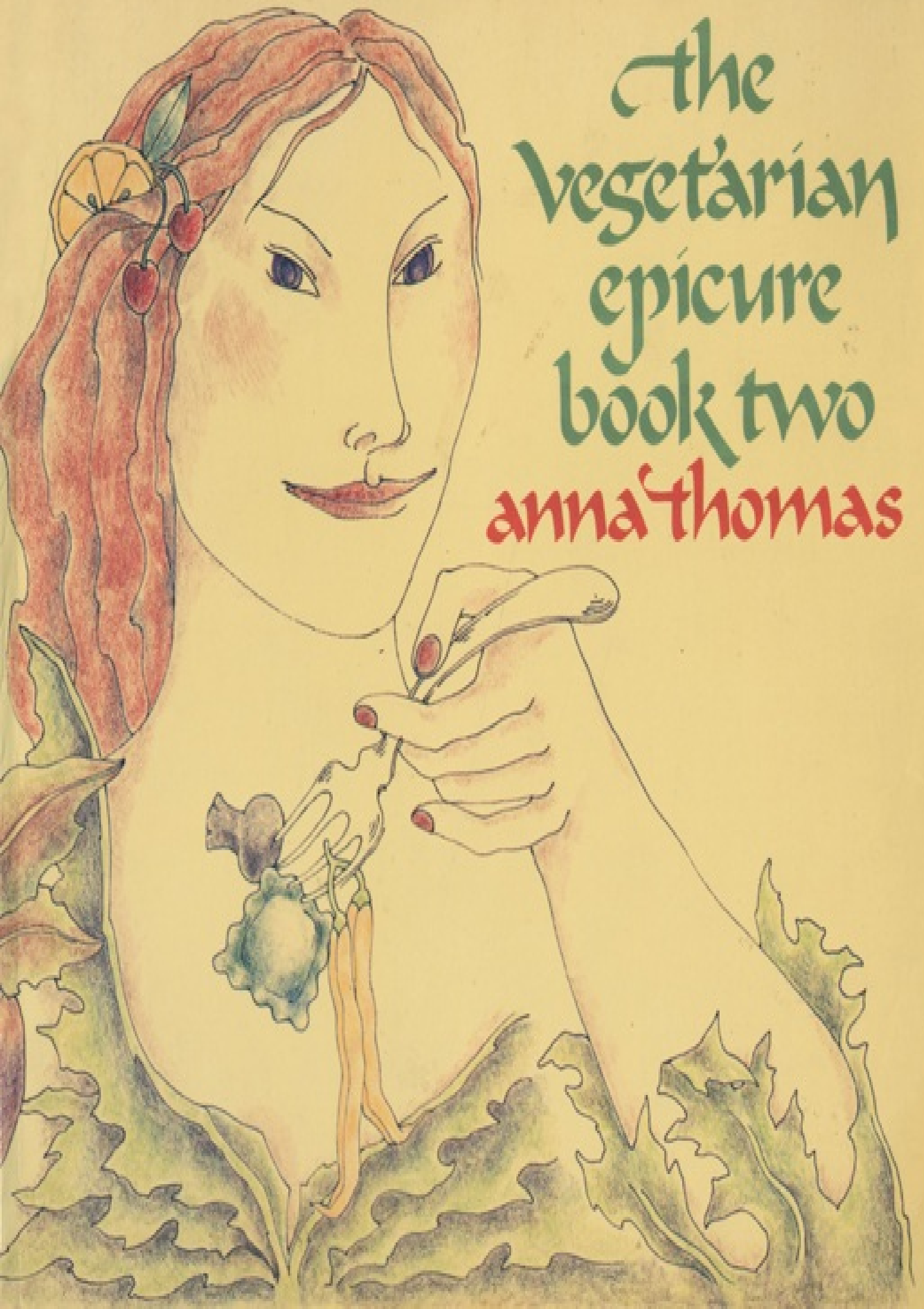


The
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book two
anna thomas

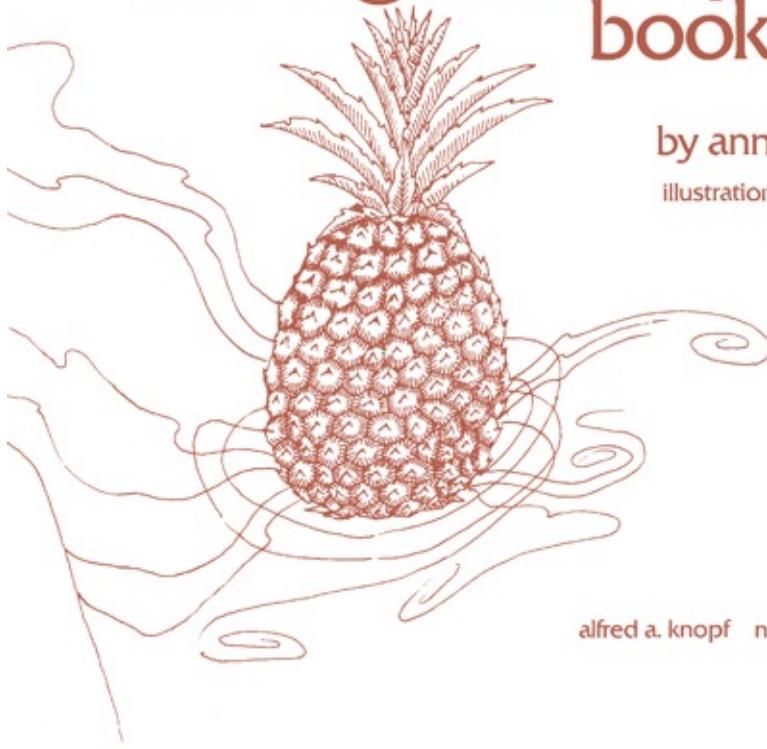




the vegetarian epicure book two

by anna thomas

illustrations by julie maas



alfred a. knopf new york 1982

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For my husband, Greg

acknowledgments

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contents

Title Page
Copyright
Dedication
Acknowledgments
Introduction
Menus
Breads
Soups
Sauces and Salad Dressings
Eggs, Soufflés, Omelets
Salads and Cold Vegetables
Stews, Casseroles, Hot Vegetable Dishes
Croquettes, Pâtés, Cheeses
Savory Pastries: Quiches, Pizzas, Pierogi
Crêpes
Italian Pastas, Vegetables, and Frittatas
Spanish Specialties, Including Tapas and Tortillas
Mexican Dishes
Indian Foods: Curries, Raitas, Pilaus, etc.
Desserts
Preserves and Relishes
Tiny Open-faced Sandwiches
Index
About the Author
Other Books by Ann Thomas



introduction

Why a second book? Because we always itch to expand horizons. Book Two is not just a continuation of the first volume but an exploration of rich new lodes. The first book came out of my own past, and from the tremendous need for a collection of really good vegetarian recipes. This second volume is the result of new adventures: It broadens the scope of the gourmet vegetarian kitchen with forays into entirely different cuisines and cultures. It is a record of culinary discoveries that I'm eager to share, and a notebook of travels.

The writing of this book came about in a most enjoyable way. I spent the last four years traveling, eating, reading, taking notes, cooking, and writing. Work and whim took me through large parts of Europe—Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Austria, Hungary, Poland—as well as to England, on a brief sally into the Middle East, and on a jaunt through

