

# The importance of being Julia

THE JULIA CHILD COTTAGE INDUSTRY IS REVVING UP WITH TWO NEW BOOKS AND A PAIR OF MOVIES

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's been three years since Julia Child passed away but her career couldn't be more alive and well. With two films on her life currently being sized up for Hollywood and two recently released books chronicling her own truffles and tribulations, some people might start to believe she's pulled an Elvis and is still among the living.

Which is probably how she would have wanted it. Arguably one of the world's most celebrated chefs, Child — TV land's self-professed “teacher of food” — lived and worked until the ripe age of 91. She was a late bloomer in the fame game; her first on-air appearance was at age 50 but she more than made up for lost time.

As soon as Child took the helm of her first show, *The French Chef*, in 1963, her warm, warbly yet determined voice and her signature cauliflower-shaped hairdo instantly had viewers from all walks of life hooked on cooking français.

Her chopping, slicing and puréeing ways not only survived the tyranny of YouTube (hundreds of Julia video posts abound), Internet blogs (respected online foodie diarists such as eddybles.com cite her as their #1 inspiration) and finicky television trends (she holds the record for the most PBS reruns known to a cook) but her chutzpah has managed to cross as many generations as Cher.

Which is why two blockbuster scripts on the domestic anti-diva are racing to get the final green light from producers and directors in Tinseltown. Last spring, on Martha Stewart's daytime talk show, actress Joan Cusack let it slip that she would be starring in the yet-to-be-titled biopic of Child's life. A separate script is rumoured to be based on one of the many books written about Child's gourmet journey, including *Appetite for Life*, written by Noel Riley Fitch, and her acclaimed autobiography *My Life In France* co-written with grandnephew Alex Prud'homme.

To add to Julia fever, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington is preparing for its grand reopening next summer with a dynamic exhibit that features Child's original kitchen from her former cuisine headquarters in Cambridge, Mass.

Curator Aryana Green says her team spent three days in 2001 speaking to Child and archiving more than 1,200 objects, including cabinets, appliances and peg boards. “We stopped short of cutting her walls down and taking her floors up just to recreate the space where Julia had so lovingly mastered her craft.”

To celebrate its reopening (the exhibit originally opened in '01 and closed this year for renovations), the exhibit will feature a never-before-seen video, taken on 9/11, that shows an exclusive interview with Child, who dishes on her favourite cooking must-haves. “It was remarkable,” says Green, of the experience. “We were thinking of not taping because of the circumstanc-



Julia Child donated the 14- by 20-foot kitchen from her Cambridge, Mass., home, and its more than 1,200 items, including her Garland stove, cookbooks and utensils, to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. The exhibit will reopen next summer.

es but Julia — who was 90 at the time and not in good health — said, “We have work to do, let's do it.”

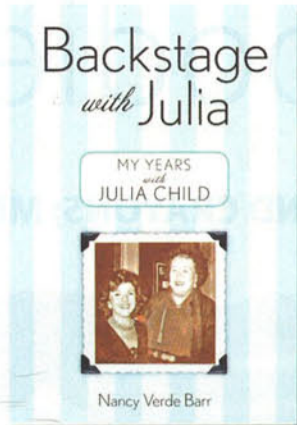
Two new books on Child's years of wise- and egg-cracking life have also hit bookstores. *Backstage with Julia*, written by Nancy Verde Barr, who worked with Child for more than 18 years, delves deeply into Child's later years when she became a famous career woman thrust into the limelight.

The book offers readers candid snapshots of quirky moments during Child's career rise. From 10 a.m. jaunts to the local hot dog vendor for a quick morning snack (“one with everything, please!”) to a chapter devoted to a memory of Child campily conducting an orchestra with a four-foot wooden spoon at a charity event, Barr's recounting of Julia's capers, makes for a charming read.

A separate biography by *New York Times* writer Laura Shapiro, titled *Julia Child*, from the Penguin Lives series, offers up a somewhat richer literary meal. Starting with her humble beginnings and ending with her tireless days of chopping onions in her wheelchair, Shapiro's portrait is as complex and satisfying as one of Child's recipes.

But the main reason for all this Julia Child resurgence is not nostalgia.

“Julia's a cottage industry,” concludes Green, “She became a major figure in pop culture because of her presence and knowledge. It goes to show you, she wasn't a glamour girl but she's changed the way we see food, the TV and publishing industry. She really is an ongoing inspiration.”



GETTY IMAGES



Julia Child, on the set of the 1960s series *The French Chef*, left, is the subject of a pair of new books about her storied life.



DETROIT FREE PRESS PHOTO

Although she died in 2004, people remain fascinated by the life of legendary chef Julia Child, above, relaxing in a garden at age 87.