Once upon a time, in the 1950s, three giants stirred and began to walk the land. Their footfalls sent tremors through the earth, shaking pillars and crumbling foundations. Americans, jolted from their enchanted sleep, rubbed their eyes and, turning their backs on the humble beef stew, marched straight to the palace kitchen and fell in love with Boeuf Bourguignon.

Or so the story goes. The giants, of course, were Julia Child, James Beard, and Craig Claiborne, the first male editor of the food pages of the New York Times, who, the legend asserts, turned writing about food into serious journalism and, together with Julia and James, made cooking and reading about cooking both fun and sophisticated.

The history of culinary journalism before Claiborne took over the reins at the Times in 1957 remains, to this day, obscure. David Kamp writes that Claiborne’s great achievement was to position himself “way above the ladies in snoods who had, until recently, dominated what passed for mainstream journalism.”

The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink similarly argues that most culinary journalism before Claiborne was “the type of food writing aimed at housewives in publications such as Good Housekeeping…and in the food pages of most newspapers, which offered recipes and other advice for women burdened with the daily chore of putting dinner on the table.”

While there is certainly truth to the argument that Claiborne introduced important, influential changes to the New York Times’s food pages and the practice of culinary journalism in the late 1950s, there did exist before his time an appreciation for food and cooking, and an audience for culinary stories that were anything but stodgy or the work of mostly, if not exclusively, overburdened “ladies in snoods.” Not only was M.F.K. Fisher penning her essays, but so were A.J. Lebling, Robert Coffin, Joseph Wechsberg, and even Clementine Paddleford who, though lacking the narrative skill of Fisher et al., still brought to her writing an enthusiasm for American regional culinary traditions and a strong, lively voice.

These writers, men and women alike, wrote for a variety of newspapers and magazines, and they related stories rather than simply reciting recipes and dispensing advice. The body of work these and other writers bequeathed us contains insightful reflections on the experiences of cooking.
and eating, alone or with company, in restaurants, alongside the cart of a street vendor, or at home. They help us understand the varied culinary practices of their time, here and abroad, and the profound role these practices played in the construction and maintenance of individual and community identities.

One such writer who is little known today was Iles Brody. Brody, born in Hungary in 1898, traveled (and ate) his way across Europe after fighting in World War I, and then arrived in New York in 1937. Shortly thereafter, he began writing about horses and equestrian sports for Esquire, contributing occasional features on food and drink. In 1940 Esquire’s founding editor, Arnold Gingrich, asked Brody to contribute a monthly food column, “Man the Kitchenette,” which ran for six years. Brody wrote, “It seems that I had stumbled my articles with references to food and the pleasures of the table. ‘Make goulash of the ponies,’ said Gingrich, and I did.”

Brody admitted that he never set out to be a food writer, but that he did “possess some qualifications,” including “a good stomach, a great deal of experience and a true flair for eating.” This flair, and the need that fed it, grew after the war. “It was so easy for a young man who had cheated death on three fronts and in two revolutions to become a hedonist! My program—and my young head told me it was the only program —was set: to live well, to eat well, and to thank my stars each day for being alive.” It also could not have hurt that Brody’s father had been a very accomplished Hungarian writer and an avid, if not so accomplished, amateur cook.

Brody’s “Man the Kitchenette” was unusual not only because it was a cooking column written for male readers in the nation’s first lifestyle magazine for men but also because it addressed the male domestic cook, carving a legitimate space for him in the home kitchen, which was (outside the nineteenth-century parlor) considered the most feminine room of the house. Brody’s column provided recipe instruction and advice, related lively stories of culinary adventure, and, like much of cookery literature, offered a primer for the proper performance of gender roles. While Brody instructed men on how to cook the perfect omelet, for example, he was also instructing them on how to be “manly” cooks in the domestic space of the home—not only in the conventionally “masculine” spaces of the professional restaurant or military kitchen or over a campfire, cooking game they had hunted themselves. Brody also subtly but unmistakably instructed readers on how to perform the role of the epicure, enjoying the finer pleasures of life and becoming men of distinction, a project that fit with Esquire’s broader editorial and advertising mission.

**Esquire and Its Readers**

Esquire was launched in the autumn of 1933 by David Smart and William Weintraub, the owners of a Chicago advertising agency, as a quarterly lifestyle magazine for men. It sold for fifty cents at a time when other magazines like Colliers, Liberty, and the Saturday Evening Post were selling for a nickel. Despite its high price, its first run of 100,000 copies sold out within a few hours of hitting the newsstands, and the advertiser and customer demand for more copies was so strong that the magazine began monthly publication with its second issue. By 1936 circulation had climbed to 550,000; by 1937 that number had reached 675,000.

