Rise to the Occasion
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A French Food Experience

Hedda Gioia Dowd,
Cherif Brahmi,
and Celine Chick

Photography by Courtney Perry

Forewords by Edward Giobbi and Shirley O. Corriher

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Contents

Foreword 7
Preface 11
Acknowledgments 13
1 The Ritual of Eating 19
2 Eating Healthy 23
3 The Road Less Traveled 37
4 All About Soufflés 45
5 The Childhood You Wish You Had 63
6 Green Living 101
7 The Art of Setting the Table 105
8 Life on the Farm 131
9 Chefs Entertaining Chefs 141
10 Global Health Corps Day 173
Resources 185
Notes 189
Recipe Index 191
Foreword

Hedda Gioia Dowd is the most determined home cook I know. She has always been completely focused on cooking and the pleasures of dining.

Her enthusiasm for cooking has paid handsome dividends, as the owner of a successful restaurant and as a home cook.

Hedda’s father was of Italian origin and her mother was of French origin. Can there be a better cooking heritage?

Chef Cherif Brahmi was a guest in our home one weekend. I immediately became aware that he was a talented chef in the French tradition. His passion for food was contagious.

I cannot imagine a better match than Hedda and Cherif. This book is a must for serious cooks and cookbook collectors.

Edward Giobbi

Acclaimed American painter and bestselling author of Eat Right, Eat Well, The Italian Way and Italian Family Dining: Recipes, Menus, and Memories of Meals with a Great American Food Family
You will love this book. From rise n°1, the soufflé restaurant, owners Hedda Gioia Dowd and Chef Cherif Brahmi share treasures with you. Soufflés are a miracle of air and eggs—high and browned. And then, when you dip in, you are greeted by luscious, soft creaminess—the wonder and joy of soufflés! There are also beloved recipes of Hedda’s childhood, with memories of her French mother and grandmother. Delightful dishes include Andrée’s Orange Surprise—oranges hollowed, filled with sherbet and Grand Marnier-flavored whipped cream, and frozen with a secret piece of chocolate hidden in one orange.

In the Beef Volcano, Chef Cherif adds a warm, comfort-food touch to marvelous classic French boeuf bourguignon, with steaming, creamy mashed potatoes forming a volcano to cradle the bourguignon.

The photographs are inviting—from a speckled Araucana hen on her nest to escargots served in antique French escargot shells on fig leaves on an antique bread board.

The stories are engaging, from tales of famous French chefs to mysteries on Hedda’s farm, such as how Ramon solved the problem of the missing eggs.

Rise to the Occasion is more than just recipes. It is like the joy of a soufflé itself—a wonderful, warm experience.

Shirley O. Corriher
Author of CookWise and BakeWise
Food is not only sustenance. Food is nurturing, soothing, and satisfying.

Hedda Gioia Dowd and Chef Cherif Brahmi, owners of rise n°1 in Dallas, Texas, have put food at the center of restaurant and family life. Preparing a delectable meal is first and foremost a way to seduce the epicurean in all of us, to titillate our senses, delight our palates with sheer pleasure, and make us feel whole again. Hedda firmly believes “it is in the sustenance of food that you develop your whole being.”

Hedda grew up eating soufflés and remembers the excitement and mystery surrounding them. She loved peering into the oven window to see them rise. Hedda wanted to share the wonder and joy she experienced as a girl in her French mother’s kitchen. Rise restaurant was born: part restaurant, part family tribute, part heritage, and part retail experience, but fully Hedda and Cherif’s creation.

This book is a tribute to food, tradition, family, and good company.

Hedda Gioia Dowd
Oh! l'amour d'une mère...
Amour que nul n'oublie
Pain merveilleux
Q'un Dieu partage
et multiplie.
Table toujours servie
au paternel foyer
Chacun en a sa part
Et tous l'ont tout entier!... Victor Hugo
I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Andrée and D. Frederick Gioia, who gave me a fire in my stomach from the moment I was born, and a daily journey through example.

For as long as I can remember, food has been the center of my universe. One of my earliest and fondest memories is climbing a cherry tree in my grandparents’ grove in France, sitting on a branch, picking my first pair of ruby earrings—red cherries—and placing them ever so carefully around each one of my ears. I moved my head from side to side just to feel the heaviness of the fruit against my skin. As I climbed down the tree to show them off to my family, I wondered how long they would last before I would devour them and all I had gathered in my pockets.