Mexico. Everywhere I went, I was delighted by the food, by the rewards of being eager to sample the new and unfamiliar.

I thought of each meal as a little adventure (and some turned out to be big ones). When I was lucky enough to be staying with relatives or friends, I followed them into the kitchen and pestered them for their best recipes. If, while touring, I discovered a particularly wonderful restaurant, I didn't mind staying a day or two longer in that city to do it justice.

Many people, I found, were curious how a vegetarian could survive, and even eat splendidly, while traveling abroad. The answer is, easily.

Nearly everywhere I went, I discovered that the emphasis on meat was much less overwhelming than it is here in the United States, for economic reasons as well as from long-standing tradition. Most restaurant menus commonly include some enticing dishes made of fresh vegetables or fruits, eggs, cheeses, or grains. In all the *tavernas*, *trattorias*, *kellars*, *cafés*, and *ristorantes* I visited, the choices offered me ranged from adequate to exciting.

In Italy, of course, the antipasto and pasta were a constant temptation; in France we discovered omelets anew and ate dozens of cheeses that we had never tried before. In Madrid and Segovia, every restaurant offered an array of vegetable dishes, along with the eggy Spanish *tortillas*, which appeared in endless variation. And in England, that bastion of roast beef, the most sophisticated vegetarian cuisine was everywhere available, in a phenomenal number of Indian restaurants.