Gingrich promoted the new publication as the only magazine devoted to men and their interests and promised readers that it would offer a much-needed antidote to the “feminization of the magazine industry,” which, he said, was overrun by publications catering to women. Gingrich welcomed readers with this reassurance:

> It is our belief, in offering Esquire to the American male, that we are only getting around at last to a job that should have been done a long time ago—that of giving the masculine reader a break. The general magazines, in the mad scramble to increase the woman readership…have bent over backward in catering to the special needs and tastes of the feminine audience…Occasionally, features are included for [the male reader’s] special attention, but somewhat after the manner in which scraps are tossed to the patient dog beneath the table.

Esquire’s first article was Ernest Hemingway’s account of fishing for marlin off the Cuban coast; the second was a short war story by John Dos Passos. Esquire continued featuring stories by “masculine” writers on boxing, fishing, hunting, war, and the conquest of desirable young women. Yet, from the beginning, Esquire betrayed a sense of uneasiness over its “natural, easy masculine character.” This unease stemmed from the fact that Esquire grew directly out of Apparel Arts, a promotional quarterly for the men’s fashion industry, at a time when taking an interest in fashion was often mocked as a weakness of women and effeminate men. Gingrich quickly reassured readers that the magazine respected the average American’s “horse sense” and would guard against the danger of becoming a “primer for fops.”

Esquire published full-color illustrations of men departing for the courthouse or bank in three-piece suits, wearing tweeds for a day at the races, or donning loafers and Bermuda whites for cocktails with a beautiful woman at a sunny resort. Each illustration was followed by a short narrative linking fashionable dressing to social distinction and economic
success. In these pages, fashion ceased to be a frivolous feminine pastime and was represented instead as a powerful masculine tool for climbing social and corporate ladders.

*Esquire*’s project of representing feminine practices that were not highly valued as serious and appropriate for men extended beyond the wardrobe, encompassing interior decorating, reading lifestyle magazines, and, of course, cooking at home. All of these required men as well as women to cultivate an avid interest in shopping. In this way, *Esquire* began paving the way for the not-far-off emergence in magazines of the American male “consumer” and, more specifically, the American male “gourmet,” two symbolic identities that in the 1930s were not yet popular.

“Man the Kitchenette”

“Man the Kitchenette” was part recipe file, part culinary geography and history, and part travelogue, told in a strong narrative voice. Its imagined reader was a bachelor living in a modern urban apartment, who wished to please his palate, seduce women, and move up in the world. It carefully balanced nostalgia for Old World Europe with a very modern, down-to-earth attitude, providing a model for a new, emerging ideal of an American “gourmet” at a time when that concept did not have broad cultural currency.

In his narratives, Brody meandered through Europe’s capitals, coastal towns, and country villages, occasionally bringing his explorations closer to home. He regaled readers with stories of his adventures, introducing them to his aristocratic, knowledgeable, and sometimes quirky friends, inviting them to join him as he savored delightful meals served in “horribly expensive” as well as modest restaurants and showing them how to re-create satisfying, delicious fare in their own kitchenettes. He constructed his authority by referencing what he knew from books, his firsthand travel experiences, and his “expert” friends who were willing to share their knowledge with him, which Brody then passed on to his readers. He peppered his column with literary references, informing readers, for example, that William Makepeace Thackeray admonished his dinner guests that they “must not speak a word before we have finished with the fish,” and that Pythagoras believed that “the chief principle of morality is to abstain from eating beans.” But Brody’s extensive book learning played a secondary role to his own travels. He drew heavily on his memories of living in Europe, and the recipes he provided spanned the Continent, occasionally even reaching England, the outpost of culinary civilization as it was mapped at the time. While he included regional American dishes, he did not set out to document them as did the writers of the 1940s *WPA America Eats* project; nor did he limit himself to the techniques and ingredients of the fabled French chefs. He included recipes for Cossack Sashlik [sic], Hungarian Pörkölt, Bisque d’Ecrevisse [sic], New England oysters, and even the humble omelet. He also felt no need, as would later writers, to claim authenticity for his recipes, only that they were easy, impressive, and delicious.

Brody’s narrator described himself as a traveler rather than a tourist because, he explained, it appealed to his “imagination to live like a born Frenchman or Englishman or Dane.” It also created the sense that he was taking readers on an insider’s journey, letting them in on local information not readily available in guidebooks. The places he described became much more than tourist sites; they (and the food they served) were imbued with the comfort of familiarity and fond memories. For example, Brody described Les Halles market and a nearby nightclub in Paris this way:

> The narrow streets resounded with orders; everyone and everything was alive; blue-smocked porters brushed shoulders with evening-clothed Americans, who were making a pilgrimage to the Mecca of Soupe à l’oignon, the Smoking Dog Restaurant. The second best place for the much esteemed soup was the Capitol Restaurant, on Montmartre, underneath the El Garron, best nightclub of all times, from which once I was put out. It happened so many years ago that I feel free to admit it.\(^1\)

