives in the United States and attend the same high school in Denver, Colorado—two have legal documentation and two do not. Marisela, Yadira, Elissa, and Clara—all have their dreams, their goals, their personal gifts and talents. But all are not equal under the law and, as they approach adulthood, the differences in opportunities become painfully obvious. This is excellent journalism on the part of Thorpe and an enlightening way to drive home the real costs of our immigration policy's weaknesses and strengths.

For a fascinating glimpse of the two lives of Helen Thorpe, author and wife of Denver mayor John Hickenlooper, check out this story in 5280 magazine:
<http://www.5280.com/magazine/2009/10/two-lives-helen-thorpe>

Let It Bleed: The Rolling Stones, Altamont, and the End of the Sixties, Ethan A. Russell with Gerard Van Der Leun. Springboard Press 2009. Nineteen sixty-nine was a pivotal year in rock and roll history. Ethan Russell was one of only 16 people (and the only photographer) who made up the Rolling Stones 1969 tour that ended in the chaos that took place during a free concert at Altamont Speedway in the San Francisco Bay area. For any fan or history buff of the Rolling Stones, this book provides essential detail, great photos, and an only-from-an-insider point of view that will fascinate and flabbergast. It's all about the hard living, fantastic talent, and big-wave riding adventures of one of the greatest, longest-running bands of our time.

For more on the tour and the author: <http://www.letitbleedbook.com>

Eaarth, Bill McKibben. Times 2010. This is the first of McKibben's books I've read and I must say he packs a powerful punch. He discusses with considerable clarity how we have fatally transformed our planet's environment through unsustainable practices deeply rooted in our dependency on oil, through an emphasis on corporate farming aimed at profit-right-now at all costs, and, particularly in the developed world, through an unceasing focus on bigger, more acquisitive lifestyles. His view, simplified, is that we are living on a fundamentally altered planet and we had better get ready to hunker down to a different way of thinking about and using our resources in order to survive both now and in the future. He writes quite convincingly about the importance of more local diversification and community development rather than the present mega consolidations of such things as energy and food production. Although the first part of the book focuses on what might seem to some a "doomsday" discussion, McKibben fills the second half of the book with examples of successful, hope-filled, viable means for holding back the

tide of environmental changes that can only lead to our planet's demise. This should be essential reading for anyone who wants a realistic picture of the effects of climate change and some proposals for what we, as individuals, can do to make a difference in our own spheres of influence.

For more about the book and the author: <http://www.billmckibben.com/>

For more about 350.org and events planned for 10/10/10: <http://www.350.org/>

The American Meadow Garden: Creating a Natural Alternative to the Traditional Lawn, John Greenlee, photography by Saxon Holt. Timber Press 2009. For the gardener who prefers a more environmentally friendly alternative to large expanses of lawn. Greenlee presents some attractive and interesting arguments for ditching stuff that needs constant mowing and huge quantities of water. Beautiful photographs and informative suggestions for planting in various parts of the United States, including resources.

An interview with the author: <http://tinyurl.com/y9r39ez>

SOMETHING DIFFERENT: A RADIO DOCUMENTARY –

<http://www.stillsingingtheblues.org>

This is a unique presentation that any fan of music from this part of the country will thoroughly enjoy. We stumbled onto it in one of those serendipitous events that seem to happen daily on the Internet. Here's a brief description from the website:

Louisiana's Interstate 10 corridor between New Orleans and Lafayette has been described as the "most musical 125 miles on Earth." It is famously the birthplace of jazz, zydeco, and Cajun music, and also has its own brand of funk and R&B. But New Orleans and South Louisiana also have a strong blues tradition, which exists below the radar yet provides the DNA for much of the Pelican State's other music.

Still Singing the Blues is a two-part, two-hour radio documentary series featuring musicians in New Orleans and South Louisiana who continue to perform both traditional blues and more commercial rhythm-and-blues. Part 1 burrows into the lives of three outstanding older performers: Carol Fran of Lafayette, Harvey Knox of Baton Rouge, and Little Freddie King of New Orleans. Part 2 takes listeners into the handful of neighborhood clubs in New Orleans that keep the blues alive. In addition to playing on community and public radio stations across the country, these documentaries will also go online in August 2010.