In Poland and Hungary we found marvelous fruit soups, pancakes in wonderful new roles, subtle and cooling salads made of cooked vegetables, and a whole repertoire of tasty ways with simple, fresh cheeses. I also recall evenings in Greece, sitting by the Aegean at sunset, munching grape leaves stuffed with rice and dill and washing them down with ouzo. And during the long, hot summer days in Cairo, when we weren't devouring the sweet, juicy watermelons, we were sampling *tahini* and *baba ghanouj* and hotly spiced bean cakes.

The list goes on; really, the only problem was not to overdo the pleasures of the table so much that a new wardrobe would become necessary en route!

In hotel rooms and on long train rides, my husband and I would reminisce and fill notebooks with descriptions of wonderful dishes we had eaten, along with the new ideas that cropped up constantly alongside these discoveries. Dining cars were best for this. Rumbling past slowly changing landscapes and thousands of telegraph poles, we detailed the high points of a culinary odyssey.

Whenever we returned home, the serious cooking would shortly begin. Great eating became even better as favorite friends joined us at the table. I would experiment with re-creating memorable dishes from our travels and adapting foreign ideas to my own style.

Friends and family were often gathered in our little dining room, under the mirrored globe, to sample the new fare. I would gauge their responses, make more notes, and cook or bake things again if necessary –until it was all absolutely right.

Of course, not every recipe in this book is the fruit of travel. Often my friends share their particular specialties with me. Sometimes I feel the need of a little celebration, or I have a house guest to pamper, and then I like to devise something new, and usually write it down. But it is just a matter of doing something I enjoy, and that's just how I hope this book will be used by others.

In the course of all this testing and trying, my feelings about the main “secret” of good cooking were constantly reaffirmed. The one piece of advice I invariably repeat when people ask me how one should go about cooking well is this: Use good ingredients. Always, always start with the best possible ingredients—the freshest butter and milk and cream, the nicest vegetables, the finest pasta, the loveliest rice, vine- or tree-ripened fruit, aged cheeses, good wines. You won't be sorry. With high quality at the outset, you have a fair chance of achieving superior results. Yes, it's possible to destroy even the best ingredients if you don't know what you're doing, but at least you can be confident that they won't destroy you! So procure the best you can, don't be shy in the kitchen, and good things will follow.

As in the first *Vegetarian Epicure*, the good things in this book are meatless, but it is not a book for vegetarians only. It is for anyone who can enjoy foods like fettucine alfredo, pea soup with dumplings, fondue, pimiento and olive quiche, tomatoes filled with hearts of palm, Liptauer cheese, wild mushroom soufflé, Caesar salad, and frozen strawberry mousse. It is true, however, that a great many people today are eating less meat, for reasons of health, economy, or simply personal preference, and I am convinced that these new styles in dining, far from being dreary, can be infinitely varied and inspired. For those who want to expand their repertoire because they are eating less meat than they used to, and for those who, like myself, prefer not to eat meat at all but don't intend to compromise on the satisfactions of really delicious food, I hope this book provides a bonanza of pleasureable eating.

Arranging all this new material in a manner that made sense was an interesting task, so I'd like to say something about the way we finally did

it. Several chapters are devoted to the foods of specific countries; most of the recipes, however, are grouped by type rather than by place of origin. With such an arrangement, there are bound to be a few things which fit into more than one category, so a bit of cross-referencing has been done. Gazpacho, for example, is included with the soups, but there is a note about it at the end of the section on Spanish foods.

I hope, finally, that this book will be as enjoyable for you as it has been for me. The most important thing about food, after all, is enjoyment, and what a grand thing it is that eating is such a renewable pleasure: We always do get hungry again! Preparing those delectable meals should be a pleasure as well. It's an act of creation that is all the more charming because it is so ephemeral. There's something pleasing about the fact that a great meal is not a lasting thing; that, rather, all the thought and work are enjoyed by one small group of people, for one brief and delightful while, then vanish, to linger in memory only.

We all eat, and it would be a sad waste of opportunity to eat badly. It's true that the meals we consume in a lifetime number in the tens of thousands, but the number is finite; each one should be as nice as it can be, for it can never be regained.

So, have a good time, and *buon gusto!*



menus

A good menu is like a good story. It must have the proper balance of dramatic elements, sorted out and arranged in such an order that each new course fulfills the promise of the one that came before while setting the scene for the one to follow, and everything must be resolved in the end, for unlike some stories, all meals should have happy endings.

Before plunging on to the ways in which this is accomplished, I should say a word or two about vegetarian menus versus traditional ones. It makes sense that a pattern that works for meals designed primarily around meat won't work so well for a varied assortment of nonmeat dishes. I won't say that vegetarian cooking has no "main courses" because there clearly are meals which do have such a central dish. However, that is just one part of a flexible range of possibilities, and more often than not, a fine meatless menu will consist of two or three

complementary courses of equal importance.

