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From Emeril's Kitchens

Emeril Lagasse

From Emeril's Kitchens

Favorite Recipes from Emeril's Restaurants

Emeril Lagasse


WILLIAM MORROW
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Dedication

In memory—

I dedicate this book in memory of my dear friend and pal Louis “Mr. Lou” Lynch. Loving husband, father, grandfather, and a rock to all who knew him.

One of the greatest pastry chefs in America, he started with me in the beginning at Emeril’s New Orleans, and created many of the signature dishes that so many people still enjoy today. He will be greatly missed but always remembered.

With love from Emeril and Alden Lagasse, Emeril’s restaurants, and Emeril’s Homebase family



Chef Emeril Lagasse's portrait by artist Rise Delmar Ochsner, Emeril's New Orleans

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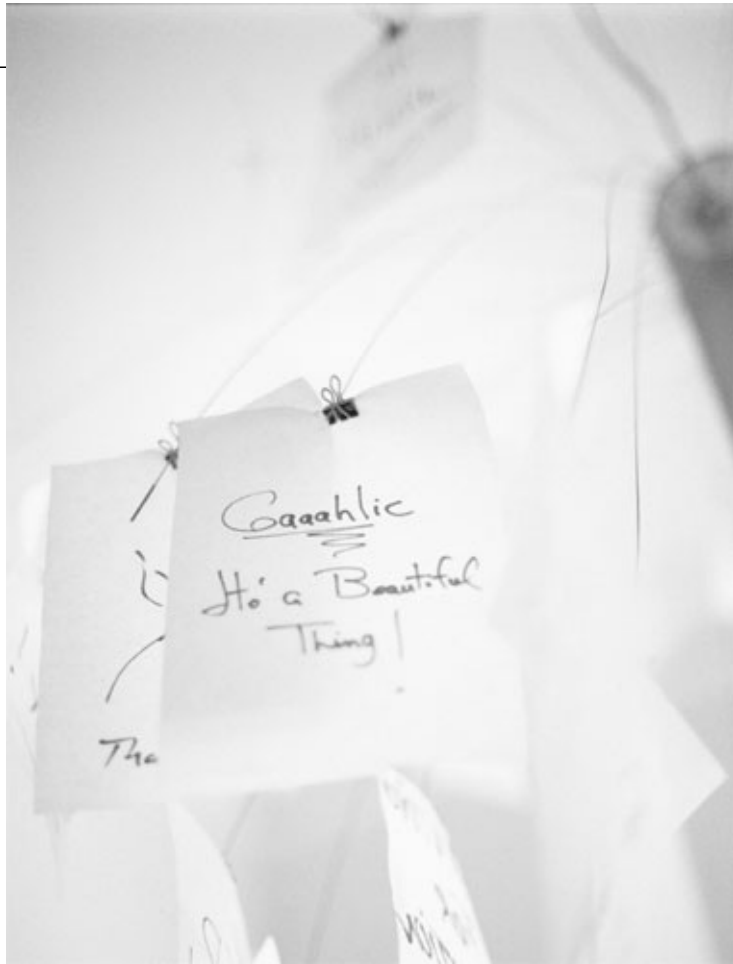
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Entrance foyer chandelier, Emeril's Delmonico

INTRODUCTION

A new cookbook always gives me the opportunity to communicate with my fellow foodies and fans. And you know who you are! You're the folks who watch *Emeril Live* and *The Essence of Emeril*, the visitors who enjoy eating at my restaurants, and the home cooks who love to prepare recipes from my cookbooks.

From Emeril's Kitchens is my eighth cookbook and soon we will open our ninth restaurant. Can you believe it? Writing each cookbook and opening each restaurant has represented a particular creative phase in my life, and it's gratifying to look back and trace this culinary evolution.

Born and raised in Fall River, Massachusetts, I had a love of food instilled in me by my parents at a very early age. Not only is my mom, Miss Hilda, a terrific cook—and particularly when she makes the traditional Portuguese dishes of her heritage—but my dad, Mr. John, always did a fair amount of weekend cooking that reflected his French-Canadian background. Wow! Talk about a food-of-love flavor explosion! In high school, I worked in a local Portuguese bakery, and then graduated from the prestigious culinary school, Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island.

