

THE FUCKING FRENCH COOK

*A Cookbook for People Who Hate Cooking,
Recipes, Measurements and Instructions*

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INTRODUCTION

If you bought this book looking for precise recipes, you already made a mistake.

French people don't cook with recipes.

We cook with confidence.

Sometimes we don't even know what's in the pan.

We just look at it and say: *"Yeah. That looks French."*

Cooking is simple.

Take something good. Add butter. Add wine. Add garlic. Pretend you know what you're doing.

If someone asks for quantities, laugh at them.

This book contains no exact measurements because life contains no exact measurements.

If your grandmother can make it without a recipe, so can you. *Probably.*

THE SEVEN RULES

I. If the recipe takes more than one hour, it's a Sunday or it's nothing.

II. "A pinch" means whatever you want. Stop asking questions.

III. You don't need special equipment. A knife, a pan, a flame. That's cooking.

IV. Butter is not your enemy. The no-butter diet is.

V. Taste. Adjust. That's the entire secret of French cooking. You're welcome.

VI. If you fail, try again or order a pizza. Both are valid. Neither is shameful.

VII. Never cook sad. A glass of wine while cooking is not optional. It is infrastructure.

Bonne chance. You'll be fine. Probably.

CHAPTER I

Les Matins

Parce que même un mec qui déteste cuisiner doit se lever

RECIPE 01

L'Omelette

The most humiliating recipe if you fail it

French people don't make scrambled eggs when they fail an omelette. They call it "oeufs brouillés" and charge more for it.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 3 eggs
- Butter
- Salt, pepper
- Cheese (optional)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Crack 3 eggs into a bowl. Beat with a fork — 30 seconds, not 10 minutes. Season.
2. Pan on medium-high heat. Butter in. When it foams: your eggs.
3. Wait 15 seconds. Drag the edges toward the center with a spatula. The uncooked egg fills the gaps.
4. When the center is still slightly wobbly — not liquid, wobbly — it's done. Fold or roll.
5. Into the plate. Eat immediately. A cold omelette is a crime.

THE HONEST TIP

If you fail the roll, you have scrambled eggs. Call them oeufs brouillés. Tell no one.

RECIPE 02

Les Tartines

Oui, tartine. Not toast. There's a difference.

The difference between a French tartine and an English breakfast is not the bread. It's the absence of guilt.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Baguette (fresh)
- Demi-sel butter (non-negotiable)
- Jam or honey
- Coffee

WHAT YOU DO

1. Cut the bread. Thick. Not a diet slice.
2. Toast if you want. A fresh baguette doesn't need it.
3. Butter generously. You should see the butter. If you're debating, there isn't enough.
4. Jam on top. Eat with coffee. That's it. 200 years, nobody has suggested improving it.

THE HONEST TIP

Demi-sel butter is a Breton invention. Brittany also gave us crêpes. We forgive them everything, including the weather.

RECIPE 03

Les Oeufs Cocotte

Fancy name. Five minutes. Nobody needs to know.

"Cocotte" sounds like you spent the morning in a French country kitchen. You spent four minutes.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 eggs

- Heavy cream
- Butter
- Salt, pepper
- Ham or cheese (optional)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Oven at 180°C. Butter the inside of each ramekin.
2. Optional: lay ham in the bottom, grate some cheese.
3. Small spoon of cream in each. Crack one egg gently on top. Season. Another spoon of cream over the egg.
4. Bake 10-12 minutes. White set, yolk still runny. Serve in the ramekin with bread to dip.

THE HONEST TIP

If you don't have ramekins, use a muffin tin. Cover with foil. No one will ever know.

RECIPE 04

Le Croque-Monsieur

The best grilled cheese in the world and we refuse to call it that

Technically a croque-monsieur is a grilled cheese. The French will never accept this characterization. Both things are true.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 thick slices bread
- Butter
- 2 slices cooked ham
- Gruyère, grated
- Béchamel: butter, flour, milk, nutmeg

WHAT YOU DO

1. Quick béchamel: melt 1 tbsp butter, add 1 tbsp flour, stir 1 min. Add 150ml milk gradually, stir until thick. Nutmeg.
2. Butter one side of each bread slice.
3. Non-buttered side: spread béchamel. Add ham. Add cheese. Close sandwich, buttered sides out.
4. Pan medium heat. 2-3 minutes per side until golden.
5. Optional: more béchamel and cheese on top, 2 min under the grill. This is the correct version.

THE HONEST TIP

The béchamel is what separates a croque-monsieur from a ham and cheese toastie. Skip it and it's a toastie.