This is no new idea, nor is it particular to vegetarian cooking. The *primero* and *segundo* of an Italian meal are an example of this style of eating. Spain has a similar tradition: The typical restaurant menu there shows no special categories for soup, salad, or entré; rather, foods are listed in three groups, the last being the most substantial, both in weight and in price, and dinners are composed from these groups according to the diner's own preference.

This sort of attractive flexibility should be kept in mind when planning a meatless menu. It allows for a real variety of satisfying meals, any of which can make delicious culinary sense on its own terms. As long as one doesn't try to force vegetarian cooking into a narrow form which does not suit it, then ideas can be found everywhere, and tasty meals devised according to a few basic rules.

Contrast, as a good storyteller knows, is an invaluable tool in creating effect. The simpler the dish preceding your pièce de résistance, the more wonderful the latter will seem. Surprise, too, is a dramatist's stock in trade. But the most effective surprise is the one that, once sprung, is quickly followed by the sense that it was inevitable. Of course, you should consider always the tastes of the diners, the time of year, the time of day, and the setting. A candlelit dinner in a formal dining room on a nice, crisp, evening in November is quite a different story from a picnic in August or a family meal in the kitchen.

Practically speaking, the question is, with every meal, where exactly to begin? The best way is with a blaze of inspiration, but lacking that (and we all have our off days), start with one good, solid idea. It might be a particular dish, a type of dish, or even a certain ethnic flavor for which you've developed a sudden craving. Then consider what is in season. There's nothing like seven or eight months' deprivation to whet the appetite for crisp stalks of asparagus in the spring or ripe, golden pumpkins and roasted chestnuts in autumn. Whatever your idea, seasonal planning is a surefire way to proceed. Having considered the possibilities, give a thought to the limitations as well. If it's going to be a buffet for twenty, then you'll want to concentrate on dishes that can be prepared ahead of time, will keep well, and are served with a minimum of fuss. And for any kind of meal, try not to plan more than one or two dishes which will require your last-minute attention, unless you thrive on the edge of hysteria.

When preliminaries are decided, think in terms of balancing sweet dishes with tart ones, hearty with light, and creamy food with something that will afford a crisp, satisfying crunch. If it's pasta that you're hankering for,

then you'll want to start with tangy marinated vegetables or salad with a vinaigrette dressing, and the dessert should be light. If it's a birthday, and cake will be required after dinner, avoid starchy or overly heavy dishes. One rich and saucy course is generally all the sauce a meal will want, and the same is true, as a rule, of foods sautéed in decadent amounts of butter or olive oil.

All these suggestions, though, are merely suggestions, and not law. If an unusual combination of foods strikes you as being perfectly appetizing, go ahead and try it! If you know that the group for whom you are cooking develops a prodigious capacity for sweets at Christmastime, indulge it and serve three desserts at your gala dinner. Or, if you're longing to do something that is deliberately out of season and are able to procure ingredients of high quality, by all means have fresh strawberries or melons (flown halfway around the world) in the middle of December. Taste and circumstance will guide you, after all, but imagination will set you free.

There is only one rule that must never, under any circumstances, be broken: Don't try to prepare something if you can't, for any reason, procure the highest quality ingredients for it. However good your idea, no dish is better than what goes into it, and the best planned menu won't save it.

When it comes time to cook, make everything as lovely to look at as you can, arranging colors and shapes with as much care as you do seasonings; keep your sense of humor; and enjoy yourself.

One final note. Even the best story needs the proper telling to bring it off, and so we come to the idea of timing. A meal should be served as thoughtfully as it is planned and prepared. Now, I'm not suggesting that you should starve anyone to ensure the proper reception for your food, but a little bit of a wait among pleasant company can be quite enjoyable and serves to heighten not only the appetite but the drama as well.

In the case of the omelet or the soufflé, the fresh, hot crêpes, or pasta *al dente*, the timing is nothing short of critical, and it is far better for the diner to wait awhile for the soufflé than the other way around. But any time at all that food is being served in courses, hurrying from one to the next is not recommended. Remember the value of suspense! Allow enough time to savor each dish with the proper, leisurely absorption and to deliciously anticipate the following one.*



In Florence, in restaurants like Che' Ce' Ce' and Fagioli, the antipasto is generally the heart and soul of a meal or even the whole of it. There, the antipasto is not some insignificant tray of celery sticks and olives brought to your table by a waiter. No, indeed. The magnificent sight of it grips your attention from the moment you enter and dominates it thereafter. A table of awe-inspiring size is laden with an abundant assortment of raw and cooked salads, marinated dishes, pickles and olives and peppers of all sorts, mild and sharp concoctions, heavy and light ones. Once, at Che' Ce' Ce', we tried counting—and lost track somewhere around forty.

