

CANAL HOUSE



COOKING

VOLUME N° 2



*Christopher and Melissa in the Canal House kitchen*

**Welcome to Canal House**—our studio, workshop, dining room, office, kitchen, and atelier devoted to good ideas and good work relating to the world of food. We write, photograph, design, and paint, but in our hearts we both think of ourselves as cooks first.

Our loft studio is in an old redbrick warehouse. A beautiful lazy canal runs alongside the building. We have a simple galley kitchen. Two small apartment-size stoves sit snugly side by side against a white tiled wall. We have a dishwasher, but prefer to hand wash the dishes so we can look out of the tall window next to the sink and see the ducks swimming in the canal or watch the raindrops splashing into the water.

And every day we cook. Starting in the morning we tell each other what we made for dinner the night before. Midday, we stop our work, set the table simply with paper napkins, and have lunch. We cook seasonally because that's what makes sense. So it came naturally to write down what we cook. The recipes in our books are what we make for ourselves and our families all year long. If you cook your way through a few, you'll see that who we are comes right through in the pages: that we are crazy for tomatoes in summer, make braises and stews all fall, and turn oranges into marmalade in winter.

*Canal House Cooking* is home cooking by home cooks for home cooks. We use ingredients found in most markets. All the recipes are easy to prepare for the novice and experienced cook alike. We want to share them with you as fellow cooks along with our love of food and all its rituals. The everyday practice of simple cooking and the enjoyment of eating are two of the greatest pleasures in life.

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# CANAL HOUSE COOKING

Volume N° 2

Hamilton & Hirsheimer



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## Welcome to Canal House

Some people find it sad to see summer go, but as the air cools and the light turns golden, our appetites build—we're hungry to eat and ready to cook. At Canal House, fall starts the season for some serious home cooking.

The autumnal sun rises later each morning. And now, whichever one of us arrives at our studio first switches on all the lights, builds a fire in the old wood stove, and starts the espresso machine. Everything begins to look cozy and cheery.

Early in the season we start a fall cleanup. We pull on our pink rubber gloves and tear the stove apart, cleaning every crevice in the oven: it will get a good workout from October until after the new year. We take inventory of our little pantry; we'll need to fill the canisters with flour and sugar and stock the shelves with currants and prunes, cinnamon sticks and anise seeds, vanilla beans and almond extract. The fruit from Melissa's pear tree is packed in boxes and stored in her garage—we'll make pear sorbet in November. The wooden box that holds all our holiday baking recipes comes down from the shelf, and we begin to make lists.

The markets are bearing big time. So we put on our sweaters and jump in the car to check out the late harvest bounty. The apple trees in Amy and Gary's orchard are heavy with Honey Crisps and Ginger Golds—two of our favorites for making apple pie. We stop off at Brian Smith's to buy jugs of the best cider around. Every farm stand has something amazing: huge Cinderella pumpkins, handsome thick-skinned squashes, hardy greens, mighty root vegetables pulled from the earth—gnarly carrots, dirty beets and potatoes, rutabagas and white turnips—and cabbages and brussels sprouts, all made sweeter by the first frosts of the season. The onions are splendid—bulbous ones, long ones, flat ones, small ones, all in colorful papery jackets. Baskets of meaty fall mushrooms sit next to pale orange persimmons on their way toward a deeper shade of ripe.

Even the grocery stores, dreary most of the year, have come to life with the glorious foods we all love to cook—big fresh hams, capons, ducks, turkeys and geese; standing rib roasts and magnificent crown roasts of pork; shellfish and salt cod. The baking aisles swell with cans of pumpkin pie filling, sacks of

flours, tins of baking soda, bottles of extracts and spices, packages of chocolates, tubs of candied fruits, and jars of colorful cookie decorations. All signs indicate it's time to start cooking. And we do.

Christopher arrives one morning with a plump chicken—a bird with a pedigree: grass-fed and the farmer's darling. So we start a big pot of her Triple X Chicken Broth to simmer on the back burners of our apartment-size stoves. By noon, we've got enough rich broth for a simple lunch of chicken noodle soup, with plenty left over to freeze for another day. We plan long-range and make our golden fruitcakes in late November so we'll have time to give them a daily drizzle of booze before we give them as gifts in December. Melissa will follow her family tradition and spend a day making a *bûche de Noël* with her daughters.

