

TELLING TALES

Delicious stories about food

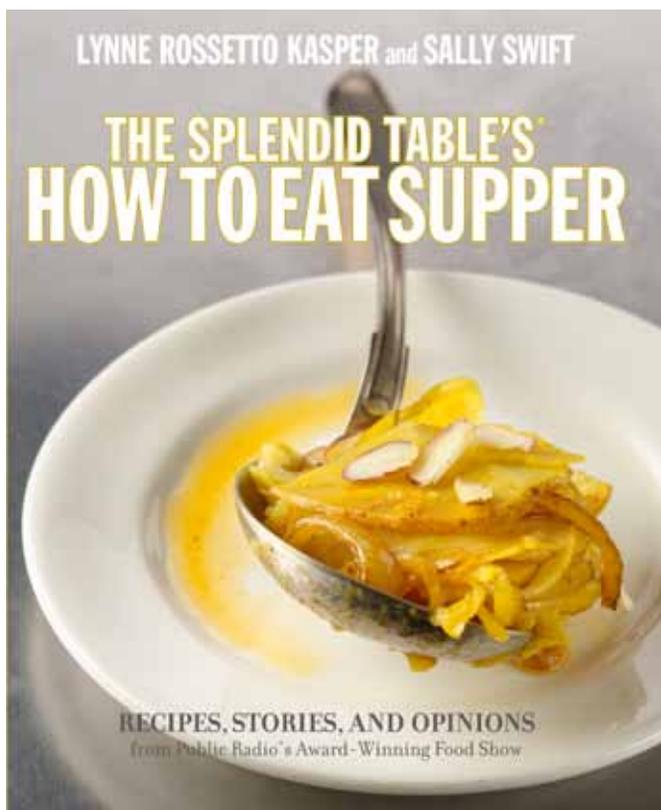
By Annette Gallagher Weisman

Pub owners in Ireland are not subtle about reminding customers it's closing time; they just open the doors and let in a huge draft. It's like that sudden chill in the air when the sun goes down in Aspen. More acute in fall, it's a signal that any day now, snow is imminent. Seems like an ideal time to curl up by the fire with a good cookbook.

But books like "The Joy of Cooking" are no longer in vogue; rather, those that tell stories about food with some incidental recipes are increasingly popular, such as "Garlic & Sapphires," by memoirist Ruth Reichl, and blogger Julie Powell's "Julie & Julia," which was recently made into a movie.

Adam Schell, a former professional chef and frequent visitor to Aspen, has written a novel loosely based on the tomato's introduction to Italy, "*Tomato Rhapsody: A Fable of Love, Lust & Forbidden Fruit*" (Delacorte Press, \$24). Set in 16th-century Tuscany, his fabulist tale has characters so over the top they're almost caricatures of themselves. Aside from the forbidden lovers Davido and Mari, there's the Good Padre, a villainous stepfather, a Grand Duke, a Fool named Bobo (seriously) and many others, including whores, farmers and merchants. Told with a strong narrative voice and the lyricism of a libretto, this torrid romance novel contains bawdiness and rhyming speeches of Shakespearean proportions along with tomato fights and riffs about local food. In fact, "Tomato Rhapsody" reads like a fairytale for grown-ups. Come to think of it, the ingredients might be ripe for an animated movie.

I never thought I'd find two guys talking about cars riveting. But if by chance I tune in to "Car Talk" on National Public Radio, I'm hooked; Click and Clack, with their raucous repartee and infectious laughter, are great storytellers. Being a foodie, listening to "The Splendid Table," with host Lynne Rossetto Kasper, is even better. Kasper and producer Sally Swift have co-authored "*The Splendid Table's How to Eat Supper: Recipes, Stories and Opinions from Public Radio's Award-Winning Food Show*" (Clarkson Potter, \$35). The recipes focus on fresh, local ingredients, such as Big Tomato



Sweet-Sour Salad. Kasper admits to being obsessed by tomatoes and has much to say about that lusty fruit! You'll also find anecdotes from the show, useful advice about which brands of olive oil, pasta, etc., to buy and recommended cookbooks.

Six months of the year David Tanis is the chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, Calif. This famous restaurant is owned by Alice Waters, who initiated the locavore movement in the 1970s. Waters calls Tanis' book, **"A Platter of Figs and Other Recipes"** (Artisan, \$35) "a love letter to the reader . . . gloriously illustrated by Christopher Hirsheimer."

In the foreword, she writes about the beauty of Tanis' hands while he cooks and how he'll burst into song in his big baritone. Tanis has reason to sing. He spends the other six months of the year hosting a private dining club in his 17th-century apartment in Paris. For Tanis, "simplicity is key," as he shows us how the ordinary can become sublime. His seasonal menus include spring's Fried Egg Soup and Wild Salmon with Vietnamese Cucumbers, followed by Rose-Scented Strawberries. Inspired by first "ogling vegetables" in local markets, he prefaces each menu with wonderful tales about the people, places and food he encountered along the way.

And now, for the days of our lives, **"Cool Cuisine: Taking the Bite Out of Global Warming,"** by Laura Stec with Eugene Cordero, Ph.D. (Gibbs-Smith, \$24.99) is a cool book. While it includes charts and graphs about such things as global greenhouse-gas emissions, energy and agricultural feeds, it's presented in such a clear and palatable way, you'll find even the statistics interesting. For instance, did you know it takes approximately 17 million barrels of oil just to make the plastic for the 29-plus billion plastic water bottles Americans use each year? Speaking of which, I'm amused when asked whether I want Fiji or Aspen water while dining out, as it sounds like a choice between destinations. Fortunately, Aspen tap water tastes good, too; drinking it would not only save money, but help reduce the toxic waste in our environment. Along with recipes such as Dark Chocolate Chili and Backyard Persimmon Martinis, the book's "tasty food revolution" describes how simple decisions not only make us healthier, but also improve our planet's ecosystem.

This is making me hungry. How about a sliced tomato, plain with just a pinch of sea salt? A drizzle of olive oil with a grind or two of black pepper would be even better. Hmm, perhaps add some fresh mozzarella. And a few basil leaves from that indoor pot. Let's see . . . that Focaccia bread would be nice toasted. Oh, and while you're up Davido, could you pour me some Aspen tap? ☺