The university inspired me to be creative and gave me an understanding of how important discipline is for the practical challenges that a cook faces. I then worked as an apprentice in Paris and Lyon, France, where I refined my knowledge of classic French cooking. Time in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia restaurants gave me perspective on current American food trends and spurred my love of farm-fresh ingredients.

The Brennan family hired me as executive chef of Commander's Palace Restaurant in 1983. When I started, I was awed by the great tradition of haute New Orleans Creole cuisine for which the restaurant and the city were known. The bountiful fresh regional produce, game, and seafood equally stunned me. The Brennans were eagerly marrying the nouvelle cuisine that had emerged from France the decade before with a New Orleans sensibility and local culinary traditions. While taking Commander's to the next stage was a tall order, I was ready to learn and create, and I was passionate to succeed. I accepted the challenge and never looked back. What evolved was a dynamic new era, and my "new New Orleans" cuisine began to take root.

Eric Linquest and I worked together at Commander's Palace; he in the front of the house, me in the kitchen. We became fast friends. When I was ready to strike out on my own and open Emeril's, I knew Eric was the only person I wanted to manage my restaurant. Over many meals and many glasses of wine, we discussed what was important to us. Although we had big dreams, we also had a limited budget. Everything had to be considered very carefully—from the number of menu items, food costs, and kitchen equipment to the wine list, linens, and storage facilities.

When we opened Emeril's on March 26, 1990, my goal was to take contemporary Creole cuisine to the next level and make the menu a reflection of my culinary thinking. For instance, barbecued shrimp had long been served in New Orleans restaurants, but instead of baking the shrimp in their shells with butter, garlic, and seasonings, I intensified the flavors by making a robust stock and sauce base first, and then, after sautéing, cooking the shrimp in a rich cream reduction for a concentrated flavor.

I've given new twists to other classic dishes and made them my own. When Emeril's opened, we developed a savory appetizer cheesecake to take the place of the usual dessert one: the Home-Smoke Salmon Cheesecake is on the menu to this day. Same thing with my ultra-rich Banana Cream Pie, which continues to be one of our most-ordered desserts.

My goal at Emeril's was to serve flavorful, unique food that was creative and exciting. I wanted all of our ingredients—herbs and lettuces, rabbits and pigs, quail and seafood—to be fresh from the gardens, farms, and waterways of Louisiana and Mississippi, or wherever the best sources might be. (Dan Crutchfield of Crickhollow Farms still provides fresh rabbits and hogs.) To this end, we made our own breads, pastries, ice creams, andouilles, tassos, sausages, spice blends, and more in-house (just as they are made today at each of the restaurants). In addition to borrowing from local cuisines, introduced techniques and ingredients from Asia, Europe, and the Southwestern United States. From the day we opened, our customers were enthused and ate everything up!

My first cookbook, *Emeril's New New Orleans Cooking*, introduced my style of cuisine to home cooks everywhere, with recipes from the Emeril's menu and favorites reflecting my Portuguese and French-Canadian heritages. Some favorites from that book included the Kale and Andouille Soup, Portuguese Chorizo Clam Stew with Garlic Aioli, Crawfish Rellenos with Red Bean Sauce, and Tamarind-Glazed Pork Chops with Mole Cream and Roasted Sweet Potatoes.

Two years later we opened a restaurant in the French Quarter—NOLA. NOLA, an acronym for New Orleans, Louisiana, reflects my passion for food, but in a more informal setting than Emeril's. NOLA's logo is a blue swirl, symbolic of a powerful hurricane churning with relentless energy, and the multistoried restaurant churns up its own excitement every evening. The food at NOLA is a heartier, more rustic version of the fare served at Emeril's. In no time the word spread, and NOLA soon had its own identity, with eager diners lined up halfway down our block of St. Louis Street every evening for the 6:00 P.M. opening.

Our opening chefs, Dave McCelvey, now director of culinary operations for all of our restaurants, and Michael Jordan developed a menu bursting with Louisiana products. NOLA, though constantly busy, has very high standards. Many chefs in my company cut their teeth at NOLA, starting as eager, passionate line cooks and earning their stripes as they moved through the ranks. Christian Czerwonka, Neal Swidler, Joel Morgan, and Sean Roe—who are represented as chefs de cuisine in this book—all started at NOLA.

