



BREAKING BARRIERS

ERIC KIM'S DEBUT COOKBOOK SHOWCASES HOW EXCEPTIONAL COOKING CAN TRANSCEND BORDERS

By David Saric

ERIC KIM'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE As both a chef and the son of immigrant parents informed the recipes included in his debut cookbook. With *Korean American*, Kim — who previously won over a legion of fans as a food writer for the *New York Times* and a columnist for the *New York Times Magazine* — has completed his biggest project to date, blending narrative and gastronomy, all with an emphasis on authenticity. Here, Kim breaks down the inspiration behind his varied roster of recipes and discusses the lasting impact of a childhood and life spent navigating two distinct cultures to form a third identity as a Korean American.

Why do you feel like now is the right time to release your debut cookbook? How long have you been perfecting its recipes?

I think, from a personal perspective, I've been trying to write a cookbook for a few years, but I needed to find my voice first, and I was able to do that with a couple of jobs I had before I got to the *Times*. Also, the year I spent back home with my mom was a real masterclass in Korean home cooking. I am thankful I got to do that first, before I wrote it. I think that was very imperative, not just for the recipes in the book, but also to the story, because the book narrates the discovery of someone who's going back home and asking their parents how to

cook certain dishes from their childhood. That's the perspective I wanted to get across, which is that of a non-expert. I wasn't an expert in Korean food — and I'm still not — but what I was trying to document were the things I was able to translate from my mother that I learned during that process.

Is it nerve-racking to pen all these personal anecdotes for the world to read?

I really think of the personal essay–memoir genre as a form of writing that requires conscious editing. Even though I am sharing intimate details, they're ones that I'm carefully choosing; there's a lot of holding back, which is something people might not know. What you see on the page is a lot of intimate detail, but I see it as servicing the story and the writing. Even though it is a personal narrative, my hope is that, if I've done my job effectively, people will read it and think, "Oh, that's like my family." That's very important to me.

I've also never had this much room to write anything. Knowing that the audience for my book was more expansive than the built-in readership of a specific publication was freeing, which is reflected in the prose — there is a little messiness to it that I like.

What I love about food writing is that it sort of mirrors real life if the text is well-written. I love when I read an essay or a book about a culture that I may not be a part of, and I feel like I somehow know it, which is a very generous thing to offer as a writer. I try to make people feel that way when I can.

Was there one recipe that ignited the idea to create a cookbook?

There is not one specific recipe, but it is more of a platform to showcase the flavour combinations and techniques that I've been doing for a while, which are quite quirky. I put roasted seaweed in everything, and I always fortify it with sesame oil and salt, because that's what makes Korean seaweed so much different than Japanese nori. There's no flavour that is more Korean than sesame oil, salt, and seaweed.

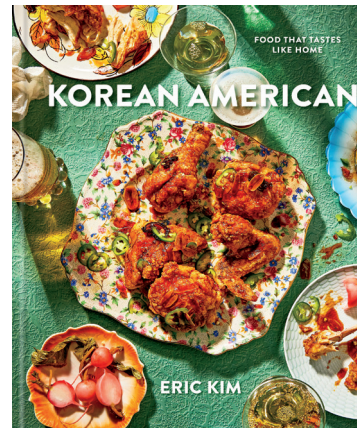
The book documents a lot of the family recipes I grew up eating, but there is also a simultaneous effort to develop unique versions of my childhood favourites or improve the experiments I would make up as a teenager. It's a mix of old and new.

Also, rather than thinking I had to perfect anything, it felt nice to write down how my family and I eat, which is constantly evolving. Some of the recipes are very new, while others are very old, which is an authentic snapshot of how a family's dinner table evolves over time.

What would you like readers to glean from this cookbook?

I'll say that, emotionally, getting to the end of the book-writing process felt so healing. I thought, "Wow, I just learned a lot about myself and my family." I figured out how I want to move around in this world, which is without whitewashing my Korean ancestry or feeling that I must make up Korean parts of me that aren't authentic. There's a sense of ownership of this third identity, Korean American.

It can be hard for children of immigrants who are straddling expectations from both cultures — living your life feeling like you don't belong in either place is a difficult place to be in. However, there is a changing climate of identity politics, and people are making more room for intersecting identities. Trying not to define entire cultures and cuisines as monoliths is something that's important to me. Both Koreans and non-Koreans are asking these questions of me all the time. "Which one are you?" And I say I am both and neither at the same time.