Friends stop in wanting to visit, catch up, share a story, ask our advice about something they want to cook. Sometimes they come bearing gifts, like our friend Neal, who loads us up with his neat bundles of oak for our stove. Or Teresa, who showed up one day carrying a potted lemon tree in one hand and a bag of homemade cookies in the other. Andrew will drop in with a brace of pheasant or news of venison to come. And Steve might stop by to get our take on some new flavors that he's developing for his line of salumi. We offer a tea or glass of something stronger. There's usually something going on the stove or resting on the counter and we offer that too. The visit wouldn't feel right if we didn't have something delicious to serve them and a small gift to send off with them.

Foods of the holidays are classics, tied to tradition and memory. We cook our grandmothers', aunts', and mothers' recipes to bring them to life and invite the people we miss to the table again. For us, it wouldn't be a holiday without Neenie's Sourdough-Sage Stuffing, or Jim's Roast Capon, or Peggy's Grand Marnier Soufflé. But no matter what your menu, the most important thing is to join together for a meal and share the intimacy of the table. The recipes in this book are our gift to you.

Christopher & Melissa

## ROASTED RED PEPPERS WITH CURRANTS AND CAPERS

serves 4–8

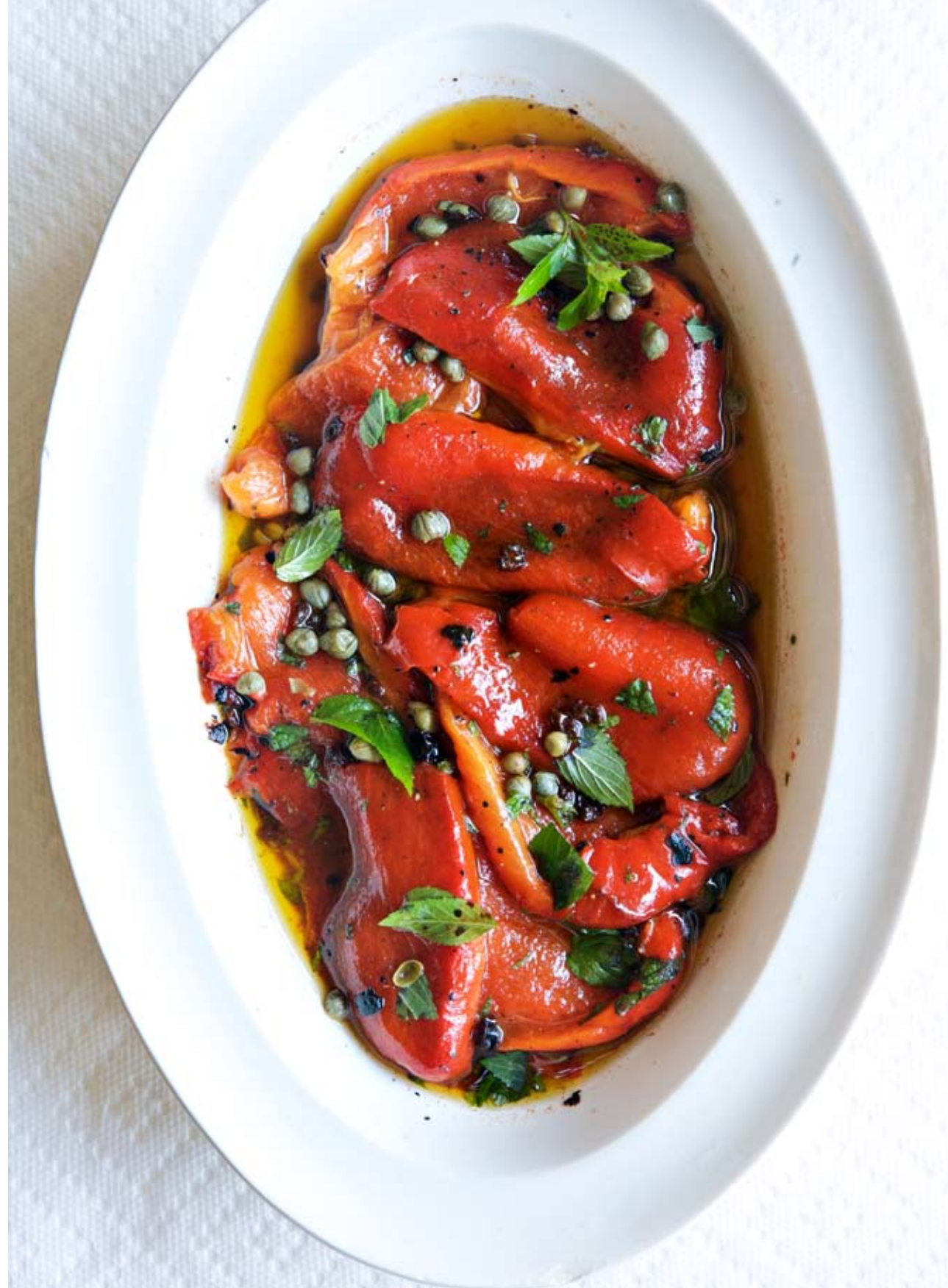
It's an odd sight the first time you see someone blistering the skin of peppers (or eggplant for that matter) over the flame on a kitchen stove. We do this when our grill or little wood-burning stove isn't fired up. Charring the skins this way gives a smoky depth of flavor you don't get by roasting the peppers in the oven. But if an oven's all you've got, use it! The other flavors going on in this dish will prevail.