> Brody’s gaze was nostalgic, and his stories were embellished with vestiges of Old World aristocracy. He wrote wistfully of venerable restaurants such as Warsaw’s Bristol, which “had an air of Czarist Russia about it. Here, old waiters, remnants of the Romanoff era, brought you a pot of tea no matter how late you returned to your room—a room where the pièce de résistance was a four-poster bed with a bootjack under it and an icon above.”\(^2\) Another of Brody’s favorite Warsaw restaurants was the Restaurant Fukier, established in the late 1920s by one of the wealthiest merchant families of the time. He described it as [a] jewel of an old private palace, with fine antique furniture, magnificent fireplaces, and small individual dining rooms. A complete old-world Middle Age atmosphere lingered over the rooms, for almost everything was left the way it used to be hundreds of years ago. One even felt a bit uncomfortable because it seemed as though one were intruding on the privacy of a very exclusive family.\(^3\)

> Brody enjoyed this restaurant’s exclusive hospitality, dining at a table “laid with massive silver, exquisite china and an old golden candelabra,” daydreaming of “an old
Prince Radziwill” who “closeted himself often in one of the intime Fukier’s dining rooms in the pleasant company of some ortolans, truffles and wine. He took along his own chasseur to wait on him and even a second footman to pour his favorite wine.” In this way, Brody shared with readers a vision of a pre–World War II Europe that was peaceful, cosmopolitan, and elegant, and that represented a refinement in everyday life that could be achieved not only by the fawning Prince Radziswills but by the Brodys of the New World as well. What was needed was the desire to cultivate good taste and enjoy life’s more refined pleasures, regardless of one’s pedigree or trust account.

“Man the Kitchenette” set out to help readers cultivate such desires in the aftermath of the Depression. But it also accommodated the typically American disdain of snobbish, antidemocratic elitism, frivolous consumption, and other foppish attitudes and manners that, since the late 1700s, had been signified in the shorthand of American political discourse as “French.” Patrick Henry, for example, attacked all that Thomas Jefferson stood for by accusing him of cultivating an “effete” appreciation for fine, notably French, cuisine, for employing a French chef in the White House, and for abjuring his native victuals. Sixty years later, in 1840, well after the French Revolution had toppled the monarchy, the presidential candidate William Henry Harrison reassured American voters that he lived on “raw beef with salt” and drank “good American hard cider,” while his rival Martin Van Buren enjoyed “pâté de foie gras” served on a silver plate and “soupe à la reine with...a gold spoon.”
One hundred years later, in 1940, Brody felt comfortable praising the French and their cuisine to *Esquire*’s readers, although he tempered the excesses that “Frenchness” still to some degree symbolized with a bracing dose of down-to-earth Americanness. He did this partly by extending his acquaintance to chefs who sweated in the kitchen, fishermen who smelled of the sea and its harvest, and even the local butcher. He wrote, “although my neighbors are millionaires (it isn’t catching!) my best friend is Bill the Butcher from the Cash and Carry market.”19 Bill gave Brody entrée into the refrigerated room at the back of the shop, where, under Bill’s careful instruction, he could select the best steak or pot roast. Brody’s friends thus included not only counts, princesses, and wealthy merchants but also hardworking men with useful knowledge gained from years of experience that Brody could share with his readers.

Brody also built rapport with his American readers by confessing that even though he traveled extensively, lived in an expensive neighborhood, and dined out regularly, he was really a man of modest means who simply knew how to live life in the manner of his wealthier friends. After finishing a restaurant meal replete with a slice of cake, coffee, and cognac, Brody wrote, “I asked for the bill, and eyed the exit while it was being made up; there is no doubt I thought of escaping…the check, however, was not so bad, and I walked out a free and well-fed man.”20

Brody encouraged readers to follow his lead by exercising their common sense and judgment in order to eat well cheaply. He admitted avoiding the “esteemed turtle soup” partly because “the real thing is prohibitively expensive” but equally because he did not “think it warrants its reputation.”21 Better food could be had for less money, Brody told his readers. One need not have a hefty wallet to enjoy a good meal. Nor did one need to mimic “capricious gourmets” or “perfectionist gastronomes,” who were so fastidious they could not enjoy simple pleasures, such as picnics. As Brody advised readers, “Food fanciers do not like to eat in the open for fear of getting something in their food, or not having it at the right temperature…gourmets are a fussy lot, so let’s leave them alone.”22

Six months later, *Gourmet*, the nation’s first magazine devoted to eating and cooking as marks of social distinction, would begin publication, defining and defending in the first issue what it meant to be a “gourmet.” *Gourmet*’s 1940s “gourmet” resembled Brody’s epicure: a man who was down-to-earth and middle class, yet able to travel, go out to eat, enjoy fine food and wine, and exercise expertise and artistry in the urban domestic kitchen. But readers of Brody’s column were encouraged to eschew the term and think of the enjoyment of good food in less exclusive, self-conscious terms.