RECIPE 05

Le Granola Français

We don't call it granola. We call it muesli. We don't really eat it. But here it is.

This recipe exists for the mornings when you want to feel like you're making an effort without actually making an effort.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 200g rolled oats
- 50g honey
- 40g butter
- 50g almonds or hazelnuts
- Pinch of salt
- Dried fruit (optional, after)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Oven at 170°C.
2. Melt butter and honey together — 1 minute.
3. Pour over oats and nuts. Mix. Spread on baking tray.

4. Bake 20-25 minutes, stirring once. Golden. Will crisp up as it cools.
5. Cool completely. Add dried fruit. Store in a jar. Keeps 2 weeks.

THE HONEST TIP

The French don't really eat granola. They eat tartines. This recipe is for the French person who lived abroad long enough to develop morning guilt. You know who you are.

RECIPE 06

Le Pain Perdu

French toast. But we invented it. And we named it 'lost bread.' Which is more honest.

Pain perdu means 'lost bread.' The French have been rescuing stale baguettes since the Middle Ages. This is not a breakfast trend. This is history.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2-3 thick slices stale bread
- 2 eggs
- 100ml milk
- 1 tbsp sugar
- Vanilla (optional)
- Butter

WHAT YOU DO

1. Beat eggs with milk, sugar, vanilla in a shallow bowl.
2. Soak bread 30 seconds per side. Absorb, not drown.
3. Butter in pan on medium. When foaming: bread in.
4. 2-3 minutes per side until golden. Serve immediately with powdered sugar or jam.

THE HONEST TIP

Brioche makes a better pain perdu than baguette. Baguette makes a more honest one. The Americans took this recipe, added maple syrup, and charged \$18 for it at brunch. The bread cost 20 cents.

— Fin du Chapitre I. Vous êtes équipés pour survivre jusqu'au déjeuner. C'est déjà pas mal. —

Les Soirs

Quand t'as la flemme mais que les chips c'est pas un dîner

RECIPE 07

La Soupe à l'Oignon

The most underestimated soup in the world

Louis XV supposedly made it himself at 3am. If it's good enough for a king who couldn't sleep, it's good enough for a Tuesday.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 4 large onions
- 50g butter
- 1 tbsp flour
- 200ml white wine
- 1L beef stock
- Baguette slices + Gruyère for gratin

WHAT YOU DO

1. Slice onions thinly. Yes, you'll cry. Butter in heavy pot, medium-low. Onions in. Salt.
2. Cook 30-35 minutes stirring occasionally until deep golden brown. Not blonde. Deep brown. This step IS the recipe.
3. Add flour, stir 1 min. Add wine, scrape the bottom. Add stock. Simmer 15 minutes. Season.
4. Ladle into oven-safe bowls. Float baguette slices on top. Cover completely with Gruyère.
5. Under grill 3-4 minutes until bubbling and golden. Eat immediately. Burn your mouth. Worth it.

THE HONEST TIP

The stock cube is fine. Professional chefs won't admit this. This book will.

RECIPE 08

Les Pâtes Beurre-Parmesan

Technically Italian. Adopted by France. We're not sorry.

The French didn't invent this. But they perfected the attitude — make it at 10pm, pair it with wine, feel no shame.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 200g pasta
- 80g cold butter (in pieces)
- Parmesan, grated (a lot)
- Salt, aggressive black pepper
- Pasta cooking water — KEEP IT

WHAT YOU DO

1. Cook pasta in heavily salted water. Al dente.
2. Before draining: save a cup of cooking water. This is the step everyone forgets. Don't be everyone.
3. Hot pan: butter pieces. Drained pasta on top. Splash of cooking water. Toss energetically.
4. Parmesan over everything. Black pepper — aggressive. Eat.

THE HONEST TIP

If you have a truffle, grate it on top. If you have a truffle at home and you're reading this book, you made different life choices. Still good though.

RECIPE 09

Les Moules Marinières

The fastest impressive dinner you will ever make

Mussels take 10 minutes. This is the greatest gap between perceived difficulty and actual difficulty in all of French cuisine.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1kg fresh mussels
- 2 shallots
- 2 garlic cloves
- 200ml dry white wine
- 50g butter
- Fresh parsley, black pepper
- Bread — mandatory

WHAT YOU DO

1. Clean mussels. Discard any open ones that don't close when tapped.
2. Shallots and garlic, chopped. Butter in large pot. Shallots 2 min, garlic 1 min more.
3. High heat. Wine in. Mussels in. Lid on. Cook 3-4 minutes shaking occasionally.
4. All mussels open = done. Still closed after 5 min = discard.
5. Parsley, pepper. Serve in the pot with the broth and a lot of bread.