What's your go-to recipe for, say, impressing a small dinner party?

I would choose the jalapeno marinade chicken tacos. They're just universally good. The marinade is very vibrant and herbaceous, with the perfect amount of garlic. When it cooks, it mellows out, and you can make as spicy as you'd like. There's also this cooling watermelon salsa, which I dress like a Korean *muchim*, and if you have a well-made flour tortilla, it's amazing.

I would be lying if I said I wasn't trying to impress people with food when they come over, but I do think my approach is less flashy and more focused on something tastier and more balanced. I think simple is elegant, and when you're able to pull off food that is straightforward, it really resonates. I would describe the book as food that tastes like home, rather than trying to be something it's not.

KOREAN AMERICA: FOOD THAT TASTES LIKE HOME IS AVAILABLE AT INDIGO.CA

JUST ASK

BERNARD JOSEPH-LEMOYNE, HEAD SOMMELIER AT OTTAWA'S ATELIER, ANSWERS YOUR MOST PRESSING QUESTIONS ABOUT PAIRING WINES

BERNARD JOSEPH-LEMOYNE, Atelier's head sommelier, is used to answering questions about how to select wine; one of Canada's most acclaimed restaurants, Atelier, specializes in modernist cuisine, which can make wine pairings something of a daunting task. Although Joseph-Lemoyne knows that people are sometimes a little shy about talking to somms, answering guests' questions about wine is one of his favourite things about the job. So we asked him the questions we've always wanted answered.

What's something you'd like to see guests do more often when choosing a wine?

Try something they think they don't like. Somebody might say "I only drink white wine" or "I don't like Chardonnay," for example, but Chardonnay is made in such a wide range of styles that you can have it light and crisp [or] full-bodied and dense — or even tannic, if it's an orange wine. It's our job to get people to try something different.

Should we still be pairing red with meat and white with fish? Or is that an outdated wine rule?

That rule is very much out the window. I am all for a white wine with a steak or a red wine with your fish; it's all about finding the right one.

Can you give an example of a fish and red wine pairing?

Sure. It all depends on the fish, but if you had something like a swordfish steak, it would definitely hold up to something bold like a Brumont Château Bouscassé Madiran, especially if it was cooked on charcoal. It's a great pairing because swordfish is super flavourful and has density and marbling that's almost like a rib-eye. I'm willing to stake my sommelier pins on that bet.

I take it that the Madiran would also work with beef?

Yes. So, if you've got a beautifully aged rib-eye with a chimichurri or even a duck breast, then the



Madiran is a perfect match for that too. The wine has a tannic component, some fruit, as well as a green note and this blood sausage savouriness — all of which will come alive with this pairing.



Since we're deep into rosé season, do you have a recommendation?

Rosé from Provence is really the benchmark, and a wine like Chateau Minuty M de Minuty Rosé really manages to highlight the grapes that are indigenous to the South of France, which is lovely to see. It's perfectly balanced; it's floral and there's rich fruit. And I find there's almost a little bit of a spice element and some smokiness [that comes] through. Served not too cold, it will express itself well.

What would you serve with it?

A fantastic pairing for the Minuty is a charcuterie board with some cured meats, some rich cheeses, and maybe a crostini and some kind of fruit compote — maybe all dressed in some nice, rich olive oil. It's the perfect versatile wine to play with all those elements.

That sounds great. Would it pair just as well with other starters?

It could, but I'm thinking things like scallop ceviche or a flaky pastry canapé mightwork better with an acidic white like the Porer Pinot Grigio from Alois Lageder.

What is it about that Pinot Grigio that makes it so good in this role?

The Lageder Pinot Grigio has got a beautiful texture and this biscuity, brioche-like character, but it's still a light-bodied wine, so that would lead me towards lighter fare. It's grown in a quite mountainous, almost Alpine area in Northern Italy. And, on the nose, it's got a first-day-on-the-ski-hill kind of freshness that I really love.

Any last thoughts on what people should know about talking to their somm?

Just that it's a fantastic opportunity for the diner to pick our brain and ask why we've chosen a specific pairing or what some terminology means. I think that these are the kinds of questions that break that fourth wall and help people become more comfortable choosing wine.

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