**Home Cooks and Public Gourmets**

Although Brody encouraged readers to leave perfectionist gastronomes alone, he himself moved in the small, elite world of New York City’s public gourmets, represented perhaps most famously by Lucius Beebe, the *New York Herald Tribune*’s “top-hatted, extravagantly turned out exemplar of the high life, whose columns often detailed his gustatory intake at such hoity-toity spots as the Stork and the Colony.”21 Some of the recipes found in “Man the Kitchenette” Brody imported from his travels abroad, attributing them vaguely to the Russian peasant girl who introduced him to *mamaliga* (polenta) or the cook in a restaurant near Tijuana’s red-light district who served him the best green salad he had ever eaten. Many other recipes, however, he attributed to the chefs, owners, or general managers of the most refined Manhattan restaurants and nightclubs, the same restaurants favored by the likes of Beebe. For example, Brody gave readers recipes for calf’s liver pâté from El Borracho, Lobster à la Newburg from the Stork Club, Frogs Legs Provencal from the Café Chambord, Terrapin Stew from the Colony, Filet of Sole from the Passy, Oxtail Stew from the Savoy—even Stinging Nettles Salad from a party thrown on Helena Rubinstein’s penthouse terrace.

These very exclusive restaurants were clustered on New York’s Upper East Side, the playground of café society, where celebrities, journalists, mobsters, politicians, and the wealthy gathered to enjoy themselves in public. A 1940s New York City guidebook described the Café Chambord as one of the most expensive French restaurants in the city, and the Colony, which radiated social power through its habitual guests the Vanderbilts, the McCormicks, Jimmy Walker, Charlie Chaplin, and the Prince of Wales,24 as one of the priciest restaurants in the world. The Stork Club was known as the snobbiest nightclub in town, and the Copacabana the one most glittering with celebrities.

For “Man the Kitchenette,” the provenance of the recipes, rather than the ingredients or methods of cooking employed, were what set them apart from those typically included in many contemporaneous cookbooks and cooking columns. Take, for example, Brody’s instructions for preparing oysters four different ways: Oysters Mornay, Oysters Rarebit, Oysters à la Rockefeller, and Oyster Stew. Collectively, the recipes called simply and typically for oysters, butter, a sprinkling of grated Parmesan cheese, and
a pinch of cayenne; eggs were added to Oysters Rarebit; spinach and bread crumbs to Oysters à la Rockefeller; milk and Worcestershire sauce to the stew. Only Oysters Mornay called for the extravagance of béchamel.

Brody attributed these recipes to the Grand Central Oyster Bar, located in Grand Central Terminal, built in 1912 as the world’s largest and most luxurious train station. The restaurant fed New Yorkers’ passion for oysters, which, thanks to the fecund beds of the city’s many waterways before pollution and overharvesting destroyed them, had always been cheap and plentiful. They were sold on street corners, from market stalls, in basement oyster cellars in the poorest neighborhoods, and in the city’s middle-class restaurants. But Brody chose to take his recipes from the famed Oyster Bar, known, in the words of the 1930s food writer Allan Ross MacDougall, as “a landmark on the American epicure’s map. Well-traveled gourmets have been heard to say: ‘Prümer’s of Paris for Lobster Thermidor; Scott’s of Piccadilly for Devilled Crab; the Grand Central Oyster Bar for Oyster Stew.’”

Although Brody consistently took his recipes from New York’s most luxurious restaurants, his column did not serve as a restaurant guide. He did not include addresses, hours of operation, reviews, or menus—and the elite few who could afford a meal at the Colony or a night at the Copacabana would not have needed his guidance in such matters. Instead, Brody offered readers a way to participate in the pleasures of café society without having the means to do so directly. He showed readers how to bring a semblance of café society home. Brody combined the roles of the public gourmet and home cooking instructor, grounding “cooking at home” in an elite, public, professional, urban, masculine milieu, thus making home cooking appealing to and acceptable for men, especially those who harbored social and cultural, if not economic, aspirations.

**Garlic’s Champion**

Brody’s column was steeped in New York City and in the New Yorker’s habit of looking eastward toward Europe rather than westward toward the American interior. This set Brody’s column apart from the trend in the 1930s evidenced in women’s magazines, newspapers, and cookbooks that shifted the center of American cooking from the East Coast to the Midwest, a move that occurred when large land-grant universities like those in Illinois and Wisconsin established home economics programs that produced the era’s recognized culinary “experts.” Many of their graduates found employment in schools, social work institutions, and food-manufacturing companies and worked as cookbook writers in Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Dubuque, Madison, and other Midwestern cities. Women’s magazines followed the trend, refusing to hire editors from the East Coast and publishing recipes and cookbooks that “assumed a decidedly Midwestern posture.”