THE HONEST TIP

The bread is not a side dish. It's the final course. The broth is the point. The mussels are the excuse.

RECIPE 10

La Ratatouille

Not the movie. The actual thing. Which is better.

Requires no technique. Requires only time and a willingness to let vegetables do their thing.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 aubergine
- 2 courgettes
- 2 peppers (red or yellow — not green, green peppers are sad)
- 4 tomatoes or 1 tin
- 1 onion
- 3 garlic cloves
- Olive oil (a lot)
- Thyme, basil

WHAT YOU DO

1. Cut everything into equal chunks. Rustic is the point.
2. Olive oil, medium heat. Onion 5 min, peppers 5 min, aubergine 5 min, courgette 5 min, garlic 1 min, tomatoes.
3. Season generously. Add thyme. Low heat. Cover. Cook 30-40 minutes.
4. Finish with fresh basil. Taste and adjust.

THE HONEST TIP

Ratatouille is better the next day. This is not a suggestion — it is a fact of chemistry.

RECIPE 11

Le Steak et sa Sauce

The steak you already know. The sauce that changes everything.

A steak without sauce is just meat. The French understood this immediately. The sauce is the argument.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 entrecôte or sirloin (200-250g)

- Butter + oil
- Fleur de sel, black pepper
- Sauce: 1 shallot, 100ml red wine, 100ml stock, 1 tbsp butter

WHAT YOU DO

1. Steak out of fridge 20 min before. Dry with paper towel.
2. Cast iron on very high heat. Oil and butter. When smoking: steak. Don't touch it.
3. 2-3 minutes per side for medium-rare. Turn once. Optional: baste with butter, garlic, thyme.
4. Rest 3-4 minutes under foil. Non-negotiable.
5. Sauce: same pan, shallot 1 min, wine in scraping the bits, reduce half, stock, reduce half, butter, swirl.

THE HONEST TIP

The pan sauce takes 5 minutes and elevates a €12 steak into something that feels like a restaurant. Highest return-on-investment technique in this book.

RECIPE 12

Le Boeuf Bourguignon Express

Three hours in the real version. One hour in this one. You'll live.

This version cuts corners intelligently. The result is 85% as good. On a Tuesday, 85% is excellent.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 600g stewing beef
- 200g lardons
- 1 bottle red wine
- 2 carrots, 1 onion, 3 garlic
- 200g mushrooms
- 2 tbsp flour

— Beef stock

— Bouquet garni

WHAT YOU DO

1. Cut beef into chunks. Season. High heat, oil. Brown in batches. 10 minutes. Most important 10 minutes of this recipe.
2. Remove beef. Lardons until golden. Remove. Onion and carrots 5 min.
3. Flour 2 min. Garlic. Entire bottle of wine. Scrape the bottom. Stock to cover. Bouquet garni. Beef back in.
4. Simmer covered 1 to 1.5 hours.
5. 30 min before end: mushrooms in butter, add to stew. Serve with mash, pasta, or bread. Never rice.

THE HONEST TIP

The wine you cook with should be wine you'd drink. The flavour concentrates. Whatever's wrong with the wine becomes more wrong.

— *Fin du Chapitre II. Vous avez six dîners. C'est toute la semaine.* —

Pour Épater

Quand t'as des invités et que t'as pas envie qu'ils sachent

RECIPE 13

Le Poulet Rôti

The dish that made France famous and requires almost no effort

10 minutes of actual work and an hour of the oven doing everything. Best ratio in cooking.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 whole chicken (1.5kg)
- 50g soft butter
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 lemon
- Thyme, rosemary
- Salt, pepper, olive oil

WHAT YOU DO

1. Oven to 220°C.
2. Mix soft butter with salt, pepper, thyme. Slide under the skin over the breasts. Push butter directly against the flesh.
3. Inside cavity: half lemon, 2 crushed garlic, rosemary. Olive oil outside. Season.
4. 220°C for 20 min, then 180°C. Total ~1 hour. Baste every 20 min.
5. Test: pierce thigh, clear juice = done. Rest 10-15 min before carving. Non-negotiable.

6. Pan sauce: white wine + water in tray, scrape, reduce 2 min. That's your jus.

THE HONEST TIP

The resting time is the most ignored step in all of cooking and also the most important. Set a timer. Walk away. Drink wine.

