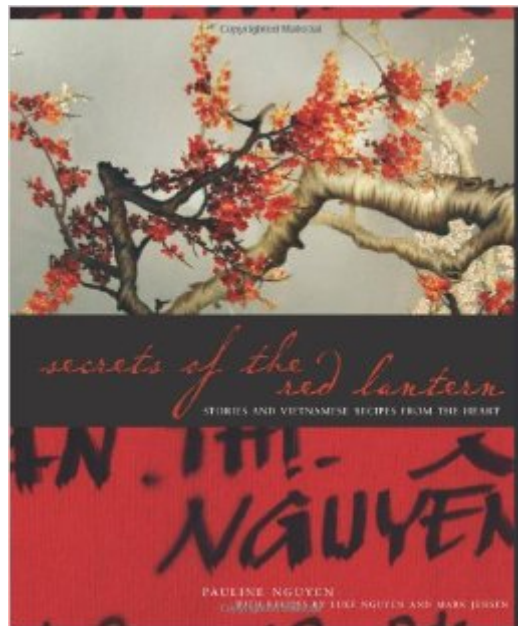


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Secrets Of The Red Lantern: Stories And Vietnamese Recipes From The Heart



Synopsis

In my family, food is our language. Food enables us to communicate the things we find so hard to say." -Pauline Nguyen

Overflowing with sumptuous but simply prepared dishes that have been passed down through generations of the Nguyen family, *Secrets of the Red Lantern* is part Vietnamese cookbook and part family memoir. More than 275 traditional Vietnamese recipes are presented alongside a visual narrative of food and family photographs that follows the family's escape from war-torn Vietnam to the successful founding of the Red Lantern restaurant. At the heart of each recipe is the power of food to elevate and transform. From a recipe of cari de that sparks a memory to the distinctly bitter melon soup that says, "I'm sorry," *Secrets of the Red Lantern* shares the rich culinary heritage of the Nguyen family and their personal story of reconciliation and success. Recipes like Bun Rieu (Crab and Tomato Soup with Vermicelli Noodles), Goi Du Du (Green Papaya Salad with Prawns and Pork), and Che Khoai Mon (Black Sticky Rice with Taro), unlock the family's secrets and see the family persevere through homesickness, heartache, and the upheavals of change to finally experience growth and celebration. The result is a beautiful journey through Vietnamese history, culture, and tradition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the most beautifully crafted books I have seen with a fabric cover designed to resemble silk. The thick pages are very pale gray with a silhouette pattern of leaves and branches in a slightly darker gray with a thin border near the top of the cherry blossom pattern from the front

cover. But still the text has good contrast and is very easy to read. There is also a ribbon page marker. The book is part family memoir and part cookbook. The ten chapters are titled from the family stories with recipes contained within. The recipes are only loosely organized by type, though there is a recipe index in the back. Beautiful photographs throughout, family pictures and many but not all of the finished dishes. There is a large variety of recipes, basic building blocks like stock, master sauce and scallion oil to an assortment of salads, soups, seafood, poultry, beef, pork, some goat and five desserts. The recipes can contain unusual ingredients that are only available at a good Asian market. I enjoyed learning in particular about some of the fresh herbs I had seen in the markets but never knew how to use them because so many Asian cookbooks adapt the recipes to use more familiar ingredients. There is a limited glossary and suggested substitutions for some of the harder to find ingredients but no pictures of them so I did an internet search to learn what they look like and also other substitution ideas like using lemon basil for rice paddy herb. There are also many recipes that require only basic ingredients available at any market like the sublime and comforting Caramelized Ginger Chicken that uses only fish sauce, ginger, garlic, red chile, sugar, onion, chicken stock, scallion and cilantro.

Before we get to the incredibly intimate biography of Ms. Ngyuen, bear in mind that as I write this, I'm sipping -- no, gulping -- my second batch in the last ten days of Pork and Watercress Soup (p.65). So simple, so good -- the first made with my own homemade chicken broth, the second with a supermarket broth. Of course, the homemade broth is the winner, but don't let that stop you from this incredibly easy, delicious soup. Two suggestions: First, do the skimming before adding any seasonings; second, grind your own pork if you have a food processor. I just realized that, in my long life, I have never bought supermarket ground pork -- those curlicues -- ugh! And before I continue with the recipes, I must tell you that I found the autobiographical section remarkable, informative and, in the end, quite uplifting. The author's tale of her life's journey is almost embarrassing in its honesty. She relates a story of incredible hardship and sorrow that we here in America seldom, if ever, have experienced. I feel privileged that she shared her story with me. Here's looking at you, kid! Okay; back to the recipes. The caramelized white perch (p.95) would have been delicious had I had decent fish. So should I recommend it as a way to dress up something basically awful? No; it's such an easy method and so good that one should honor it with a really fresh fish. The third recipe I tried was the shrimp with tomato, fish sauce and black pepper (p.60). In spite of the frozen supermarket shrimp I used (I know -- and I agree) it was so good that I ate one and a half portions at dinner, and could hardly wait to eat the leftovers the next day for lunch. I have

marked eight recipes to try in the future. I know they will be good.

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