The “Midwestern posture” promoted “recognizable American food like haddock, and simple flavors uncomplicated by herbs and spices.” It was suspicious of dishes brought over from the “old country,” like “goulash, potato latkes, or the steaming blend of cabbage and potatoes.” It disapproved of the peasant tradition of one-pot meals and rich, saucy embellishments to honest cuts of meat. This reflected a deep distrust of immigrant groups and the desire to both Americanize them and limit the influence of their pernicious culinary practices on the wider culture. For example, the 1930s edition of The Good Housekeeping Cookbook called for real stew that contained no paprika (one of Brody’s favorite spices) “and salads that were sweet, with canned fruit, bottled mayonnaise and French dressing. Garlic was treated only slightly less cautiously than arsenic.” The most extreme of these recipes were (and continue to be) caricatured, especially in cookbooks aimed at men, recipes like Fannie Farmer’s Berkshire Salad in Boxes (boxes made from crackers and egg-white glue, filled with chicken salad, and tied with red bows) and the Monte Carlo Salad (presented as playing cards constructed from green mayonnaise, canned pimientos cut in the shapes of hearts and diamonds, and truffles cut in the shapes of spades and clubs).

Brody did not comply with these broad trends that rejected Old World recipes, herbs and spices, sauces, and unadorned savory salads. He proudly offered recipes for the one-pot Cossack Sashlik (mutton cubes browned in butter and bacon, simmered with whole small tomatoes and onions, and served over boiled rice); Goulash (diced beef browned in pork fat, cooked gently in water with onions, paprika, and potatoes), and cabbage stuffed with rice, pork, and any other cheap cuts the butcher had on hand. Fish—striped bass, salmon, carp, and sole—he cooked in butter with white wine, shallots, broth, and his favorite fresh herb, parsley. He made liberal use of other herbs and spices as well: fresh thyme, bay leaf, and cloves in his beef, rabbit, or partridge stews; paprika in his goulash and roasted spring chickens; cayenne for his oysters; saffron for his boiled lobster; nutmeg in his corned beef hash; tarragon in his white sauces; and garlic in almost everything. When a recipe called for low heat, he used butter; when it called for high heat, as in the recipes for omelets and frogs’
legs, he used olive oil. He dressed his salads, which were never sweet but made of savory greens such as romaine (which he described as “that meaty, long substantial herb”), dandelions, watercress, and purslane, with wine or tarragon vinegar and a good olive oil from Nice, Portugal, Greece, or Italy and topped them with croutons made from toasted bread stroked “gently with garlic.”13 His disdain for sweet salads even led him to condemn his countrymen who had a strong preference for them. “That country [Hungary],” he wrote, “outstanding in all other branches of the culinary art, is a complete failure as far as salads go. A sweet salad of lettuce leaves is sickening.”14 Brody’s disdain for sweet salads cemented his distinction from the “Midwestern posture” popular in food writing of the time—and from the femininity with which that posture was firmly associated.

Masculine Appetites
“Man the Kitchenette” set out to show men what it meant to be a masculine cook at home, a project that included instruction on where to cook (how to create a masculine kitchenette), how to cook, and what to cook. In so doing, Brody could not ignore the popular argument that men and women “naturally” preferred different types of food—though he did not emphasize this as much as other cookery writers of the day. This argument had been heavily promoted by the nineteenth-century domestic scientists (of whom Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe were perhaps the most famous), who encouraged women to apply both scientific and religious principles to the sound management of their white, middle-class, Christian households.15 For these experts, a clear understanding of and respect for the separate roles and responsibilities of the sexes was essential. This separation was defended on the grounds that women were biologically, emotionally, and psychologically more delicate than men. Because of this delicacy, women were expected to stay in the shelter of their homes, avoiding the dangerous streets and sites of commerce and safeguarding their physical and moral purity.

The idea that women were delicate and men robust governed the kitchen table. Men were expected to be driven by hearty appetites that could only be satisfied with generous helpings of red meat; women were expected to prefer small salads, tea sandwiches, and sweets, which were easy to digest, visually appealing, and far removed from the brutality and immorality of the masculine world.16 As Harvey Levenstein has argued, “Women were expected to like dainty foods...for to have lusty tastes in foods seemed to betray a weakness for other pleasures of the flesh as well.”17