RECIPE 14

La Sole Meunière

The simplest fish dish in France. The one that made Julia Child cry.

Julia Child ate this in Rouen in 1948 and said it changed her life. Four ingredients. Ten minutes.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 sole fillets (or any flat white fish)
- Flour
- 80g butter
- 1 lemon
- Fresh parsley
- Salt, pepper

WHAT YOU DO

1. Season fish. Dust lightly with flour — pat off excess.
2. Half the butter in pan on medium-high. When foaming and golden: fish in.
3. 2-3 minutes per side. Done when it flakes easily.
4. Remove fish. Same pan: remaining butter. Watch it foam, subside, turn golden-brown and nutty. Beurre noisette. 90 seconds.
5. Squeeze lemon in — it hisses. Add parsley. Pour immediately over fish.

THE HONEST TIP

The beurre noisette is the recipe. The rest is just fish. Watch the butter like it owes you money — golden to burnt in 20 seconds.

RECIPE 15

Le Magret de Canard

Duck breast. Sounds terrifying. Takes 20 minutes. Impresses everyone.

The gap between perceived and actual difficulty is enormous — which is the entire premise of this book.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 duck breast fillets
- Salt, pepper
- Sauce: 2 tbsp honey, 2 tbsp soy sauce, 1 tbsp balsamic, 1 shallot

WHAT YOU DO

1. Score the fat in crosshatch, 1cm apart, not through to flesh.
2. Season both sides. Cold pan. No oil. Fat side down. Medium heat.
3. Cook fat side 8-10 minutes until golden and rendered. Don't rush.
4. Flip. 3-4 min for pink (correct). Rest 5 min tented with foil.
5. Sauce: pour off fat (keep it). Shallot 1 min, honey bubbles, soy + balsamic, reduce 2 min. Pour over sliced duck.

THE HONEST TIP

The duck fat is liquid gold. Fry potatoes in it. Your potatoes will never be the same again. You will never go back.

RECIPE 16

Le Gratin Dauphinois

The greatest thing ever done with a potato

Potatoes, cream, garlic, and time. One of the finest things France has ever produced.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 800g waxy potatoes (Charlotte, Nicola)
- 400ml heavy cream
- 200ml whole milk
- 2 garlic cloves
- Butter
- Salt, pepper, nutmeg

WHAT YOU DO

1. Oven to 160°C. Low and slow.
2. Peel and slice potatoes 3mm thin. Do NOT wash after slicing. Keep the starch.
3. Heat cream, milk, garlic, seasoning to simmer. Add potatoes, cook 5 min.
4. Butter a gratin dish rubbed with garlic. Pour in potato and cream mixture.
5. Bake 60-75 minutes. Golden top. Knife slides through with no resistance.
6. Rest 10 minutes. Continues cooking as it rests.

THE HONEST TIP

160°C is correct. Do not increase the heat. Patience is the recipe.

RECIPE 17

La Vinaigrette

Two minutes. Everyone in France does this. Nobody outside France does this. Why.

The bottled vinaigrette industry exists because people don't know how easy this is.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 6 tbsp olive oil
- Salt, pepper

— Garlic, herbs (optional)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Mustard, vinegar, salt, pepper in a bowl or jar. Mix.
2. Add oil in steady stream whisking constantly. It thickens. Chemistry. 30 seconds.
3. Taste. Too acidic: more oil. Too flat: more vinegar or salt.
4. Dress the salad at the last moment. Never before.

THE HONEST TIP

Make it in a jar. Shake instead of whisk. Keeps a week. Now you have vinaigrette every day with zero effort.

RECIPE 18

Le Beurre Blanc

The sauce that sounds impossible and isn't

French cooking teachers use this to terrify students. This is technically justified and practically irrelevant.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 3 shallots, finely chopped
- 100ml dry white wine
- 50ml white wine vinegar
- 200g cold butter, cubed
- Salt, white pepper

WHAT YOU DO

1. Shallots, wine, vinegar in saucepan. Reduce until almost dry — just a few tablespoons remaining.
2. Very low heat. Add cold butter cubes 1-2 at a time, whisking constantly.
3. Sauce becomes thick, creamy, pale yellow. Season.

4. Strain shallots for elegance, leave in for honesty. Serve immediately.

THE HONEST TIP

If the sauce breaks: off heat, add an ice cube, whisk vigorously. Usually comes back. If not, you have melted butter, which is also delicious.

