

Local Culinary Palate Craves Cookbooks

Trends and purchases evidence the palate and preferences of Vero Beach.

by Brenda Silva

One of the most-loved cookbooks of all time is *The Joy of Cooking*, and judging by local bookstore sales and requests, it's apparent that the joy of cooking – and reading about cooking – still exists in Vero Beach today. In the past, cookbooks were simply recipe collections, but that's not the case today as bookstores devote large sections to the latest culinary titles, which inspire wait lists and special orders.

Cookbook trends tend to be dictated by television and movies. Just as Julia Child appealed to viewers in 1963, leading them to purchase her book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, many other cooks have done the same. Debbie Sentance, floor manager at the Vero Beach Book Center, said, "The cookbooks that sell the best are ones people hear about on TV."

In 24 years at the family-operated Vero Beach Book Center, Sentance has seen trends come and go. However, she was quick to point out that some authors have longstanding appeal.

"People love Ina Garten, and can't wait for her newest book, *Cooking for Jeffrey*. They're very excited about it, and we have a lot of requests. Her books always sell fast."

Sentance explained that in 1999, when Ina's first book *The Barefoot Contessa Cookbook* was soaring in popularity – three printings and over 100k sold in one year – the Vero Beach Book Center was scheduled to have her as a guest.

Unfortunately, this was at the same time Ina's television show began, and the appearance was cancelled. However, 17 years later, it seems the love for Ina and her cookbooks continues.

Cookbook trends are also apparent at chain bookstores, according to Lynn Greene, general

manager at Books-A-Million in the Indian River Mall.

"With more celebrity chefs on TV, it's having an impact on cookbooks and special orders. We've had a lot of people asking for the latest book by Anthony Bourdain, and he isn't even on the Food Network."

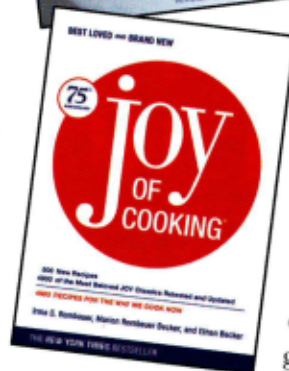
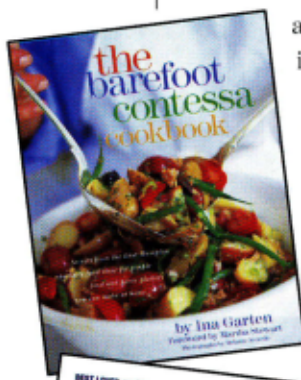
Another influential factor for local bookstores is online shopping. Greene said, "We have people who come in looking for a book, and after we help them find it, they decide to order it online. This kind of browsing without buying isn't helping us at all."

Just as cookbook trends have changed over time, so has how people read cookbooks. No longer content to simply go straight to an appealing recipe, more people who purchase cookbooks are reading them like fiction – from cover to cover.

"When a celebrity writes a cookbook, they don't just write recipes anymore. Now, anecdotes tell readers how they created the dish. These little details matter to fans, so they read the cookbook page by page," said Sentance.

In the same way celebrity fans feel connected by a cookbook, the same thing can happen with different generations who come together in a similar way. Greene said, "I recently sold *The Joy of Cooking* to someone who was buying it because both their mother and grandmother had it at home. Buying the book was a way of keeping in touch with their heritage and family, because it was an important part of their life."

In as much as cookbook trends may change, the one thing that remains the same is how they have the ability to bring people together over a love of food and each other.



Debbie Sentance, floor manager, Vero Beach Book Center



Lynn Greene, general manager at Books-A-Million