1 cup really good olive oil	4 red bell peppers
2 tablespoons currants	1 small handful fresh mint leaves, torn or chopped
1–2 tablespoons capers	Salt and pepper
Juice of 1 lemon	

Put the olive oil, currants, capers, and lemon juice into a serving dish and set aside while preparing the peppers.

Set the peppers on top of the burner plates on top of a gas stove. Turn on the flame to medium-high heat. Or, set the peppers on a grill over hot coals. Char the skins of the peppers, turning them as they blister and blacken all over. (You can char the peppers in a very hot oven, 500° is a good temperature. Put the peppers on a sheet pan and roast until charred all over.) When the peppers are ready, put them into a bowl and cover them to steam and soften the fragile charred skins so they are easier to peel off. When the peppers are cool enough to handle, peel and rub off the blackened skin. Pull off the stems, tear the peppers in half, remove the cores, and scrape the seeds away from the flesh (resist the urge to rinse the seeds off. You will rinse away delicious flavor.).

Put the skinned and cleaned peppers into the dish with the olive oil. Add the mint, season with salt and pepper, and turn the peppers until they are well coated. Let them marinate for an hour or so before serving.



## LOBSTER STEW

serves 4–6

At Christmas, sometimes you are shopping up to the last minute. Give yourself a gift and order your lobster ahead. When you do, ask your fishmarket to steam and crack the lobsters for you just before you pick them up and if they have good fish stock, pick that up, too.

Two 1½-pound lobsters	Pepper
Salt	2–3 russet potatoes, peeled and diced
4 tablespoons butter	1 cup white wine
1 yellow onion, finely chopped	1 cup good fish stock
2 ribs celery, diced	1 cup heavy cream
2 sprigs fresh tarragon	Chopped chives for garnish

Plunge the tip of a large sharp knife into the heads of the lobsters just behind the eyes. (This is the hardest part of the whole recipe.) Drop the lobsters into a large pot of salted boiling water over high heat and cook for about 8 minutes. Remove the lobsters from the pot and set them aside until they are cool enough to handle.

Remove the meat from the lobster, reserving the shells and any juices. Cut the lobster into large bite-size pieces, leaving the claw meat whole.

Melt the butter in a large heavy pot over medium-low heat. Add onions, celery, and tarragon. Season with salt and pepper. Add the large pieces of lobster shells along with any juices and cook, stirring from time to time, for 10 minutes. Add potatoes, wine, and fish stock, cover, and gently simmer until the vegetables are just soft, about 15 minutes. Remove and discard the tarragon and lobster shells.

Add cream and lobster meat and cook until lobster is just heated through, about 5 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Ladle into bowls; garnish with chives.









## ROAST DUCK AND POTATOES

serves 4–6

This duck dish flies in the face of elaborate restaurant theater—Roasted Duck Served Two Ways in which the duck is presented to the table. Then the rosy pink breasts are carved from the carcass tableside, after which the duck is whisked back to the kitchen where the legs and thighs are returned to the oven to roast until perfectly tender. Finally, the waiter returns to the table for the final act. That’s a lot of dinner theater.

Our recipe is just as delicious and more doable for us home cooks. And it’s really a two-in-one dish. Roasted crispy-skinned duck with fully cooked tender meat plus potatoes roasted in duck fat. Each one satisfying enough to make a meal in itself, together they are heaven.

One 5–6 pound duck  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 tablespoon anise seeds

Salt  
12 medium all-purpose white  
potatoes, peeled

Preheat the oven to 400°. Rinse the duck, pat it dry, and trim off the wingtips and any excess neck skin. Prick the skin all over. Rub the olive oil and anise seeds all over the duck, then season the bird inside and out with salt. Tie the legs together with kitchen string.