Brody gave a nod to all this in his column, acknowledging the motif that still appeared regularly in 1930s cooking literature associating light, sweet, ornamental foods with women and encouraging men to disdain them. For example, Achmed Abdullah and John Kenny’s 1934 publication, For Men Only: A Cook Book, warned men that “the deathly marshmallow and the bloody maraschino cherry lurk in the hidden corners of too many feminine kitchens, waiting to stick a dirty dagger into the honest masculine palate.”18 Brody advised his readers that a man could feel good about cooking if he prepared “manly foods,” such as Boeuf Stroganoff [sic], a “he-man dish and very easy to make”,9 bone marrow, “very healthy, and very manly, too”;30 and stew, which is “as masculine as chicken à la king is feminine.”41 He even upended the widely circulating stereotype of salad as the quintessentially feminine food, arguing that “salads are really the man’s department, and belong more properly in these pages than any other kind of dish I have ever written about. Only a man can make a perfect salad.”42 Perhaps aware that he was pushing against decades of expert and popular opinion, Brody defended this statement by writing, “This may sound like a pretty general statement, but it is not my own invention; among many other experts the owner of the Restaurant de l’Odéon told me so in Paris the very day I arrived in that magnificent city.”43 In Paris, “no restaurant, small or large, would think of serving you a ready-to-wear salad; they hand the man, always the man, the leaves in a bowl, and the ingredients, and you go to work with your hands and imagination, amazing your table companion with your creation.”44 Of course, as I noted earlier, the “perfect salad” made by a man was very different from the kind preferred by women: a woman’s salad was sweet and pretty; a man’s was savory and lacked any ornamentation save a sprinkling of croutons.

Brody engaged in this rhetoric of gendered appetites with a hint of irony that had been absent in the writings of the domestic scientists. For him, men and women did prefer different types of food, but not because of biological differences. Women, American women, simply and lamentably lacked good taste. He wrote, “it is astonishing and regrettable how little the young women of America appreciate good food. They dine in perfect happiness on hamburgers or a ham and cheese on white, and plate of lettuce leaves, peaches and mayonnaise (horrors!) plus a cup of coffee.”45 He is pained “to think that a charming and often beautiful American girl’s gastronomic imagination does not stretch beyond this viand [hamburger]. If she happens to be a sophisticate she might ask for squab or filet mignon, a few peas or Carottes à la Vichy or Au Béchamel. But these are exceptional cases.”46
Referencing the still-popular motif of men’s different, and often superior, gustatory tastes helped Brody distinguish the male from the female cook, and legitimize (bachelor) men spending time voluntarily in their domestic, yet masculine, kitchenettes. He also prescribed specific attitudes and behaviors that the masculine cook needed to bring to the kitchenette and to his task.

Efficiency: Hallmark of the Masculine Cook

In Brody’s world, men may have had superior taste in food, but that did not mean they spent a lot of time in the kitchen cooking up elaborate dishes. One of the hallmarks of the masculine domestic cook was efficiency: the ability to cook good, tasty food in the shortest time possible. For this reason, most of the recipes that Brody shared with his readers came with the reassurance that they were simple and satisfying, although they did require a deft hand. Of omelets Brody wrote, “they are easy to make and easy to spoil. It is really child’s play to prepare an omelet—but one false move, and you may as well throw it away.” Of Crêpe Suzettes [sic] Brody wrote, “It is not difficult, but it does require some care.”

Brody told readers that his recipes would allow them to whip up a gratifying meal and get on with life’s other pleasures. Cooking was not meant to be an obligation for the bachelor cook, nor was it a measure of how well he performed the important role of “caring for family,” as it was for women. Instead, a man cooked only to please himself and his date. Brody gave this advice to readers: “When you have an especially important girl whom you want to impress at your flat for dinner, if you would like her to exclaim, ‘have you been cooking all day long?’ whereas the whole thing did not take you half an hour, give her Fried Chicken Louisiana.” In another column, he offered a recipe for preparing Biftek Bercy, “which allows a man to say to his guest: ‘But darling, you can’t leave in this rain… let me fix you something to eat. It won’t take five minutes...’ And getting up from the settee, smoothing his mussed hair, and shaking his legs to get back some of the trouser crease, he turns to cooking.”

Brody advised his bachelor cooks to choose dishes that were efficient and to arrange their kitchens in an efficient manner as well. The ideal domestic cooking space for the male cook departed from the idealized, rambling, well-outfitted kitchen of the family home, reigned over by a wife and mother. The bachelor’s kitchen was not a kitchen at all, but a small, urban, sparse kitchenette, where an unencumbered man could exercise masculine culinary artistry.

The kitchenette was efficient partly because of its size and partly because it was free from “fussy” kitchen gadgets and appliances, which the advertising industry worked so diligently to promote to women. He advised readers: “do not use fancy kitchen utensils like an egg beater unless you are callous to the contempt of professional chefs.” A simple silver fork well used, Brody argued, was more than adequate for the task. The same principle applied to coffee. Of this Brody wrote, “I am exceptionally proud of my coffee. It has been made the same way for years, strained through a white sock—not always the same one—into an earthenware pot... there is no percolator at my house, and there never will be.”