You probably don't have the facilities or the inclination to set out an antipasto of quite such wealth at home, but it's not too much trouble, really, to toss together a selection of four or five dishes, augmented by some good, vinegary things from jars or from a delicatessen. Then serve a great pasta, not overdone and not too saucy, and a light or fruity dessert.

The two meals that follow are reminiscent, in a scaled-down way, of the way we ate in Florence.

🍷 antipasto 🍷

pickled peppers, lima bean salad, peperonata, tomatoes with vinaigrette dressing, cured olives, sliced provolone cheese

🍷 penne al cardinale 🍷

🍷 pasta with creamy tomato sauce 🍷

🍷 melons in vermouth 🍷
almond cookies or torrone

espresso

🍷 antipasto 🍷

marinated mushrooms, garbanzo bean salad, fresh mozzarella salad, frittata of zucchini, pickled peppers, cured olives, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, green onions

🍷 penne al boccalone 🍷

🍷 pasta with spicy herb sauce 🍷

🍷 cherry and amaretto soufflé 🍷

espresso

A lovely and festive dinner, with a high amusement quotient, this is designed for a small group—four to six, ideally—sitting at a round table. The salads can be prepared well ahead of time and likewise the fabulous dessert. Only the fondue wants some last-minute stirring in the kitchen.

I like to put each antipasto in individual oblong bowls or dishes and ring them around the chafing dish or fondue pot in the middle of the table. If you have a lazy Susan large enough to carry this entire operation, then you're really in business. Pass a large basket of cubed bread first so that all can take as much as they like onto their plates, and pour the wine. Bring the fondue out, adjust the flame under it, and the job is done. The idea is to nibble on bites of salads in between scoops of fondue.

👉 **gnocchi salad, white bean salad** 👉

👉 **eggplant caviar, peperonata,** 👉
pickled peppers, cured olives

👉 **italian fondue** 👉
cubes of french or italian bread

👉 **spumoni cake** 👉

espresso

Here is another kind of Italian dinner.

The dish which needs your real attention at the last moment is the Spaghetti e Cipolla, of course. Don't let the pasta cook a moment too long. Drain it as soon as it is *al dente*, have the onion sauce ready and steaming hot, toss them together, and serve instantly—on warmed plates. Don't make the portions too large, though, or the delicious stuffed eggplant (which can wait in the oven an extra five minutes with no harm done) could be too much.

After a filling meal, fruit is the best. In this case, oranges and tangerines would be welcome, or melons of any kind.

👉 **insalatone** 👉
[a marinade of cooked vegetables]

👉 **spaghetti e cipolle** 👉
[spaghetti and onions]

👉 **melanzana al forno** 👉
[baked eggplant]

assorted fresh fruit

espresso

In Spain, *tapas* belong to *tapa* bars. They are, by definition, those snacks that are eaten, in small individual portions, to accompany a glass of wine while one is standing at the bar. I ate many fine dinners in Madrid by roaming through several good bars of this type and having a little of this here and a little of that there, with many glasses of red wine. Once back in California, I sorely missed the *tapa* bars, so I'd prepare a little selection of my own tapas and serve them buffet-style to my friends—with Spanish wine, of course, or *sangría* in the summertime.

🍷 **tortilla española** 🍷

🍷 **ensaladilla rusa** 🍷

🍷 **champiñones a la plancha** 🍷
[steamed mushrooms]

🍷 **barcelona white bean salad** 🍷

🍷 **roasted eggplant and peppers in oil** 🍷

cured olives

cheeses

crusty bread or rolls

hearty red spanish wine

For cold days and hearty appetites, Spanish Cocido is really a whole meal: The cooking broth combined with vermicelli makes a light soup, to be followed by the assorted stewed vegetables, garbanzo beans, and dumplings, then a light salad to clear the palate before dessert.

🍷 **cocido** 🍷

with crusty rolls or garlic bread

tossed green salad

🍷 **flan** 🍷

[caramel custard]

coffee

In Mexico tortillas often appear in every course. In this simple but interesting meal the popular appetizer Guacamole is served with tortilla chips, followed by an unusual tortilla soup, and then Enchiladas, which are simply stuffed and sauced tortillas.