ART

Still Life with Oysters and Lemon, Mark Doty. Beacon Press 2001. This small book (only 70 pages) is a literary gem I plan to read and reread often. Doty weaves his

experience of falling in love with a still life painting throughout a book that reveals his life and human loves, and he does it with truly lovely, elegant use of language, description, and imagery. I highly recommend this as a read to savor, rather like a perfect meal accompanied by just the right wine and companion.

<http://www.markdoty.org/>

Book of Lofts, Le Livre des Lofts, Das Loftbuck, Simone Schleifer and Julio Fajardo, eds. Evergreen 2009. In New York in the fifties, artists and bohemians in search of cheap places to live and work began to move into abandoned late-nineteenth-century buildings that once were warehouses, workshops, or factories. A new American version of the Parisian artist's atelier was born and spread worldwide, most particularly in urban settings. No longer inexpensive spaces, they are often works of art themselves: luxurious, elegant residences for those who love and can afford a minimalist approach to housing. This book features 55 lofts from New York to Paris, from Germany to Japan—ranging from huge industrial spaces to small places of business and includes more than 600 photographs, architectural plans, and computer graphics. I loved seeing the innovative ideas for space management, the sometimes unusual materials employed, and, quite often, the completely re-visioned ideas for ways to live. Written in English, French, and German, this would be a lovely gift for anyone interested in architecture or home design.

Building One Fire: Art + World View in Cherokee Life, Chadwick Corntassel Smith and Rennard Strickland with Benny Smith. University of Oklahoma Press 2010 <http://www.oupres.com/>. Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Chad Smith and renowned Cherokee-Osage scholar and author Rennard Strickland present a unique look at Cherokee art through the lens of Cherokee philosophy. Since the time when Water Spider brought the gift of fire to the Cherokee people, the One Fire, "the Ancient Lady," has been at the center of Cherokee spiritual life. This book offers an engaging discussion of the gifts from the "four messengers," the colors and qualities associated with them, and the four-point circle that embraces the sacred fire. These aspects of Cherokee consciousness and creativity are embraced and made manifest by Cherokee artists. The book contains more than 200 artworks by some 80 artists and is an exceptional presentation for those interested in Native American art themes and inspiration. A welcome gift for any art collector or student.

Printmaking: A Contemporary Perspective, Paul Coldwell. Black Dog Publishing 2010. A thorough journey through the processes and evolution of printmaking from seventh century woodcuts to the medium's most recent developments. Coldwell begins with a brief history of the processes and then examines relief prints, intaglio, lithography, screen prints, and the digital print, all illustrated with fascinating examples by a range of artists. He then explores the expanded practices of printmaking, including reworking traditions, painterly approaches, the hybrid print, new technology, and others. All in all, this is a fine overview for anyone interested in printmaking and fine art practices, a resource any artist could thumb through again and again for fresh inspiration and knowledge.

Bali Home: Inspirational Design Ideas, Kim Inglis, photography by Luca Invernizzi Tettoni. Tuttle Publishing 2009. Bali is known as a global leader in tropical design, featuring clean lines with the simplicity of Asian sensibilities. This book showcases over 100 homes, garden estates, hotels, resorts, restaurants and more, including the latest design trends coming out of the island. Many of these ideas could be adapted to other climates, including the use of gorgeous materials, both hard and softscape, striking color management, and dramatic exterior visual effects combining nature and luxurious living. The photography alone will have any amateur or professional decorator itching to get started!

FILM

This issue's film section is expanded beyond its usual number because the first few fall into a category we call "tough" films. They are gritty portrayals of subject matter we sometimes want to turn away from, yet they present opportunities to be more aware, to witness what's real for others who share our planet. To me, this is one important purpose for film. And yet, because I knew that some scenes would be very difficult to watch or thought they would be too grim or even depressing, I skipped them first time around. When I finally decided to see what they had to offer, I found each to be deeply moving, beautifully filmed, and well worth everyone's attention and the accolades that have come to them.

Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire (2008). Recipient of six academy award nominations and winner of best supporting actress (Mo'Nique) and best writing of an adapted screen play (Geoffrey Fletcher). Set in 1987 Harlem, *Precious* is the story of a 16-year-old girl struggling in a bleak and brutal world. Gabby Sidibe, Mo'Nique, and Mariah Carey star in this powerful film based on the novel *Push* by Sapphire. Viciously abused mentally and physically by her mother and sexually by her father, Harlem teen Precious Jones battles unimaginable barriers to having any sort of life at all. After bearing two children fathered by her own father, through the intervention and caring of people in education and social services, Precious finds a tiny window of possibility. While some of the scenes are tough, shedding light in these dark corners makes us all more aware of the desperation some suffer and, perhaps, will inspire more compassion for those less fortunate. But there's more than that to this film, which also contains a message of hope, and the main actresses give two of the finest performances to be found on screen—the film should not be missed for that reason alone.

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC-Iklfr4_E

The Hurt Locker (2008). You've heard a lot about this film and, maybe, like me, initially turned away from the idea of another violent war movie. But when I finally sat down to view it I found that the director, Kathryn Bigelow, has created an extremely well-filmed, fast-paced portrayal of daily events in the Iraq war. Yes, it's violent—and shockingly so in at least one scene—but it's also, I believe, an important realistic look at what war is,

what it does to people, its attractions as well as its destructiveness. No one comes away from this film without wondering what possible benefit there could ever have been or be to our troops being in Iraq or Afghanistan, or any other war zone of our own making. It's extremely powerful and everyone should bear witness.

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GxSDZc8etg>

The Cove (2009). Sundance and academy-award-winning documentary unveils the horrifying truth behind the capture of dolphins in a scenic cove in Taijii, Japan. A group of animal activists visit the site and risk their lives to film and expose a brutal operation designed to provide dolphins for the lucrative tourist trade and that creates an environmental catastrophe in the making. Those dolphins not selected for show animals (bringing prices up to \$150,000 each) are sold for meat—meat containing high levels of contaminants—and used in mandatory school lunches. Even the majority of Japanese people were unaware this was going on and the film was banned for a time in Japan; eventually permission was obtained for limited screenings at which protests were staged. Watching this film yourself and passing the word to others can help put an end to this inhumane practice.

Trailer: <http://www.thecovemovie.com/WatchTheTrailer.htm>

The Messenger (2008). An injured U.S. soldier, Sgt. Will Montgomery (Ben Foster), is paired up with by-the-book Capt. Tony Stone (Oscar nominee Woody Harrelson) to notify families of killed soldiers—a job that bonds them as they debate different views on serving America. At odds at first, the two find common ground while facing a variety of challenges.

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tTIQ8pkGf0>

Winter's Bone (2010). Winner of the 2010 Sundance Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize and the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award, directed by Debra Granik, and adapted for the screen by Granik and Anne Rosellini. Seventeen-year-old Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence) must find her father after he uses their family house to secure his bail and then disappears without a trace. With a mentally ill mother and a young sister and brother depending on her for their survival in this harsh Ozark culture, Ree challenges her outlaw kin's code of silence and risks her life to try to save their home. She hacks through the lies, evasions, and threats offered by her relatives, and begins to piece together the truth. Stunningly filmed and an oscar-possibility acting performance.

Trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE_X2pDRXyY&feature=player_embedded

Lars and the Real Girl (2007). When you first hear that this film is about a young man falling in love with a life-size sex doll he's bought over the Internet, you might think this is going to be a stupid movie without redeeming qualities. Surprisingly, it's not so. First it's part whacky comedy and I couldn't stop laughing at some of the early scenes—then

it becomes poignant as a whole town gets involved. There's a deeper theme here about acceptance of difference. I think you'll enjoy it—

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1XxlLVnt1w>

FOOD

pig: king of the southern table, James Villas. Wiley 2010. As the award-winning author of this just-out cookbook emphasizes: "I can't state it any more succinctly: Pork is and has been and always will be my favorite meat. . . . Today pig is as much king on the Southern table as when I took my first bites of juicy pork roast with sweet potatoes, fried salty country ham with red-eye gravy, and pickled pigs' feet."

