

fried tofu, seasoned with black pepper and scallions (see below for a recipe). His intense approach to flavor made me see ingredients in a new light: I don't often get excited by quinoa, but married with radishes, avocado, favas, lots of cumin and chile flakes, it's hard to resist.

—Dana Bowen
The Making of Spine

The Meatball Shop Cookbook Daniel Holzman, Michael Chernow, and Lauren Deen (*Balantine Books, \$28*) Greek *keftedes*, Chinese lion's heads, English faggots—nearly every cuisine has its meatballs. Chef Daniel Holzman and manager Michael Chernow capitalized on the food's universality when they opened the Meatball Shop in Manhattan in 2010. Their concept translates seamlessly to this cookbook, which offers variations from classic beef to a Thai-inflected version made with pork and shrimp. The majority of the recipes call for fewer than 10 ingredients, and many are staples that most cooks have on hand. On top of easy execution, the authors add wit, evident in dishes like the Bambi Balls, made with ground venison, juniper berries, and port. But, despite multicultural nods, *The Meatball Shop Cookbook* owes its largest debt to Italy and Italian America; many of its recipes are updates of those cuisines. Pesto is grounded with earthy spinach, risotto gets a hit of fennel, while vegetables like beets with almonds, pecorino, and water-cress add elegant dimension to the book. —Ben Mims

The PDT Cocktail Book Jim Meehan (*Sterling Epicure; \$24.95*) Jim Meehan, the co-owner of PDT, a latter-day Manhattan speakeasy serving superb tipples, spills his secrets to creating perfect drinks, and the perfect drinking environment, in this book, jauntily illustrated by Chris Gall. Meehan doesn't entirely demystify mixology—he calls for a breathtaking range of esoteric ingredients; I had to hunt down lemongrass and cinchona bark just

to make a gin and tonic—but the results are giddily delicious. My first lesson: Go for balance. Meehan adds orange juice to an Aperol Spritz of seltzer, prosecco, and the namesake Italian bitter, bringing fruity equilibrium to this classic refresher. I also learned that small gestures count: A pinch of salt coaxes sweetness from the Edgewood, a mix of gin, grapefruit, Punt e Mes vermouth, and Lillet. Its creator, Greg Best, is quoted: "I had been bartending for five years and realized I was only standing at the edge of the (proverbial) woods." It's an apt remark for this book. Its first impression is mind-boggling, but its parting gift is a touch of mastery. —Betsy Andrews

Black Pepper Tofu

SERVES 4-6

The recipe for this spicy, fried bean curd comes from *Plenty* (Chronicle Books, 2011) by Yotam Ottolenghi.

- 2 cups canola oil
- 1½ lb. firm tofu, cut into 1" cubes
- ½ cup cornstarch
- 11 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp. finely chopped ginger
- 12 small shallots, thinly sliced
- 12 cloves garlic, crushed
- 8 red serrano chiles, stemmed and thinly sliced
- 5 tbsp. coarsely ground black pepper
- 3 tbsp. kecap manis (sweet soy sauce; see page 106)
- 3 tbsp. light soy sauce
- 4 tsp. dark soy sauce
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 16 small scallions, cut into 1½" pieces
- Cooked white rice, for serving

Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Toss tofu and cornstarch in a bowl until evenly coated. Fry tofu until browned all over, about 3 minutes. Drain and set aside; discard oil, and wipe skillet clean. Return skillet to medium heat with butter. Add ginger, shallots, garlic, and chiles; cook until soft, about 15 minutes. Stir in pepper, soy sauces, and sugar. Return tofu to skillet; cook, stirring, until

warmed through, about 2 minutes. Stir in scallions; serve over rice.

Stuffed Bell Peppers in Tomato Sauce

SERVES 6

For this dish from Claudia Roden's *The Food of Spain* (Ecco, 2011), use flat-bottomed bell peppers that will stand up easily while baking.

- ¼ cup plus 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 red serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 lb. ripe tomatoes, cored and pureed in a food processor, plus 3 finely chopped
- 2½ tsp. sugar
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 1 large yellow onion, minced
- 2 tsp. finely chopped oregano
- 1¼ cups short-grain rice
- 2½ cups vegetable stock
- Pinch of saffron threads
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 red or green bell peppers

1 Make the tomato sauce: Heat 3 tbsp. oil, garlic, and chile in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat; cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add pureed tomatoes, 2 tsp. sugar, and salt; cook until sauce is thickened, about 40 minutes. Set aside.

2 Make the filling: Heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Add onion; cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Add chopped tomatoes, remaining sugar, and oregano; cook until liquid is evaporated, about 10 minutes. Add stock, rice, and saffron; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until rice is slightly underdone, about 15 minutes. Set aside.

3 Heat oven to 400°. Using a paring knife, cut a circle around top of each pepper, discard seeds, and reserve tops. Stand peppers up in a 2-qt. baking dish. Divide filling among peppers; cover with pepper tops. Pour sauce into dish around peppers; cover with foil. Bake for 1 hour; uncover and continue baking until peppers are soft and browned on top, about 15 minutes more.