

FOOD & WINE

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JANUARY

EDITOR'S LETTER

Simply Put

THE FEASTING SEASON IS ALMOST OVER, the tree is destined for the curb, and my liver is waving a white flag of surrender. Soon the weeks-long reverie of gravy making and ham carving, oyster cracking and coupe clinking, gift giving and party going will blessedly give way to ... quiet.

It's a fine time to get back to basics. I'm not talking about resolutions, but simple, intentional acts that deliver gratifying wins—the culinary equivalent of a basketball layup. For me, that means sharpening the knives that have taken a beating during the holiday cooking, like my 14-year-old stainless steel Capco Chinese cleaver. Every time I pick it up I think of a cook named Fredo whom I worked alongside many years ago. Every day, he stood over his cutting board, a proud "Hecho en Mexico" tattoo on the back of his neck, making efficient work of his daily prep with the same model of \$15 cleaver. Fredo used that hulking 18-ounce knife for everything, from the heavy work of removing chicken backbones and cracking crab legs with the knife's spine to the more delicate work of mincing carrots and onions to make sofrito and thinly slicing mint leaves. It was the only knife he used.

Honing the edge on my own blade, I'm reminded that this kind of minimalism can be grounding. So is the therapeutic repetition of pushing a steel blade against wet stone. In this issue, we get back to basics with an ode to four unsung knives, including the workhorse cleaver ("On Point," p. 70). In "Super Bowls" (p. 90), we embrace the redeeming power of a great pot of soup, a mark of any good cook. (The soul-warming Burmese Samusa Soup from San Francisco's Burma Superstar, simmered lentils and potatoes in a heavily spiced vegetable and tamarind broth, is one of my favorite recipes in this issue.) Finally, in this age of the new and the next, we celebrate the best—in this case, the sustained excellence of Suzanne Goin and the 20th anniversary of Lucques (p. 80), her Los Angeles institution. You'll want to cook Goin's entire vegetable-focused menu this month, starting with her Roasted Carrots with Beet Puree, Goat Cheese, and Hazelnuts (p. 86).

So be good to yourselves. String together some small victories. Make some soup. Build a fire. Read a book. Keep it simple.



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From the Home Office



1 KNIFE WORK

I sharpen my knives with Japanese whetstones—first with a King 1000-grit stone for grinding a thin edge and then a finer King 6000-grit stone to sharpen and refine. A sharpening steel is handy for honing on a daily basis. Find all three at korin.com, and look for Korin's sharpening videos on YouTube.



2 EVERYTHING SPICE

2018 was the year of Chili Crisp, the spicy, salty, umami-rich Chinese condiment. Now I'm obsessed with Mexican salsa macha, aka salsa de semillas, which delivers similar firepower with an earthy flavor. The chile, nut, and seed combo adds crunch and heat to everything from fried eggs to rice. *Salacious Dry Salsa*, \$5; salacioustable.com



3 MORNING BLEND

Make this quick green juice for a vibrant morning pick-me-up: Combine 1 chopped apple, 1 celery stalk, 1 peeled medium carrot, ½ peeled cucumber, and a fistful each of baby spinach and cilantro in a high-speed blender. Add water to cover, and process until smooth. Look for other breakfast ideas starting on p. 25.