Put the duck into a large roasting pan breast side up. Add ½ cup water to the pan. Roast the duck in the oven for 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven. The duck may stick to the bottom of the pan so use a metal spatula to get under the duck to release it. Settle the duck back into the pan and add the potatoes, nestling them around the duck.

Reduce the oven temperature to 375°. Return the roasting pan with the duck and potatoes to the oven. Turn the potatoes from time to time so they develop a deep golden crusty skin as they roast. (The potatoes may also stick to the roasting pan, so carefully release them from the bottom of the pan as you turn them, keeping the crust attached to the potato.)

Roast the duck and potatoes for another 30–50 minutes, until the duck skin is crisp all over and the potatoes are deep golden brown and tender when pierced. Transfer duck and potatoes to a serving platter and season with salt.

## SERIOUS RAGÙ

makes 2–3 quarts

In the spirit of old-style Northern Italian country cooking, this ragù uses inexpensive cuts of pork, lamb, and beef. These tough cuts are full of flavor but need a long slow cooking to tenderize the meat. The time it takes is worth it as this sauce is seriously delicious. We believe in making a big batch and freezing it in dinner-size portions (allow about 1 cup per person to serve over pasta).

2 pounds lamb necks or shoulder lamb chops	2 cloves garlic, sliced
2 pounds pork spareribs	5 anchovy fillets, chopped
2 pounds beef short ribs	A healthy grating of nutmeg
Salt and pepper	1–2 cups white wine
Olive oil	One 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes
1 large yellow onion, diced	One 15-ounce can plain tomato sauce
1 large carrot, peeled and finely diced	Handful of fresh parsley leaves, finely chopped
2 ribs celery, finely diced	

Use paper towel to dry the meat. Season with salt and pepper. Heat a little oil in very large heavy pot. Brown meat in batches over medium-high heat, removing it from the pot as it browns. Continue until all the meat is browned.

Add a little more oil to the pot. Add the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, and anchovies. Cook, stirring often, for about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and nutmeg. Add the wine and cook for about 3 minutes.

Return the browned meat to the pot. Add the crushed tomatoes and tomato sauce along with 2 cups of water. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to low and slowly simmer the ragù for about 3 hours. Give it a stir from time to time and add more water if it looks like it is getting too thick.

Remove all the large pieces of meat from the pot to a large cutting board. Discard all the bones and gristle and any of the meat that you don't like the look of. Finely chop the remaining meat and return it to the pot.

Put the pot on the stove over low heat and barely simmer the ragù for another 2 hours. Continue to add water if the sauce gets too thick. Just before serving, add parsley. Serve over pasta with grated parmigiano-reggiano, if you like.





## CHOCOLATE GINGERBREAD

serves 12

We aren't gooey cake fans so this cake is perfect for us—more about flavor than sweetness. The gooiest part is pouring on the melted chocolate icing. We smooth it out and just let it run over the sides of the cake. Who can resist warm gingerbread on a cold fall afternoon?

### FOR THE GINGERBREAD

2½ cups flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground allspice

1 teaspoon dry mustard

½ teaspoon ground black pepper

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

¼ cup dark brown sugar

2 eggs

1 cup molasses or sorghum

8 ounces chocolate chips, melted

1 cup espresso or strong coffee, cooled

### FOR THE CHOCOLATE ICING

8 ounces chocolate chips

½ cup heavy cream

For the gingerbread, preheat the oven to 375°. Grease a 9-inch springform cake pan, then dust it with flour, tapping out any excess.

Sift or whisk the flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, allspice, mustard, and pepper together in a large bowl then set aside.

Put the butter into a large mixing bowl and beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in the brown sugar, about 2 minutes. Beat in the eggs one at a time. Beat in the molasses and the chocolate until smooth. Add the dry ingredients and the espresso alternately while you continue to beat the mixture. Use a rubber spatula to help incorporate any batter on the bottom or sides of the bowl. Pour into the prepared cake pan and bake until the top springs back when you lightly press it in the middle, about 40 minutes. Remove from the oven and place on a rack to cool.

For the chocolate icing, while the cake cools, heat the chocolate and the cream together in a small heavy pot over low heat. Stir with a whisk as it melts.

Transfer the cooled gingerbread onto to a plate. Arrange strips of waxed paper under the edges of the cake to keep the plate clean. Smooth the icing on top of the gingerbread, allowing it to drip over the sides. Remove the paper.