For the lover of succulent, spicy, or BBQ'd pork, this book is a must-have for your kitchen. Villas brings us not only an abundance of mouth-watering recipes—300 in all—with gorgeous full-color photography "from the Mason-Dixon to the Gulf of Mexico and everywhere in between," he seasons it all with the spirit of Southern cooking's history and culture and includes favorite recipes from some of the region's most cherished restaurants.

Here's a sample recipe for Slow-Roasted Pork Shoulder with Orange-Raisin Sauce

An earlier interview with Villas that tells more about his background:
<http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-villas-james.asp>

Brunetti's Cookbook, recipes by Roberta Pianaro; culinary stories by Donna Leon. Atlantic Monthly Press 2009. For those of you not familiar with the charming, very popular novels by Donna Leon featuring Commissario Guido Brunetti, sited in Venice, Italy, they are worth dipping into just for the luscious descriptions of food alone. Leon knows Venice well—the everyday life that tourists might never glimpse. She has woven original essays about Brunetti's life throughout this fabulous collection of recipes provided by Leon's best friend and favorite cook, Roberta Pianaro. Nearly 100 tasty choices, fully illustrated, capture the essence of Italian cooking in this part of the country. I always enjoy a cookbook that moves beyond recipes alone, embedding them in a narrative about a time or place we can picture ourselves visiting, sitting down with congenial friends at their abundant table, sipping wine, trading stories, living the good life.

For more details about Donna Leon: <http://www.groveatlantic.com/leon/author.htm>

The School of Essential Ingredients, Erica Bauermeister. Putnam 2009. This is the perfect book for those who love the sensuous qualities of food—the color, the texture, the shared camaraderie of a well-prepared and beautifully presented meal. Bauermeister's first novel is the story of a cooking class and the lives of the eight people who comprise it. It's a celebration of the senses—taste, touch, sight, smell, reinforced

with an underlying melody of conversation. As you savor this tale, peace and beauty descend, enfolding you in life's physical joys, lingering in the memory like the last melting spoonful of Tiramisu on the tongue.

Visit the author's website to learn more about her and sample her favorite recipes:
<http://www.ericabauermeister.com/biography.html>

Lunch in Paris: A Love Story with Recipes, Elizabeth Bard. Little, Brown 2010. This is the kind of narrative "cook book" that I find a special treat. A combination of memoir about a particular time in an author's life and recipes for foods prepared to accompany events. Bard tells us the story of falling in love with a French man and how she learned to navigate a new life in Paris along with marriage, family, cross-culture negotiations, and the food that came to fascinate her. Light, delectable reading.

For more fun writing from Elizabeth Bard: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elizabeth-bard>

ROAD RASH

Belize, Joshua Berman. Moon Handbooks 2009. From a writer who has spent years exploring the rich land and sea heritage of Belize comes an updated guide to how to get around, what to see, where to stay, and a myriad of other tips and ideas. Not only has Berman traveled extensively in this country on his own, but he's taken his wife and baby with him and has first-hand knowledge about enjoying the culture *en famille*. Includes sections on the best of Belize, the Mundo Maya, all about the world-class diving, jungle explorations, butterfly safaris, and the exciting birding to be found in Belize. 43 detailed, easy-to-use maps.

<http://www.joshuaberman.net>

KOOK: What Surfing Taught Me About Love, Life, and Catching the Perfect Wave, Peter Heller. Free Press 2010. I love a book that is part travel adventure, part learning about someone taking on physical challenges in unexpected ways. At an age when most people are settling for quieter sports, acclaimed author Peter Heller gets sucked up into the undertow of learning to surf, coming face-to-face with the ocean's seductive beauty and endangered existence. Some men buy red sports cars and sport twenty-somethings on their arms when they enter their middle years, but Heller resolves to throw himself whole heartedly into a six-month effort to go from beginner—"kook"—to mastering a big-hollow wave as he and his girlfriend explore the surfer's life from southern California and down along the coasts of Baja and mainland Mexico. Along the way he finds, often to his surprise, that not everything in his relationships with surf, sea, and girlfriend is controllable, that at times he must simply hope to survive until he can breathe freely again. A great adventure that made me wish I wasn't far past the age to take up surfing!

Author's website: <http://www.peterheller.net/>