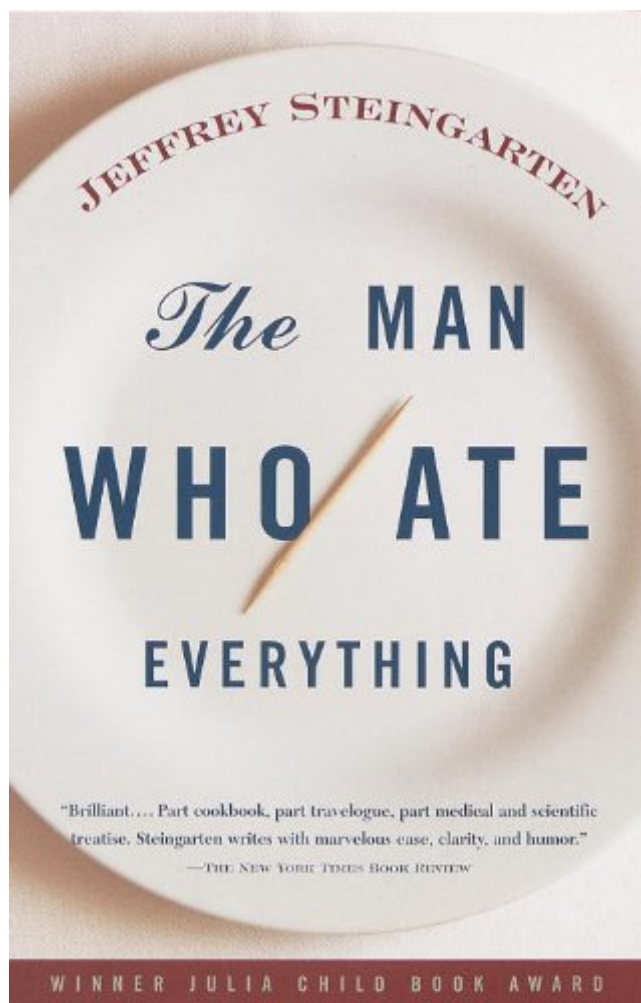


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The Man Who Ate Everything



Synopsis

Funny, outrageous, passionate, and unrelenting, Vogue's food writer, Jeffrey Steingarten, will stop at nothing, as he makes clear in these forty delectable pieces. Whether he is in search of a foolproof formula for sourdough bread (made from wild yeast, of course) or the most sublime French fries (the secret: cooking them in horse fat) or the perfect piecrust (Fannie Farmer--that is, Marion Cunningham--comes to the rescue), he will go to any length to find the answer. At the drop of an apron he hops a plane to Japan to taste Wagyu, the hand-massaged beef, or to Palermo to scale Mount Etna to uncover the origins of ice cream. The love of choucroute takes him to Alsace, the scent of truffles to the Piedmont, the sizzle of ribs on the grill to Memphis to judge a barbecue contest, and both the unassuming and the haute cuisines of Paris demand his frequent assessment. Inevitably these pleasurable pursuits take their toll. So we endure with him a week at a fat farm and commiserate over low-fat products and dreary diet cookbooks to bring down the scales. But salvation is at hand when the French Paradox (how can they eat so richly and live so long?) is unearthed, and a "miraculous" new fat substitute, Olestra, is unveiled, allowing a plump gourmand to have his fill of fat without getting fatter. Here is the man who ate everything and lived to tell about it. And we, his readers, are hereby invited to the feast in this delightful book.

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Customer Reviews

This book was a refreshing read about the author's (who is a lawyer turned Vogue food critic) culinary journeys around the world. He describes everything from the Southern barbecue to Venitian seafood with such delicious adjectives, you feel like hopping on a flight right then and eat that simple Italian pasta he is raving about or experience the exotic Korean Wagyu he claims is nothing like normal beef. Loved his witty remarks and all the jokes he makes on his wife's expense! I came to know so many amazing things about the world of food (which I'll surely toss around in conversations when I want to seem a food know-it-all! :D) and like all people who like reading about food, I loved reading about all the ways the meat gets cooked in its own juices and herbs that impart their flavor to it and pies that symbolize America and all the science behind cakes and gluten and what not. But here's what bored me - the statistics. In the beginning, he seems to meander off citing statistics in a detailed, but drab manner, and that is when I started yawning. When I realized that this is happening again and again, I started skipping whole paragraphs that contained statistics. He stops doing this almost halfway through the book. I was also not interested in most of the recipes that are there in the book, so I skipped over them as well, but I definitely appreciate all the steps that he takes to simplify conventional recipes and describes the what-no-to-do stages in great detail. All in all, a good read without the statistics.