The food bar at NOLA offers a front-row view of the wood-burning oven, and guests can watch as our chefs cook Cedar-Planked Fish with Horseradish Crust and Lemon Butter Sauce, Garlic-Smeared Wood Oven-Baked Pocket Bread, and NOLA pizzas. In the open kitchen, signature dishes such as Cornmeal-Crusted Oysters, Louisiana Crab Cakes, and Grilled Double-Cut Pork Chops with Bourbon Mashed Sweet Potatoes are prepared. The menu, wine list, and ambience cater to more casual diners, both visitors and local New Orleanians. The result is a resounding success.

As a result of this success and to give others a sample of NOLA's local flavor, I wrote my second cookbook, *Louisiana Real & Rustic* in 1996. Though I'm not a Louisiana native, I strongly felt that authentic Acadian—"Cajun"—recipes needed recognition and a new audience. I wanted the whole country to taste what I was tasting and to enjoy the rich, full-bodied flavors of my adopted state. I stayed as true to the traditional recipes as possible, including all the techniques, customs, and ingredients of this classic American regional cuisine.

With my next book, *Emeril's Creole Christmas*, it was time to celebrate and have some fun. Once again, I used indigenous ingredients, but this time in over-the-top holiday menus. Simple corn cakes were garnished with caviar to kick them up a notch, and smoked salmon went into an elegant terrine. Beef tenderloin was smeared with fresh horseradish and black pepper. And where is it written that bread pudding has to be sweet? Not when you try my exotic mushroom bread pudding!

Two years after opening NOLA, I was introduced to Lou Silvestri, who, in turn, initiated a meeting with Danny Wade, then president of the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. At that time, Las Vegas had just three well-known restaurateurs (Charlie Trotter, Wolfgang Puck, and Mark Miller) with established places. The MGM folks were looking to bring more fine-dining restaurants to Las Vegas.

Emeril's New Orleans Fish House at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino was our first restaurant outside of New Orleans, and Las Vegas was ready for my version of dining and hospitality. Although offering many of the signature recipes from Emeril's and NOLA, the Fish House is a New Orleans-style seafood restaurant and oyster bar, with fresh Louisiana seafood flown in daily. As a bonus, our proximity to the West Coast enables us to source a wealth of produce and seafood from California, the Pacific Northwest, South America, and the Far East, giving the menu a global feel.

New Orleans-style dishes include awesome seafood gumbos, Fried Oyster Po'-Boys, Fried Creole-Marinated Calamari with New Orleans-Style Olive Salad, and Panfried Louisiana Crab Cakes. International dishes given the Emeril twist include Spicy Salmon Roll and Cucumber-Wrapped Tuna Tartare with Wasabi Tobikko Salad, Atlantic Salmon with Louisiana Crawfish, and Maine Lobster boiled like crawfish in spicy Creole seasoning and served with andouille. One of the biggest hits at the Fish House is the Shellfish over Fettuccine with a spicy piri piri sauce, a tribute to my Portuguese heritage. The Seared Yellowfin Tuna with Tomato-Fennel Confit is now a house classic.

With three successful restaurants up and running, my career with the Television Food Network took off. Although I'd been hosting shows on the network since 1993, *The Essence of Emeril* really captured the public's attention in 1996, when *Time* magazine named it one of the "Top Ten TV Shows." Production began for *Emeril Live* in January 1997, and I then started appearing as food correspondent for ABC-TV's *Good Morning America* in January 1998.

In 1998, *Emeril's TV Dinners* cookbook was published. This book is a compilation of favorite television-show recipes, including many recipes that viewers had requested through the years. It was an enormous undertaking because we included everything, and I mean everything—from stocks to desserts.

The next year saw the publication of *Every Day's A Party*. Everyone knows about Mardi Gras, but unless you're from Louisiana, you probably have never heard about the Shrimp Festival, the St. Joseph's Day Festival, or the Gumbo Cook-Off. We included recipes and menus for those events as well as local twists on national holidays and celebrations such as Easter, the Fourth of July, Halloween, and, of course, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

As a result of television exposure, combined with the restaurants' successes, other opportunities started to roll in. Tom Williams, CEO of Universal Studios in Orlando, approached us regarding the Citywalk project that he and his team were undertaking. He wanted us to consider opening a fine-dining restaurant in the prime location of the project. When Tom and his development team showed us a scale model of the restaurant they had in mind, we were impressed, to say the least. They wanted to replicate the Emeril's New Orleans experience in Orlando, and we decided it was indeed the perfect place for us to go. There was no better person to send to Orlando as executive chef than Bernard Carmouche, whose recipes are represented in this book. (Bernard and I have worked together for almost twenty years, since our Commander's Palace days!)