And so began my love affair with food and the path it took me on.

We are blessed in this life to enter a home with food covering the table and to fill our stomachs each and every day. I realize how many of us in the world will never know this feeling.

Daily, my senses were filled with the aromas and sounds of cooking by a master chef, my French mother. She brought food from her soul and heart to the table, and each day our family gathered to share our thoughts, trials, and pleasures over the most amazing meals.

I am certain that seeing, at my young age, her constantly cooking and the joy it brought her altered my life.

I never imagined that my life could revolve around what I prepare and eat three times a day, but it does and should. Great purpose and thought should go into that which fuels us each day.

I never want to miss a meal, and should it ever be my last, I want it to be shared and memorable.

I want to give thanks for how the ink got on these pages. No one does anything well alone.

I am fortunate to have met my chef partner, Cherif Brahmi, in Dallas in 1978. If it weren’t for his culinary skills, craft, and infinite patience with me, the soufflés at rise would never have been “born.” Our shared recipe book would not be here and I could not have become a restaurateur.

Thanks to my siblings, Eric, Germaine, and Dominique, who grew up sharing and witnessing this lifelong obsession of mine. They will never realize how appreciative I am of them. No one but a sibling would tolerate listening to so much talk about food.

Thanks to my late husband, Hector P. “Jack” Dowd, who always said, “Don’t sweat the mule going blind. . . . Just load the wagon!”

Thanks to André, my son. Before we opened, he hand-placed ever so carefully all 262 recycled wine bottles on our antique wine-drying-rack chandelier and then over months spent infinite hours in conversation over public-relations strategies that have proven invaluable.

Thanks to the Gioia, Dowd, Horner, Scaggs, Gillikin, Denegre, and Scotti families and my supportive friends. “We” is the operative word!

Cherif and I are fortunate to have a dedicated team beside us. So we acknowledge you:

Our coauthor Celine Chick. Her research and dedication are beyond all expectations. We are all the beneficiaries.

Our photographer, Courtney Perry. The photographs speak for themselves.

Our management at rise—Tara Brahmi, Richard Bertschi, James Dembecki, and Jesus Franco.

And our committed staff at rise and honored guests.

Merci!

Hedda
Staff with Pres. George W. Bush (back row, center) and Laura Bush and Hedda Dowd (front row, right)
First and foremost, this book is a tribute to my mother, Sadia, and my father, Moussa. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my brothers and sisters, Said, Rabah, Hadjila, Belkacem, Kader, Louisa, and Boalem, for always giving me the wisdom and resolve to reach for my goals. I would like to thank my children, Alisha, Preston, and Tara, and their mother, Darlene, for all their encouragement over my years in the restaurant business. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the people who helped me in any shape or form to excel as an individual and allowed me to follow my career as a chef.

My curiosity for cooking came not only from watching my mother cook but also through all the exquisite dishes that left me in awe. My mother was always cheerful and looked forward to cooking for and nourishing our family. Through my mother’s love and respect for cooking, my own interest to cook was born. I stumbled into cooking school by chance, but ever since the day I entered that classroom in 1970, I made cooking my life and passion. Since 1975, I have cooked professionally across Europe and the United States. Through my experience and exposure to the cooking world, I have cooked many types of cuisine under many legendary mentors. Jean Lafont, Gilbert Drouelle, and Albert Clément, thank you for sharing your enthusiasm, passion, and knowledge with me.

I now own my own restaurant, rise, with Hedda Gioia Dowd, my business partner and all-around woman extraordinaire, who never took no for an answer when I didn’t believe that the concept of a soufflé restaurant could be as successful as it has been. Thank you, Hedda, for your continued perseverance and inspiring spirit and for making me a believer in your dreams.

In short, this road has not been an easy one. Every day brings a new and exciting challenge, with many unexpected turns. I thank each and every person I have encountered for his or her efforts, support, and will to work under my leadership as a chef. You know who you are, and if you do not, come find me!

Let’s rise!