The one permissible gadget (besides the white sock) was a can opener because it allowed the bachelor cook to take advantage of the efficiency of canned foods, which Brody promoted. “The lone man’s salvation comes in a can,” Brody wrote, because with a man could “make a good dish in a jiffy.” The bachelor cook could turn to cans for Lobster à la Newburg, pâtés, herrings in cream and tomato sauce, beets, cauliflower, kale, tongue and roast beef, soups, fruits, and much more. Brody qualified his advocacy of canned food by instructing readers that taking this shortcut for efficiency did not mean they could relinquish their responsibility to exercise independence and authority in their kitchenettes. “You can openers!” Brody wrote, rallying his troops. “The recipe on your can is scientific and uninteresting; I am afraid it has to be like that for it is addressed to millions of people. But you don’t have to be a goody goody about it. Add to science those things that tickle your palate and enhance the dish YOU are preparing.”

The exercise of artistic individuality and innovation, rather than the nurturing of family and tradition, distinguished the masculine, bachelor cook from women cooks. It also served as a reminder of how Esquire’s readers could work to attain social distinction by developing discerning taste in food, wine, women, and clothes, and by applying imagination and creativity to everyday life.

An Epicurean Life

“Man the Kitchenette” instructed readers on how to become a certain kind of very American, very masculine epicure. This was a man who could learn what it meant to have refined and distinctive taste, a project advanced by well-connected, knowledgeable, and (sometimes but not necessarily) wealthy friends. He was not a conspicuous consumer, social snob, or fastidious, fussy “gourmet.” He was equally comfortable in the company of a millionaire as he was in the company of the neighborhood butcher. The butcher, after all, could
provide him with a powerful social asset: knowledge, which could be more important in attaining the good life than wealth. Brody’s column shared some of this key information with his readers, instructing them how to behave as members of a social class that could enjoy leisure, travel, education, and fine food and wine.

Brody’s epicure was the precursor to the “gourmet” in food writing, an identity that Gourmet magazine would begin developing a year later, and that Playboy would incorporate into its Playboy “lifestyle” with its own cooking column in the 1950s. Neither the epicure nor the gourmet was an identity available to women. Both were based on a hierarchy of taste, which was used to reinforce and perpetuate hierarchies of gender. In the world of the kitchenette, women could not be epicures because they had naturally inferior tastes and because they lacked imagination, creativity, knowledge, and skill. As a result, they were enslaved to recipe instructions, which prevented them from creating original dishes. Men, by contrast, were naturally better cooks once they chose to apply their superior taste, imagination, and authority to the task. The epicure and the gourmet also cooked primarily for pleasure of the self, an indulgence not afforded women, who were responsible for feeding their families. Finally, the male gourmet was rooted in the public life of restaurants, the woman cook in the private life of the family home.

The masculine “self” modeled in “Man the Kitchenette” was that of an idealized young, urban bachelor, unencumbered by age or family obligations, free to indulge in sensual pleasures and leisure pursuits. (The concept of the single girl in the city as a desirable identity was still a long way off.) He lived in the city with ready access to “everything money can buy,” in a small, efficient flat. In effect, “Man the Kitchenette” brought men back from their exile in the outdoors, from the woods and the campfire, and began to recode domestic space as masculine, but within limits.

Men could cook in the domestic kitchen as long as they took control, “manned it,” and redefined it as a “kitchenette”: the antithesis of the rambling family kitchen, the symbolic if not literal family hearth, associated strongly with women’s obligation to feed and care for their families. The kitchen was confining, the kitchenette liberating, if only temporarily, a never-never land to which a man could not return once he had entered the bonds of marriage. Once married, a man relinquished the role of domestic cook to his wife, since he

Above: A typical Esquire cartoon showing a clueless woman in the kitchen. From the January 1940 issue.
no longer had to feed himself, and he no longer needed
cooking as a tool for seduction (in Esquire’s world, wives
were never depicted as sexually desirable, and men never
cooked for them). Brody’s column provided men with the
requisite tools to move into a provisional domestic culinary
space and make it their own. He taught men not only how
to cook but how to think of domestic cooking in masculine
terms. He also taught men with social ambitions how to cul-
tivate taste and how successfully to perform the “good life.”

Even though Esquire ostensibly balked at the feminiza-
tion of culture, including that of the magazine industry, and
even though it promised its readers that it would redress this
wrong, in effect the magazine did not reject practices strongly
coded as feminine, such as cooking, shopping for fashionable
clothes, and reading lifestyle magazines. Instead, it recoded
them as appropriately masculine, helping to redefine the
private, domestic sphere as a site where men could legiti-
mately exercise some of the power they had lost in the
workplace during the Depression. Esquire and its “Man
the Kitchenette” column thus enlarged men’s sphere,
“manning” traditionally feminine spaces and practices, cul-
tivating a largely untapped consumer demographic, and
paving the way for the success of future men’s lifestyle and
culinary magazines.

