

Brunch

If we eat our cornflakes late on a Sunday morning we might think we are eating brunch but that, dear reader, is only a late breakfast. Brunch is an event! It's a great way to feed a crowd in style. Rachel Lee is a Californian (did they invent brunch?) who lives in Italy and divides her time between Tuscany and Sicily. She has taken another look at the whole concept of brunch and has devised a selection of themed menus. You don't have to stick slavishly to those; you can mix and match the dishes and even add a few of your own favourite breakfast or lunch recipes. The chapter headings are evocative and charming. November in Tuscany, A Parisian Valentine's Day, and Ski Lodge are just a few of the themes. Each chapter has a menu and a selection of dishes appropriate for the occasion and season. The recipes are simple but make quite an impact, so you can cut a culinary dash without all the effort of a full-scale Sunday lunch.

The English Garden Party menu is a good start. Rachel has been kind enough to say. The stereotype that English food is bland and overcooked can be officially put to rest. There are a few nice twists to the traditional dishes but this would be a fantastic way of feeding a lot of people on a warm (we wish) summer day. There is kedgeree, cucumber sandwiches and summer pudding but also baked Monkfish, Stilton and Chive Scones and the suggestion of a chilled glass of Rosé.

These lovely recipes could work just as well with other meals. Don't disregard this book just because you don't think you are a brunch giver. It's the nature of these dishes that they are quick and easy. No one would host a brunch if they had to get up before dawn to finish the preparations.

The art of brunch has as much to do with people as eating. Friends and family create a convivial atmosphere, and you provide the delicious distraction of fine food to pick at, to linger over and to admire. Brunch is a colourful large-format book that will give you all the tools to entertain in a truly smart but casual fashion.

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Published by: McRae Books

Price: \$22.95

ISBN 13: 978-8889272664

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Nominated for the New Media Award from the Guild of Food Writers

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