



Anna Maria Knapp

Living with *The Silver Spoon*

On New Years Eve, I took a poll with the company I was keeping, about a dozen people, asking them if they made New Year resolutions. All said no. I don't make them either. But given the media attention to resolutions at this time of year, somebody must be making them. So if you are also one of those people, who hasn't felt the need to make a particular resolution at this particular time, I offer you not so much a resolution but more an aid to attaining one that you probably make many times during the year: that you will eat in a more healthful manner.

Recently, Phaidon Press Limited, www.phaidon.com, published an extraordinary cookbook. Translated into English for the first time from the Italian, *The Silver Spoon* is the foremost, classic, Italian cookbook, although it seems more generally Mediterranean than narrowly Italian and includes French crepes and quiches and Arabic stews. Basically, the book is organized like most other comprehensive cookbooks with major sections on sauces, appetizers, first courses (soups, pasta, bean and grain dishes), eggs, vegetables, fish, meat, poultry, game, cheese, and desserts. But the similarities end there. The sub-sections are what make this book truly remarkable.

Let's say that your cholesterol is high, a condition that affects many Americans and increasingly children. You avoid red meat, but you're sick of chicken and don't find most vegetables very interesting, so not surprisingly, you fall back on what you shouldn't be eating. Two and a half inches thick, *The Silver Spoon* has entire sections on asparagus, broccoli, artichokes, carrots, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, onions, green beans, fava beans, fennel, mushrooms, eggplant, potatoes, bell peppers, tomatoes, leeks, radicchio, radishes, celery, spinach, pumpkin, zucchini, and this list

of vegetable sub-sections is not even half complete. For instance, in the onion section, you'll find fried onion rings, pearl onion omelet, Grosseto onions, stuffed onions, pearl onions with sage, the Sultan's onions, glazed pearl onions, and braised pearl onions. In the potato section, there are 21 recipes and in the dandelion section, three. The number, variety, and appeal of the vegetable recipes is astounding, with many that can serve as main courses as well as side dishes.

If you're tired of chicken, check the poultry section, where you'll find sub-sections on duck, capon, guinea fowl, goose, squab, ostrich, turkey, and of course 47 recipes in the chicken section, some of which transform the bird into a totally different dish than you've ever imagined. But if not poultry, try the game section with sub-sections for woodcock, pheasant, partridge, quail, chamois, venison, wild boar, rabbit, and hare, with 21 recipes for rabbit and four for hare. The fish, crustaceans, and shellfish section has 46 sub-sections with multiple recipes for each, including eight recipes for sardines, seven for octopus, three for snails, and five for frogs for those with adventurous palates.

Yet despite the extraordinary number and variety of recipes, the book reads nothing like a dictionary. The sections are color-coded, the graphic design accommodating and attractive, and the photos alluring. But most awesome of all, the recipes are classic, each with a few fresh ingredients simply prepared, which is to say that they hark back to a simpler culinary time, when humans fed themselves by tilling the soil and eating what the season provided, a time before plastics, refrigeration, and supermarkets, when food moved from the earth to the table in the same day. So here's to *The Silver Spoon*, to our health, and to eating the way we intend instead of the way we too often do! Happy New Year!

Valentine's Day
is coming!

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