— *Fin du Chapitre III. Vous avez de quoi recevoir. Sans qu'ils sachent. C'est ça, la cuisine française.* —

CHAPTER IV

Les Bases

Les trucs que les Français font les yeux fermés

RECIPE 19

La Béchamel

The mother sauce. Four ingredients. No excuses.

There are five mother sauces. Béchamel is the one you actually need.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 30g butter
- 30g flour
- 500ml warm whole milk
- Salt, pepper, nutmeg

WHAT YOU DO

1. Butter in saucepan. When melted: flour in all at once. Stir constantly 1-2 minutes. This is the roux.
2. Add warm milk in thirds, whisking constantly. Each addition fully incorporated before the next.
3. Continue stirring on medium until thick, 3-5 minutes.
4. Season with salt, pepper, nutmeg. Nutmeg is not optional.

THE HONEST TIP

Lumps happen. Whisk aggressively off heat. Or strain through a sieve. Nobody will know. You will know. Make peace with that.

RECIPE 20

La Mayonnaise Maison

Five minutes. Tastes nothing like the jar. You'll never go back.

The reason people don't make it is fear of the emulsion breaking. This fear is mostly unjustified.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 egg yolks (room temperature)
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 200ml neutral oil (sunflower)
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar
- Salt, pepper

WHAT YOU DO

1. Egg yolks and mustard in a bowl. Whisk together.
2. Add oil drop by drop at first — literally drops — while whisking constantly.
3. Once it thickens and turns pale (after ~50ml oil), add oil in a thin stream.
4. All oil in: add vinegar, season, taste, adjust.

THE HONEST TIP

Everything must be room temperature. If it breaks: new yolk in clean bowl, slowly whisk broken mayo into it.

RECIPE 21

La Cuisson du Poisson

How to cook fish without ruining it

Most people overcook fish. Fish is done much earlier than you think.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Any fish fillet
- Butter + oil

- Salt, pepper
- Flour (optional)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Dry the fish thoroughly. Season. Flour lightly if desired.
2. Butter and oil in pan on medium-high. When foaming: fish in, presentation side down.
3. Don't move it. 3-4 minutes. Flip gently. 1-2 minutes more.
4. Test: press gently. Should yield and flake. If it falls apart, it's overcooked. Lesson learned.

THE HONEST TIP

Fish continues cooking off the heat. Take it off 30 seconds before you think it's done.

RECIPE 22

Le Fond et le Jus

Stock. Why it matters. And how to fake it.

Good stock is the difference between a flat sauce and something with depth. Here's the honest version.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Chicken carcass or wings
- 1 onion, 2 carrots, celery
- Bouquet garni
- Cold water
- Salt

WHAT YOU DO

1. Everything in a pot, covered with cold water.
2. Bring slowly to a simmer. Skim foam. Simmer 45 minutes. Strain.

3. Cheat version: good quality liquid stock concentrate. Taste it first. If it tastes good, your sauce will.

THE HONEST TIP

When you roast a chicken, put the carcass in a pot with water and vegetables. Simmer while you eat. Strain before bed. Free stock, zero effort.

— *Fin du Chapitre IV.* —

Les Desserts

La fin du repas est la dernière impression

RECIPE 23

La Mousse au Chocolat

Air, chocolate, eggs. Nothing else. No shortcuts.

No cream, no gelatin, no shortcuts. It is eggs, chocolate, and air. The technique is about preserving that air.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 200g dark chocolate (70%)
- 6 eggs, separated
- 30g butter
- Pinch of salt
- Fleur de sel to finish

WHAT YOU DO

1. Melt chocolate and butter. Cool to warm.
2. Add egg yolks one at a time to chocolate.
3. Whisk whites with salt to firm peaks. Bowl inverts without moving.
4. Fold whites into chocolate in 3 additions — large spatula, lifting motion. Never stirring. Preserve the air.
5. Refrigerate minimum 2 hours. Overnight is correct. Fleur de sel to serve.

THE HONEST TIP

If whites have chocolate streaks, you folded too aggressively. Still delicious. Call it 'mousse intense.' Serve with confidence.

RECIPE 24

La Tarte Tatin

An upside-down apple tart invented by accident. The best accidents in France involve food.

The Tatin sisters forgot the apples on the stove. They served it upside down. It became famous.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 6 firm apples (Golden or Granny Smith)
- 100g butter
- 150g sugar
- 1 sheet puff pastry
- Pinch of salt

WHAT YOU DO

1. Peel, core, quarter the apples.
2. Butter and sugar in oven-safe pan. Don't stir. Melt to deep amber caramel.
3. Arrange apples tightly in caramel. Cook on hob 10-15 min until softening.
4. Lay puff pastry over top, tuck edges down. Oven 200°C for 25-30 min.
5. Cool 5-10 min. Invert onto plate in one confident movement. Do not hesitate.

