shows how mainstream the subject of food has become and how it can be translated into many styles of fiction and nonfiction writing.” (p.21).

—Irena Chalmers, Culinary Institute of America

Bookends

Paul Kinstedt, with the Vermont Cheese Council
276 pp. Illustrations. $40.00 (cloth)

If there was ever a time for a book on farmstead cheese making in America, this is it. America now boasts at least one cheesemaker in each of its fifty states. The American Cheese Society reports that its cheesemaker membership has gone from 179 to 279 in just three years. And if the same group’s annual cheese competition is any indication, the creation of new cheeses and new cheese-making operations is going at breakneck speed. In 2005, 749 cheeses were submitted for judging. In 2003, there were 43. Now, Professor Paul Kinstedt from the University of Vermont, in conjunction with the Vermont Cheese Council, has combined his passion and expertise in cheese science with this trend. The result is the pragmatic and eminently readable American Farmstead Cheese: The Complete Guide to Making and Selling Artisan Cheeses.

The common definition of farmstead cheese is cheese that is made exclusively from the milk of a cheesemaker’s own animals. For that reason, the term almost always applies to small cheesemakers. It is that growing group of individuals in the United States to whom American Farmstead Cheese is geared. And yet, because Kinstedt farms out some of the less-scientific chapters to those working in the cheese-making field, it is also a book that is equal parts business, education, and storytelling. As such, it will find an audience with anyone who is interested in cheese, whether in business or as a consumer.

A prospective cheesemaker would be well advised to pay attention to the chapter “The Business of Farmstead Cheesemaking” and to its author, Allison Hooper. Hooper is the co-owner of Vermont Butter & Cheese Company in Websterville, Vermont, and she shares her first-hand account of the joys and pitfalls of starting and running a cheese-making business.

If the future of cheese and how we make it matters—and it should—then so too does Catherine Donnelly’s chapter, “The Pasteurization Dilemma,” which fleshes out the facts about raw milk in cheese making.

Kinstedt turns to cheesemaker and consultant Peter Dixon for “The Art of Cheesemaking.” Although Dixon acknowledges that cheese making has improved thanks to scientific advances, he correctly points out that artisanal cheese is to be celebrated because of its relative lack of uniformity. He cautions, however, that there are limits to creative expression. “For the less experienced cheese makers, [then], traditional methods should be supported by scientific principles to the extent necessary to make consistently high-quality cheese” (p.199).

Kinstedt himself provides comprehensive information on cheese making, ranging from the milk itself to a much-needed explanation of hard-to-understand starter cultures to the basic steps of cheese making and other information essential for making high-quality cheese.

What American Farmstead Cheese lacks in design (it definitely looks like a textbook) it makes up for as the only one-stop information source on cheese making that includes material applicable to all facets of artisanal cheese making. As the cheese-making trend continues to soar, this book should fly off the bookstore shelves and into the hands of every hopeful and, for that matter, existing cheesemaker.

—Laura Werlin, author, The New American Cheese

The Perfect Egg and Other Secrets
Aldo Buzzi
New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005
150 pp. Illustrations. $16.95 (cloth)

The egg is today the least expensive thing to eat…so basic that the cookbooks tend to make no mention of it. But it too has its secrets. (p.48)

This is a delicate book whose very design evokes the way it should be held: like an egg. The book is arranged in two parts, with each comprising slivers of anecdotal tales that seek to seduce the reader with playful witiness. In the same way that Buzzi describes pigeons, the pages “fall into two categories: the edible and the inedible” (p.58): tantalizing, captivating, and highly descriptive passages intersperse with sometimes vague and boring banter. Reading Buzzi is like being a student peering over the shoulder of a master chef as he demonstrates a dish, dotting his lectures with little-known secrets and riddles (both figuratively and literally) about antiquity, gastronomic masters, historical spaces, and,
Don't Try This at Home: Culinary Catastrophes from the World's Greatest Chefs
Edited by Kimberly Witherspoon and Andrew Friedman
New York: Bloomsbury, 2005
320 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

Masses of escaped eels on the kitchen floor, slimy against the ankles of cooks. Pavarotti, late but not really hungry. Failed cia mashed potatoes. Jackie O, pedaling away on her bike, denied a reservation. Scooping up spilled hollandaise sauce from the nasty floor of an old Datsun station wagon… and putting it back on the food. Each night as I picked up this book to read another of its forty stories, I hesitated. Did I want to know about pheasant that is really chicken in disguise? Meringue that is actually a white garbage bag…teased, powdered, and minted? Don't Try This at Home: Culinary Catastrophes from the World's Greatest Chefs reveals the mishaps that have befallen the culinary stars of our time.

We have seen or heard many of these chefs on television or radio, and their voices ring familiar here. Anthony Bourdain swears for us; Michael Lomonaco enchants us; and Sara Moulton quietly mocks herself. But the standouts in this collection are the stories told by chefs who do not have daily appearances on American cookery shows. Pino Luongo’s “A User’s Guide to Opening a Hamptons Restaurant” combines humor, astute class observation, and dire warnings about staffing. Tamasin Day-Lewis’s eloquent multigenerational story, “Euphoria,” teaches us that kitchen disaster stories “spurred [her] on, made [her] realize that failure, kitchen disaster, was not only an option, it was a given” (p.110).

I’m not usually in awe of professional chefs or any other kind of celebrity and am confirmed in my impression that any celebrity who tries to appear humble often comes across as insincere. Although some insincerity is apparent in this collection, overall the chorus amusingly returns to the theme of “I messed up. We messed up. Nobody was the wiser for it, until now.” Apart from occasional self-aggrandizement (several contributors pronounce that failure is not an option when working in the professional kitchen), this volume offers entertaining insights into the community of chefs and restaurateurs who respect each other, work with each other, fire each other, and laugh at one another.

—Traci Marie Kelly, University of Wisconsin–Madison

The Devil’s Picnic: Around the World in Pursuit of Forbidden Fruit
Tarsas Cresco
New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005
368 pp. $23.95 (cloth)

Ever since Tarsas Cresco first read about absinthe as a teenager, he felt the lure of the illicit, and The Devil’s Picnic details his travels and adventures to seven different countries in search of “forbidden fruit.” Cresco casts himself as the central character in his travel adventures as he interviews colorful local informants, officials, and experts. Although he relates his experiences of intoxication amid carefully researched historical material, he is more of a journalist than a scholar: the book has no index or bibliography. Yet each chapter brims with lore, vivid descriptions, and detailed observations.

In Norway, Cresco sampled moonshine; in Singapore, he smuggled in crackers baked with illegal poppy seeds; and in France, he savored Époisses, a raw-milk cheese. He dined on bull testicles and baby eels in Spain, puffed on Cuban cigars in the United States, and drank mate de coca in Bolivia. In Switzerland, he finally sampled his long-desired absinthe and visited a euthanasia clinic that dispenses deadly pentobarbital sodium.