With Bernard at the helm of Emeril's in Orlando, it was as though I was cooking there myself. The menu Bernard put in place remains true to my New Orleans vision and to my dedication to fresh produce, and everything is made from scratch whenever possible. We make the same great homemade sausages and sauces, and serve the same familiar dishes, such as Smoked Mushrooms and Tasso over Angel Hair, Andouille-Crusted Redfish, and Rack of Lamb with Creole Mustard Crust. At Emeril's in Orlando we also feature the best of Florida's local products on the menu—Hearts of Palm Salad, and

Grilled Florida Pompano with Lemon-Poached Leeks and Shrimp—Lemon Butter Sauce.

What a time it was! Shortly after agreeing to develop Emeril's Orlando, two amazing restaurant offers came our way. First, the LaFranca family, owners of Delmonico Restaurant in New Orleans for more than seventy-five years, approached us about taking over the reins and keeping the restaurant's 110-year tradition alive. What an honor! And Rob Goldstein and Lou Silvestri were courting us to become part of The Venetian, an exciting new resort hotel and casino in Las Vegas. Given the success of Emeril's New Orleans Fish House, we were soon convinced that this was an ideal opportunity.

So, we had three operating restaurants, and within an eighteen-month period, we staggered another three restaurant openings. Luckily, we had such a strong team on board and the structure in place that we knew we could make this a reality. It was a terrific opportunity to grow and we had a lot of dedicated employees who were excited about the possibilities of moving forward.

When we opened Emeril's Delmonico Restaurant and Bar in June 1998, I was apprehensive. Delmonico had long been a grande dame of the New Orleans food scene, and my goal was to take it to the next level of splendor it deserved. I wanted to pay homage to classic New Orleans Creole food and yet give the menu a distinct Emerilized identity. We elegantly restored the St. Charles Avenue building and, among other special treatments, reinstated tableside preparation, befitting the restaurant's history. We offer timeless New Orleans classics such as Turtle Soup with Sherry, Redfish Amandine, Shrimp Remoulade, and Bananas Foster. And in true local fashion, Sunday jazz brunch features a wide variety of traditional and original eye openers and favorites, including Poached Eggs Erato, and Souffléd Spinach and Brie Crêpes, among others.

These favorites are paired with stylish Creole variations, such as Garlic Escargot with Goat Cheese, Fennel, and Bacon-Stuffed Mushrooms; Pecan-Crusted Oysters with Brie, Bacon-Barbecue Glaze, and Green Apple Slaw; and Creole Seafood Courtbouillon.

Delmonico Steakhouse in Las Vegas opened in 1999. I had always wanted a real American steakhouse featuring the best beef, aged in-house to our specifications, and more, with a dynamic, contemporary menu. We have a kicked-up charcuterie program with homemade salamis and pastrami as well as the usual andouille, boudin, and tasso made especially for our daily antipasto plate. The Delmonico name had great collateral for us, not only because of our New Orleans restaurant but also because of the great tradition established by the country's first full-service restaurant, the grand Delmonico in New York City. We knew that the elegance the name conferred ideally summed up what we wanted to represent in Las Vegas—sophistication, great food, and serious steak.

The menu, of course, predominantly features the most popular cuts of meat—from filets mignons and New York strip steaks to veal chops and Châteaubriand carved tableside—carefully cooked to order. Popular steakhouse starters such as sliced tomato salad, Caesar salad, and shrimp cocktail are served along with traditional sides and sauces, like scalloped potatoes, creamed spinach, béarnaise sauce, and marchands de vin sauce. At the same time, the very meaty Tchoupitoulas Gumbo can knock your socks off!

The year 2001 saw the release of two new cookbooks. The first, *Prime Time Emeril*, is a collection of all new recipes from my television shows—*Emeril Live*, *The Essence of Emeril*, and *Good Mornin' America*. The second, *Emeril's There's A Chef in My Soup*, is a tribute to my younger fans. This step-by-step book includes kitchen how-to's and simple recipes for starter cooks, including 1-2-3 Lasagna, Baby Bam Burgers, Cinnamon Toast of Love, Emerilized Tuna Casserole, Junior's Jambalaya, Mile-High Blueberry Muffins, and Pokey Brownies.