🌮 **guacamole** 🌮
(a spicy avocado dip)

🌮 **tortilla soup tlaxcalteca** 🌮

🌮 **enchiladas salsa verde** 🌮

🌮 **mexican rice** 🌮

fresh fruit

Croquetès, or *croquetas*, are a big favorite in the *tapa* bars of Madrid, and the Menestra de Verduras, a hearty and interesting assortment of stewed vegetables, is equally popular in the restaurants. Although this is a very Spanish meal, I find that a bit of tomato-apple chutney or even some cranberry relish goes very well with the rich, mild croquettes.

🍴 **tossed salad with herb dressing** 🍴

🍴 **egg croquettes** 🍴

🍴 **menestra de verduras** 🍴
(spanish steamed vegetables)

🍴 **apple tart** 🍴

With this Mexican dinner you can be very flexible. If you don't care for beer or tequila, the Cantaloupe Water, a very cooling drink, can be served at the start of the meal and sipped throughout. It makes a pleasant foil for the hot sauce that accompanies everything. Or it can be served at the end as a very light sort of fruit dessert.

🌮 **avocado tacos** 🌮
🌮 **bean and potato tacos** 🌮
🌮 **hot sauce** 🌮

🌮 **rajas con queso** 🌮
(peppers with cheese)
🌮 **fresh, hot corn tortillas** 🌮

🌮 **cantaloupe water** 🌮

The little *tortitas* that make the first course of this meal should be freshly made and warm, but you can shape the shells of corn dough, or *masa*, ahead of time and just do the actual baking and filling, which doesn't take long, at the last minute. *Tortitas* are one of the best accompaniments to a good margarita I've ever tasted, so have your glasses salted and a cold pitcher of margaritas ready when the shells come out of the oven. The rest of the meal is simple enough to prepare and serve if you only keep in mind that refried beans should be cooked for a long time and enchiladas only long enough so that they are piping hot all through.

margaritas
🍷 **tortitas con queso** 🍷

🍷 **spinach enchiladas suizas** 🍷
🍷 **spicy refried beans** 🍷

🍷 **strawberry water** 🍷

The salad is satisfying but not heavy, and the Cheese Soup elevates it to a perfectly pleasant warm-weather meal. What's more, the order can be reversed. If it's very hot, start with salad and, once refreshed, move on to Cheese Soup and bread, with a cold, crisp-flavored white wine.

🍷 **cheese soup** 🍷
with garlic toast

🍷 **watercress and green bean salad** 🍷

any fruit tart

coffee

This is one of the best of simple meals—quiche and soup. And so easy to serve the two either together or one after the other (remember quiche is just as good at room temperature). A delightful lunch or dinner to have in warm weather outdoors with a good, dry wine. Be sure to indulge in great, generous portions of whatever wonderful berries are at peak season.

🍷 **pimiento and olive quiche** 🍷

🍷 **eggplant soup** 🍷

🍷 **green salad with vinaigrette dressing** 🍷

fresh berries with cream

coffee

There are no courses in an Indian meal. So, although these two Indian menus are relatively simple, they will have the appearance of a banquet when everything is served, all at once.

To make your Indian dinner into an exotic event, find a bright-colored tablecloth and arrange the table in such a way that there is ample room in the center for six or seven attractive serving dishes. If you have some nice-looking shallow copper pots or gratin dishes, polish them up and put them to use. Set each place with a large plate and, for the soupy *dal* or the cold *raita*, an additional little bowl. Then bring on the feast.

The *pakor*as are a snack or appetizer and must be served hot, so plan on frying them at the last minute. They can be served first, by themselves, to nibble while sipping a gin and tonic or Pimm's and soda; both of these drinks, I've found, are excellent, cooling accompaniments to the spicy flavors of Indian cooking. Another fine choice is a good pale ale. If you'd rather forgo alcoholic beverages, a spicy hot tea with milk will do very nicely.

After the *pakor*as, everything but the sweet should be placed on the table at once, together with little dishes of nuts, raisins, spicy pickles, and whatever other garnishes you desire.

🍷 **pakor**as 🍷
[hot vegetable fritters]

🍷 **green curry** 🍷

🍷 **curried garbanzo beans** 🍷

🍷 **saffron rice** 🍷

🍷 **banana and coconut raita** 🍷

🍷 **cachumber** 🍷

🍷 **chutneys** 🍷

🍷 **puris or chapatis** 🍷
tea

any fresh fruit dessert