I'm currently a Chef, but used to work as a strategist in advertising. When I was starting out in advertising I had a Strategy Director recommend that I read Jeffrey Steingarten's food essays as a good example of how to think when approaching branding. He really researches the background of every topic he writes about - and, at times, experiments with creating his own version, coming at it from different angles. Reading his writing first got me interested in food, then it became an obsession. Soon I abandoned advertising and found my self in culinary school, then cooking for a living! I am glad I read the food essays before I saw Mr. Steingarten as a guest judge on Iron Chef America. He came across as a bit stodgy, superior, and arrogant (perhaps affect of being a Harvard-trained lawyer.) I may have not been enticed to read his books if I had seen him before being introduced to his writing. Boy can he write about food! He really draws the reader in!

Jeffrey Steingarten is the grumpy judge on Iron Chef America (or was, about 5 years ago. You will

see him in reruns). It was in the chocolate challenge of an episode a couple of years ago, when he said he would give all his points to the chef who could just make a perfect chocolate ice cream, that I understood him. I get you, Jeffrey Steingarten! I even wonder if the falderal of the show embarrasses him a little, though he sometimes says very nice things about the improbable concoctions put in front of him. I call into the other room to my husband, "I think this one's going to win. The grumpy guy likes his food better." And my husband comes in to see this for himself. Mr. Steingarten has an imperturbable gravitas on the panel, and does deliver his opinions ungarnished with self-deprecation, which tends to rub third-tier show biz types the wrong way. Once a former Dancing With the Stars actress rounded on him hotly because he didn't like something she thought was wonderful. He took it with the placid aplomb of an English Mastiff accosted by an anxious Pomeranian. He isn't arrogant. I know that because I read his book. A man is not arrogant who buys ten orders of MacDonald's French fries to try out 33 kinds of ketchup. Then confesses it was too much food and he and his wife got mixed up. And in the end they decided their favorite ketchup might not be the spiciest, but with fries, "a marriage made in heaven." If he acts as if he knows he's right, it's because he knows he's right. How can you not like a know-all who goes to all that trouble to be sure?

The Man Who Ate Everything is a collection of essays packed with his musings, research, recipes, and travels in quest of culinary perfection. His thing is to search out the experts and recipes, then do it at home. But, "Cesare [his Italian informant] never warned me about making pasta near an open drawer." His crater of flour was breached and twenty egg yolks surged across the table "like molten lava rolling over a Hawaiian housing development," into the silverware drawer. Cooking methods are detailed and the physics behind certain techniques are explained. What an interdisciplinist he is, if that's a word. I appreciated the history lessons, as well as the attention to biology (I am a wildlife ecologist). He reasonably concludes that food phobias make no sense, because we are omnivores, and gets rid of most of his through determined exposure to the hated items, because he wants to be a fair and liberal food critic who eats everything. He can't write without being funny, but beneath it he's always informed. Mr. Steingarten gets it right about plants' making poisons, and why. Boil that spinach and throw away the water, People. He is also right that we have been hoodwinked into believing that all fat is bad. I notice the dairy section of my grocery store is still loaded with awful Fat Free cheese, sour cream, half-and-half (half of what and what?); and the number of crappy Fat Free salad dressings still crowding the shelves is depressing. I was loading my cart with avocados when a woman next to me sighed and said she loves avocados, too, but (as if surprised I was still alive), "All those fatty acids!" The section Why Aren't the French Dropping Like Flies? should be required reading for anyone with a family history of heart

disease. There's a lot of fun here. He goes on a new French diet that was then all the rage (Atkins, South Beach, etc. were later knock-offs), loses 7 lbs after a month of hilarious obsessing about the number on the scales (he purchases three for comparison), but remains lovably unconverted and returns to "pies, pierogi, pistachios, pizza, popcorn potatoes, puff pastry--and that only covers the P's." He enrolls in waiters school and learns how to trick people into spending more than they intended. He travels to Memphis to judge a barbecue competition and is so in love with the winning ribs that he brings some home, and stoically stops himself from devouring them all before his wife comes home from work--his sensuous description of the meat should be rated PG-13, at least. He says I have been making mashed potatoes the wrong way, with Grandmom's hand masher. But in my defense, Mr. Steingarten's way is not to mash them at all, so I think he shouldn't call them mashed. But I can't wait to try his ketchup recipe. Just a warning: Don't try to read too much in one sitting, no matter how much you're enjoying it. I was skimming around sampling this and that, and had already read a lot--too much, I guess--by the time I got to Primal Bread. I should have been riveted. I actually kept starter once. My donor just waved her hands when I asked where she got it. "Oh, the yeasts just naturally occur, you know. Every kitchen has them." Now I see why it never tasted very good. But my eyes were glazing over and I put the book down. Keep portion size small. I keep very few books. But this one, I will. I already ordered It Must Have Been Something I Ate, and I wish there were others. The Man Who Ate Everything is funny, intelligent, informed. Just like Mr. Steingarten.

I love this book, and I'm not really a foodie. Its great beach reading as one can pick it up and put it back down and not feel lost. Each chapter is a separate entry about an ingredient, dish, or food related topic. Its witty and has a through approach to a number of different foods.

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