THE HONEST TIP

If caramel sticks when inverting: pan back on low heat 30 seconds. Stay calm. You've made it this far.

RECIPE 25

La Crème Brûlée

Burnt cream. The most satisfying dessert in the world to make.

The greatest pleasure is the crack — the spoon breaking through the caramelised crust into cold cream below.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 500ml heavy cream
- 6 egg yolks
- 80g sugar + extra for top
- Vanilla
- A blowtorch (non-negotiable)

WHAT YOU DO

1. Oven to 150°C. Heat cream with vanilla to simmering.
2. Whisk yolks and sugar until pale. Pour warm cream SLOWLY over yolks, whisking.
3. Strain through fine sieve. Pour into ramekins in baking dish. Hot water halfway up.
4. Bake 35-40 minutes. Set at edges, slightly wobbly centre.
5. Refrigerate 2+ hours. Sugar on top. Blowtorch in slow circles until caramelised. Serve immediately.

THE HONEST TIP

The bain-marie is not optional. Without it, the edges overcook before the centre sets.

RECIPE 26

L'Ile Flottante

Floating island. Poached meringue, crème anglaise, caramel. Three recipes in one.

The dessert that proves French cuisine is fundamentally theatrical.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Meringue: 4 whites, 80g sugar, salt
- Crème anglaise: 4 yolks, 80g sugar, 500ml milk, vanilla
- Caramel: 100g sugar, 2 tbsp water

WHAT YOU DO

1. Crème anglaise: yolks + sugar pale, hot milk slowly in, return to low heat, stir until coats spoon. Strain.
2. Meringue: whites to soft peaks, sugar gradually, until firm and glossy. Poach spoonfuls 2 min per side in simmering milk.
3. Caramel: sugar + water, no stirring, medium heat, watch, amber = off heat immediately.
4. Assemble: crème anglaise in bowl, float meringue on top, drizzle caramel over everything. Serve immediately.

THE HONEST TIP

The crème anglaise can be made a day ahead. The caramel must be made at the last second. The meringue is best fresh.

— *Fin du Chapitre V.* —

Le Fromage et le Vin

La fin, et le commencement de tout

RECIPE 27

Le Plateau de Fromages

Not a recipe. A philosophy.

In France, the cheese course comes before dessert. The rest of the world has it wrong.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Something soft: Brie, Camembert, Brillat-Savarin
- Something firm: Comté, Beaufort, Gruyère
- Something strong: Roquefort, Époisses
- Baguette + darker bread
- Cornichons

WHAT YOU DO

1. Take cheese out of fridge 30 minutes before. Cold cheese is a crime against dairy.
2. Three cheeses minimum: one soft, one firm, one strong.
3. Bread — baguette and something darker. No crackers. This is France.
4. Separate knife for each cheese. Using the Roquefort knife on the Brie is the kind of thing French people remember.
5. Serve to the table. Each person cuts their own. You do not pre-cut.

THE HONEST TIP

One excellent cheese from a fromagerie is worth more than five mediocre cheeses from a supermarket. Buy less. Buy better.

Le Vin

Everything you need. Nothing you don't.

The only rule that matters: Drink what you like. Everything else is context.

- White wine with fish — the acidity complements delicate flavours.
- Red wine with red meat — tannins and protein interact well.
- Rosé with everything in summer — a good Provençal rosé is a serious wine.
- Champagne with everything — the French position. Defensible.

The one tip worth more than all the others: The €12-15 bottle from a small producer in an unfashionable region will almost always outperform the €12-15 bottle from a famous appellation. The famous name is priced into the bottle. The unknown producer is not.

On wine with cheese: *Red Bordeaux with cheese is actually one of the worst combinations. The French drink white wine with cheese. They are right about this. They are occasionally right about things.*

CONCLUSION

You have 28 recipes.

You have the seven rules.

You have the philosophy.

Cook these recipes. Ignore the ones that don't interest you. Adjust the ones that do. Add garlic when you feel like it. Reduce the butter if you must, but know that you are making a choice with consequences.

And when someone asks you where you learned to cook like this:

Say you're French.

Probably.

Coming next:

THE FUCKING FRENCH BILTONG

A Scientific Comparison Between Biltong and Real Food

thefuckingfrench.com