This brings us to the book you now hold in your hands—*From Emeril's Kitchens*—with many of the most requested and most frequently ordered recipes from all of our restaurants! *From Emeril's Kitchens* traces the evolution of how one New Orleans restaurant spun off into nine across the country, each with a distinct personality and culinary twist. It's a look at the evolution of flavor in my cooking.

Most of all, it's a story of passionate chefs with dreams that dovetail with mine, and of sharing the food of love with others. It's a story of how I landed in New Orleans to create what is known as "new New Orleans" cuisine.

So what's the best way to use this book? Sit down, read it through, and flag the recipes you want to try. *From Emeril's Kitchens* is by no means a "basic" cookbook. The recipes come directly from our chefs and their kitchens, and each one may have several components—but don't let that stop you from trying a dish. If an entire recipe seems too complicated, then make just the accompanying vegetable or sauce to serve with another item. Having a dinner party? Mix up the restaurants' recipes and try one dish from each. Planning a Sunday brunch? Go straight to the brunch dishes.

So, what's next? Well, it's constant change; we're continually evolving, taking everything to the next level. For instance, we undertook a massive renovation of the original Emeril's restaurant just after its tenth anniversary, in July 2000, to bring it into the next decade and nurture a new generation of passionate diners.

Since opening that first Emeril's Restaurant on Tchoupitoulas Street in New Orleans over ten years ago, I'd wanted to open a Polynesian and Asian-themed restaurant nearby. I even knew what I'd call it—Emeril's Tchoup Chop ("chop chop"), a play not only on the Tchoupitoulas name and the chopping involved in Asian cooking but the constant, rapid pace of a busy restaurant kitchen. My vision was realized in January 2003 at Universal Orlando's Royal Pacific Resort. Emeril's Tchoup Chop is everything I'd ever hoped for, and the climate, backdrop, and energy of Orlando and Universal are a perfect fit for the restaurant.

Emeril's Tchoup Chop is a complete departure from my past restaurants. The décor of the resort and the restaurant is lush and tropical, and simulates the natural beauty found throughout the Pacific Islands. The menu focuses on the foods of the Pacific, and is a perfect extension of the hotel's South Pacific-inspired paradise, with muted natural woods accented by bright tropical flowers and lush plants, batik fabrics and canopies, carved wood reliefs, and waterfalls.

New York City architect David Rockwell, whose acclaimed Rockwell Group is best known for themed restaurant interiors, designed Emeril's Tchoup Chop. The focal points of the restaurant's water theme are the zero edge pool in the center of the room and the water wall above the ten-seat food bar, adjacent to the open kitchen. The serene water theme is underscored by warm colors and lighting.

Instead of the usual bread on the table, guests enjoy prawn chips and crispy wontons served in a folded take-out box. An open exhibition kitchen features rows of woks turning out delicious stir-fry and noodle dishes, like Duck and Vegetable Chow Mein, Kalúa Pork (slow roasted), and Noodle Sauté with Tchoup Chop Spices and Seasonal Vegetables. And some of my favorite restaurant dishes featured in this book include Mussels in Lemongrass Broth, Shrimp Toast, Kimchee, and Vegetable and Egg Fried Rice.

The Atlanta Emeril's Restaurant is due to open in 2003. The opportunity to be part of such a thriving and dynamic market is, by far, our most exciting project to date. The two hundred-plus-seat restaurant is located in the bustling Buckhead district and is designed by David Rockwell.

In the style of the original Emeril's in New Orleans and Emeril's Orlando, the Atlanta spot features many of the favorites found in this book, such as Barbecued Shrimp on Rosemary Biscuits, Smoked Mushrooms and Tasso over Angel Hair, and Home-Smoked Salmon Cheesecake. The menu also will represent classic gumbos, Andouille-Crusted Redfish, and the Tamarind-Glazed Pork Chops with Green Mole Cream that our friends have enjoyed through the years, as well as items created especially for Atlanta diners.