Cherif

Top: Cherif (rear), Jean Troisgros, Pierre Troisgros, and Jean Lafont. Middle left: Lafont and Cherif with 16 pounds of French truffles at Old Warsaw in Dallas. Middle right: Carl DiCristofalo, Paul Bocuse, Mario Messina, and Cherif in Dallas. Bottom: Cherif.
Cherif's mother, Sadia Brahmi
Rise to the Occasion
The Ritual of Eating

The sound of an eggshell cracking against a silver bowl and a whisk dipping into the pastel-yellow liquid, spinning relentlessly against the sides of the bowl until it rests amidst the blended mixture, could very well conjure up three images: your mother and you wearing aprons on Sunday afternoon and baking goods, or your grandmother in the kitchen of her country home, or thirdly and sadly, you watching a rerun of a cooking show, sleep deprived and wishing that for just a moment you could recreate the simple gesture of cracking an egg and enjoy cooking.

Life as we know it in the United States is fast. We can drive through and pick up a hamburger, salad, brownie, and coffee without leaving the comfort of our car seat. We can make a business transaction from our phone while waiting in line at the grocery store, and we can download and upload anything and everything with the touch of a button.

What if we could just press the “pause” button in our lives?

On the other side of the Atlantic, in some remote villages in France, life follows a different rhythm. People wake up with the cackle of a hen at dawn and meander through the streets on their red bicycles or blue cars to the boulangerie, where they pick up a freshly baked baguette or warm croissant. They go to work, and during their lunch break, they take the time to saddle back up on their bicycles or buckle up in their automobile and head home to have a copious meal with their families or friends.

Eating is a communal and simple act. The food need not be sophisticated or fussy, but rather rustic and hearty. Eating becomes a pleasure and not a rushed necessity.

At rise, eating takes on a more spiritual dimension. People in the dining room feel a true connection between the food they are eating and the atmosphere they are immersed in. It is as though time has stopped, so that nothing can come between your meal and your enjoyment of it. Until you leave the restaurant through its antique temple double doors, you feel enveloped in warmth and comfort. Your dining experience ends with a quote, which a hostess hands you on your way out—a thought for the day. The experience is so unique that one guest, after receiving his quote of the day, exclaimed, “Rise is a massage for the soul!” Eating at rise is more than a ritual; it is a means to open up your soul to an enchanting and uplifting experience that will leave you wanting more. As another guest explained, “I’m feeding my soul as well as my body.” Nourishment for the soul comes from a combination of good food, good company, and a welcoming environment.

A few of our favorite quotes from the quote wheel:

“The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do.”

Galileo

“The only thing that will make a soufflé fall is if it knows you are afraid of it.”

James Beard

“You will wait on your soufflé but your soufflé will not wait on you!”

Anonymous

Like alchemists transforming base metals into gold, Cherif and Hedda spend time preparing food until it becomes so good
Cherif grating salt
it is golden. In order to fully appreciate the food they prepare, they return to a way of preparing and eating that is informed by tradition while being respectful of nature.

Part of eating involves tradition. Oftentimes, we create our own rituals and traditions depending on our availability. We tell family members when we would like to get together and eat as a family. Thanksgiving is an American tradition, which we take pride in. Most of us cook with family and friends to create a satisfying meal that is then shared and enjoyed. The tradition of Thanksgiving brings us closer together, because all households either cook or order the same meal.

When Cherif visits relatives in France, he partakes in the tradition of the Sunday meal at his parents’ house. Just like when he was growing up, the whole family knows that they can come over every Sunday to join in a meal. His mother made couscous every Sunday, using vegetables from her garden. Cherif confesses that is one of the traditions he misses the most while living in America. The good thing about France is that most of the shops and businesses are closed on Sunday, so very few people are working. Spending time with family and friends is everything. In America, because we work so much, we have developed a bit of a “calendar culture.” We constantly refer back to our calendars to see when we can fit someone into our schedule, even if that person happens to be family.

Henri IV, king of France in the sixteenth century, decreed that all workers should be entitled to a poule au pot, a chicken in every pot. This dish went on to become the national dish of France. Still today, many people in France eat a chicken on Sundays in observance of this centuries-old tradition.

When signing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson famously quoted Henry IV: “It announces to the world that our nation wants more than just material wealth; our nation wants more than a ‘chicken in every pot.’ We in America have an appetite for excellence, too.”

Had President Johnson already forgotten that we in America already have more than the simple chicken in the pot? We have the twelve-pound Thanksgiving turkey. That is an American achievement!