Some Recipes from “Man the Kitchenette”

**Chicken Louisiana (a dish to make in a jiffy,
for impressing an “important girl”)**

Get a whole canned chicken and cut it into pieces. Dip the pieces
in cream, and salt and pepper them. Fry them in butter. Cut a cantaloupe
in half and remove its meat. Heat the empty shells in the oven. Chop
up a green pepper and pimiento and sauté them in butter. Strain and
add a can of whole kernel corn. When the corn, green pepper, and
pimiento combination is hot, add a small quantity of red wine to it.
Then fill the cantaloupe shells, but only partially. Place the chicken
on top of the corn. (May 1940)

**“Manly” Stew**

Get two pounds of beef, lean, for four people. Cube the meat. Make a
pickle out of a quart bottle of red Bordeaux wine, small onions, carrots,
celery, garlic, thyme, one bay leaf, three cloves, and parsley. Marinate
meat in this pickle overnight. Then take out the meat (sorry, you can’t
use the pickle for anything else afterward), sprinkle the meat cubes
with a dash of brandy or whiskey, salt and pepper, and then sauté them
in a pan with finely diced bacon and some flour over a brisk fire for ten
minutes. Then pour in a new bottle of red wine, adding mushrooms
and small onions. Cook for about two hours over a very low flame.
Don’t open the lid, and don’t forget that a stew boiled is a stew spoiled!
(March 1940)

**Romaine (“that meaty, long, substantial herb”) Salad**

Wash a head of romaine, and dry each leaf separately and well with
a napkin. Toast a piece of bread, stroke it gently with garlic, cut the
toast into small squares and place them in a salad bowl; put the leaves
of romaine over the toast. Soft-boil two eggs, and spread them over
the leaves. Add three tablespoonsfuls of olive oil, lemon, salt, pepper, a
bit of Worcestershire sauce, mix very well, and finally sprinkle grated
Parmesan cheese on top. Romaine is the only salad that may be eaten
with the fingers. (January 1940)

**Oysters Rarebit (courtesy of the Grand Central
Oyster Bar)**

Bring one cup of oysters to the boiling point and save the liquor.
Melt two tablespoons of butter, add ¼ pound of fresh cheese, cut in small
pieces; ¼ teaspoon of salt, and a sprinkle of Cayenne. When the cheese
has melted, add the oyster liquor and two eggs slightly beaten. When
smooth, add the oysters and serve at once on toast. (October 1940)

Notes
1. David Kamp, United States of Arugula: How We Became a Gourmet Nation
   (New York: Clarkson Potter, 2008), 70.
2. Andrew F. Smith, Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink (New York:
   Oxford University Press, 2007), 498.
4. Ibid., v.
5. Ibid., 11.
6. Brody was one of five sons born to Bella Rosenfeld and Sandor Brody, the
   popular Hungarian novelist, playwright, and journalist.
7. This article is based on a textual analysis of the first twelve months of
   “Man the Kitchenette” (January 1940—December 1940), during which time the
   narrative patterns and strategies that shaped the column for the next five years
   were firmly established.
8. See David E. Sumner, The Magazine Century: American Magazines since 1900
   (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 82–83.
11. Esquire, August 1940, 154.
15. Ibid., 123.
16. Ibid.
17. Waverly Root and Richard De Rochemont, Eating in America: A History
18. Ibid., 115.
19. Esquire, January 1940, 156.
20. Esquire, February 1940, 123.
22. Esquire, August 1940, 95.
24. Williams Grimes, Appetite City: A Culinary History of New York (New York:
    North Point Press, 2009), 236–237.


27. Ibid.


29. Ibid., 66.

30. Levenstein, Paradox of Plenty, 37.

31. McFeely, Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?, 37-38.

32. Shashlik refers to meat grilled on a skewer over open coals. But Brody described his experience of the dish in Fukier’s restaurant in Warsaw in the 1930s in this way: “Sashlik [sic] is a Cossack specialty, and it is small pieces of mutton strung on a spit, but strangely enough it has to be cooked in a saucepan, stick and all” (Gourmet, February 1940, 123). Brody tells readers to place cubes of mutton, bacon, whole small tomatoes, and onions on five-inch-long, thin round wooden skewers, and to place the skewers in a saucepan, slowly cooking the meat and basting it continually in its own juices. Just before the meat is done, Brody adds butter and green onions, and then serves the skewers and resulting “gravy” over boiled rice.

33. Esquire, July 1940, 96.

34. Ibid.


37. Levenstein, Paradox of Plenty, 35.


39. Esquire, February 1940, 93.


41. Esquire, March 1940, 85.

42. Esquire, July 1940, 96.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Esquire, April 1940, 105.

46. Ibid.

47. Esquire, January 1940, 92.

48. Ibid., 157.

49. Esquire, May 1940, 153.

50. Esquire, January 1940, 156.

51. Ibid., 92.

52. Esquire, April 1940, 105.

53. Esquire, May 1940, 105.

54. Ibid.