Taking the Florida toehold a step farther, Emeril's Miami Beach opens in November 2003—my ninth restaurant! We'll be right on South Beach in the Loews Miami Beach Hotel. David Rockwell

will be designing the restaurant in keeping with the colorful palette found in the Art Deco South Beach neighborhood. Again, the menu will feature Emeril's favorites, with a dash of Nuevo Latino flair.

That's the great thing about being in this business: having ideas and bringing them to fruition. Each restaurant has evolved into its own, with a distinct identity and flavor palate, and a passionate staff creating menus with the best possible ingredients. And just as this book traces my evolution up to this point, it too is a snapshot in time of our organization. The very nature of the restaurant business is change. Just as locales, techniques, and ingredients inspire menus, by the same token people are inspired and move on.

I'm thankful to the chefs who worked with me to create this fabulous book, whether they're at the same restaurant as they were when we started or whether they're with me now. What matters most is that we're inspiring a passion among our friends and spreading the food of love! BAM!



Matt Lirette, sommelier, Emeril's New Orleans

ENJOYING WINE AND FOOD

I'm passionate about wine. I drink it everyday and feel that wine turns every meal into a special occasion. So, when you dine at my restaurants, enjoying wine is an essential part of the complete dining experience, no less important than the ambience or service. Before opening the restaurant, Eric Linstead and I spent the better part of a year discussing, over many glasses of wine, all the elements that we believed were integral to running a successful restaurant. A strong wine program was essential to our concept and we outlined what we wanted to achieve. We wanted wines of quality, so we searched for the best ones from around the world. We shared a passion for food and a dedication to pairing our food with great wines, so we picked wines to complement our menu. When Emeril's opened in 1990, the wine list offered just seventy-five hand-selected varieties.

To accompany a menu of about thirty items, we started with a small selection of wines—white and sparkling wines were on one page and reds on another. Being a new American restaurant, our wine list was dominated by California bottlings. (Keep in mind that in 1990, California vintners were in the midst of releasing the 1985 Cabernet Sauvignons and had a string of great vintages from 1984 on for all varietals, so many excellent wines were available to us.)

Our wine program has grown tremendously. Each restaurant has an in-house sommelier and a wine list that averages one thousand selections. Today the wine list at Emeril's New Orleans features fourteen hundred selections and fifteen thousand bottles!

So, what's the big deal, you might ask; every good restaurant sells wine, right? True. But few have devoted the resources—from manpower and proper storage facilities to dollars invested in inventory—necessary to create the great wine lists that we have. Our wine lists are limited only by the imaginations of our sommeliers and their enthusiasm for pairing each chef's dishes with the appropriate wines. The goals of our wine program remain the same as the ones Eric and I established in 1990.

When we created our first wine list, Eric and I established a system that is still followed at every restaurant. Every bottle is tasted with potential food pairings in mind. Creative food calls for creative pairings, and the wines on each list are chosen to complement my vision as translated by each chef. Each restaurant list is well rounded, featuring wines that range from crisp white wines to accompany shellfish to tangy, fruit-driven red wines for piquant dishes and ripe, rich, Bordeaux-style reds to pair with meats and game.

Each list contains what other restaurants might call reserve list wines, with a variety of acclaimed, difficult-to-find wines and allocated artisan releases. You'll find big collectable Bordeaux on each list, like Château Lafite Rothschild, Château Cheval Blanc, and Château Margaux, as well as premier cru from Burgundy, Italian Montepulciano, Crozes-Hermitage of the Rhône, Shiraz from Australia, and vintage Ports and Champagnes. We also offer wines from less well-known regions and producers. Emeril's Delmonico Restaurant currently offers fifty-one different Pinot Noirs from the cult Sonoma County winery Williams-Selyem, as well as a vertical selection of 1988 to 1997 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne. NOLA lists sixteen Zinfandels from the boutique Turley Wine Cellars.

When we opened Emeril's, our wine slogan was, "We're in the business of selling wine, not storing wine." Each selection is very carefully chosen and not only priced to sell but paired with the menu to sell.

At the Fish House, the mostly seafood menu offers a wine list rich in bright, floral-toned Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Gewürztraminer from Alsace, Austria, and Germany. So it follows that Delmonico Steakhouse's predominantly meat menu is well complemented by a wide selection of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons and Merlots, as well as Sonoma and Oregon Pinot Noirs and Central Coast Syrahs.

