

# culinary creations

Elio Iannacci serves up three delectable delights

**A**h, love and food...two meaty topics that rank as both the bane and the blessing of many a writer's existence. These two necessities of life have been the subject of thousands of literary trends. Separately, each invokes a universe of possibilities, as their scope continues to intrigue many generations. However, when writers decide to relate their love of food, the results can be quite appetizing.

Take *The Art of Eating* (Wiley), a timeless, essay-style feast of words prepared by the queen of culinary literature, M.F.K. Fisher. This old testament of good taste still offers new ideas that have inspired the likes of Julia Child, Martha Stewart and even the brazen Jamie Oliver. This one tome, best purchased in its current 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary-edition form, serves as a collection of the first five books of Fisher's career (*Serve it Forth*, *Consider the Oyster*, *How to Cook a Wolf*, *The Gastronomical Me* and *An Alphabet for Gourmets*), including her greatest writing from the 1930s to 1948. Set in kitchens and on tables across the world, from Paris to Japan, Fisher recounts with passion the preparing and eating of food. With its exploration of delicious recipes and detailed anecdotes on various dish preparations, the book offers more than just a comprehensive read on fine fare—it presents readers with a variety of historical perspectives on the edible arts. What really makes this book superb is the fanciful way in which Fisher relays her experiences in and out of the kitchen. The author words her engaging memories of spicing and slicing with the same care a master chef musters when feeding a room filled with food critics. Even when Fisher frets over a frittata or obsesses over her candid “butter vs. shortening” discussion in *How to Cook a Wolf*,

the reader is still left charmed and hungry for more.

Following in the footsteps of Fisher's *The Art of Eating* is a daunting task for any food writer. Those whose literary soufflés rose to the top are featured in *A Slice of Life* (Overlook Duckworth), a marvelous collection of both fiction and nonfiction that investigates the many relationships people have with food. Beginning with an exquisite appetizer in the preface called “The Theatre of Food,” written by editor Bonnie Marranca, the book is upfront in its aim to question the notion of taste. Author Umberto Eco provides a few challenging thoughts on the banality of airplane meals in his capricious offering, “How to Eat in Flight.” Susan Sontag whips up a much heavier meal that touches on the politics of civilized tablewear in a piece called “In Memory of Their Feelings.” Acclaimed Italian cookbook author Marcella Hazan playfully writes on a growing love affair she has with her local Venetian market. And a celebrated television food host or two also contribute to the spread. Nigella Lawson gives a handful of opinions on how cooking is about the conflict of “impressing others,” as well as “satisfying yourself.” *A Slice of Life* brings together a banquet of voices from those most affected by basic kitchen matters such as the crack of an egg or, as in Alice Walker's case, the simple beauty of a blue bowl that she considers a “cauldron of memories.”

Also associated with concocting slices of life is the late, great New York writer Frank O'Hara. His critically acclaimed assortment of poems, simply titled *Lunch Poems* (City Lights Books), is much less literal than the previous two collections but is indeed a part of the food lit canon. Written on his lunch breaks while an associate curator for the Museum of Modern Art during the 1960s, O'Hara's stanza style is as quick and casual as his meals were. Far from some hokey roast beef on rhyme arrangement, his wording (much like his choice of diet) contains a fast-food immediacy that is still quite revolutionary in contemporary poetry. The delivery of short but sweet phrases of news, food and wit is what O'Hara's poems do best. While ordering and digesting one of his beloved combinations—a hamburger and a malted (as mentioned in his poem about Billie Holiday called “The Day Lady Died”)—we are reminded, through O'Hara's poems, how much revolves around our must-have midday nourishment. In one of the book's greatest offerings, “A Step Away from Them,” O'Hara details city life around sandwiches, Coca-Cola signs, a favourite diner and a glass of papaya juice. Like all good writing on food, *Lunch Poems* gives readers a peek into a galaxy of subjects where objects that are consumed become characters with their own rich histories and stories to tell.