When NOLA opened, Emeril's was only two years old with a 250 to 300 selection wine list. We were still a young organization with only a meager budget to open the new restaurant. At the same time, we wanted NOLA to be a more casual, friendly restaurant, so the wines were grouped by price. Most people have a comfort level about what they'll pay for a bottle of wine, and to make it easy for customers, we developed a list with five different price levels, and three or four white and three or four red wines at each level. We hoped that by making the wines accessible, diners readily would come to enjoy wine with their meals as much as we did. Within a year, the list had grown to nearly 150 selections.

At the same time, the Emeril's list took off and climbed to nearly 450 selections. We also hired our first sommelier at Emeril's, Erin White, who was followed by Greg Harrington. Greg brought a level of cutting-edge expertise to Emeril's, and within three years, the list featured one thousand selections.

When Emeril's New Orleans Fish House opened two years later, we opened the restaurant with three hundred selections, carefully chosen for balance and depth, and we tasted the wines as we developed the menu in order to assure compatibility. This mammoth undertaking enabled us to start with a list that could compete with the very best in Las Vegas and elsewhere.

What an exciting time this was for us! Not only was the Fish House an immediate success but all three wine programs were recognized by the *Wine Spectator*—the Fish House and NOLA received the "Award of Excellence" and Emeril's received the "Best Award of Excellence."

In quick succession, we opened three new restaurants—Emeril's Restaurant at Universal Studios in Orlando, Emeril's Delmonico Restaurant in New Orleans, and Delmonico Steakhouse at The Venetian in Las Vegas. Emeril's Orlando was the first restaurant planned to house a ten thousand-bottle inventory in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment, and the same was done at Emeril's Delmonico and Delmonico Steakhouse.

Each restaurant, except Delmonico Steakhouse, features a nightly degustation, or multicourse tasting menu, as a means of pairing wine and food. These special meals are "ingredient driven," and each chef designs his menu based on the best, most flavorful seasonal ingredients available. The dinners range from five to seven courses, with four to six wines chosen to complement the flavors in each dish. Each sommelier works carefully with his respective chef, discussing and tasting the degustation menu to determine which wines to serve. Hugely popular, these menus offer our guests the opportunity to enjoy the evening without having to make specific wine choices.

The by-the-glass program works in a similar fashion, with each sommelier offering a variety of hand-selected wines, giving guests the chance to broaden their horizons. By-the-glass selections average twenty wines at each restaurant, along with thirty to fifty-six half bottles.

Since opening Emeril's, I'd wanted to craft a house wine to pair with my particular style of cooking. So, it was good fortune when in 1994 I met proprietor and winemaker Jim Clendenen of Au Bon Climat, a highly respected Santa Barbara County winery. Jim had a reputation as a groundbreaking winemaker, handcrafting great Burgundian-style wines. We agreed to collaborate and develop a red and white private label wine program for my then two—and later six and nine—restaurants to pour by the glass. Despite low yields at harvest that first year (1995), Jim crafted rich,

concentrated, yet low in alcohol wines that complemented my style of new Creole cuisine. We're proud to feature Emeril's Chardonnay and Emeril's Red from Au Bon Climat by the glass and bottle at each restaurant.

The awards the restaurants have received also reflect our ongoing commitment. Today, Emeril's Restaurant in New Orleans continues to maintain the top *Wine Spectator* "Grand Award" that it's held since 1999. NOLA, the Fish House, Emeril's Delmonico Restaurant, and the Delmonico Steakhouse each have the *Spectator's* "Best Award of Excellence," while Emeril's Orlando holds the "Award of Excellence."

Of our new restaurants, the Polynesian-themed Tchoup Chop's focus is somewhat away from wine. Instead, premium sakes, special tropical drinks, and a variety of quality loose teas are paired with the full-flavored menu. Emeril's Atlanta and Emeril's Miami Beach restaurants, however, feature extensive wine programs along the lines set by our New Orleans flagship.

When you think about it, the "wine of love" is as important as the "food of love." Our wine program comes down to a love of food and wine, and, above all, sharing and making people happy. And you know what? Our customers are right there with us. Many pick their wines first and ask me to cook to match them. Now that's a real thrill and what it's all about at the end of the day. And just as the dishes found in this book are served with wine at the restaurants, I hope you will pair them with wine at home to share with your family and friends.



French bread baguettes from Emeril's Delmonico pastry shop

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