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BOOKSHELF

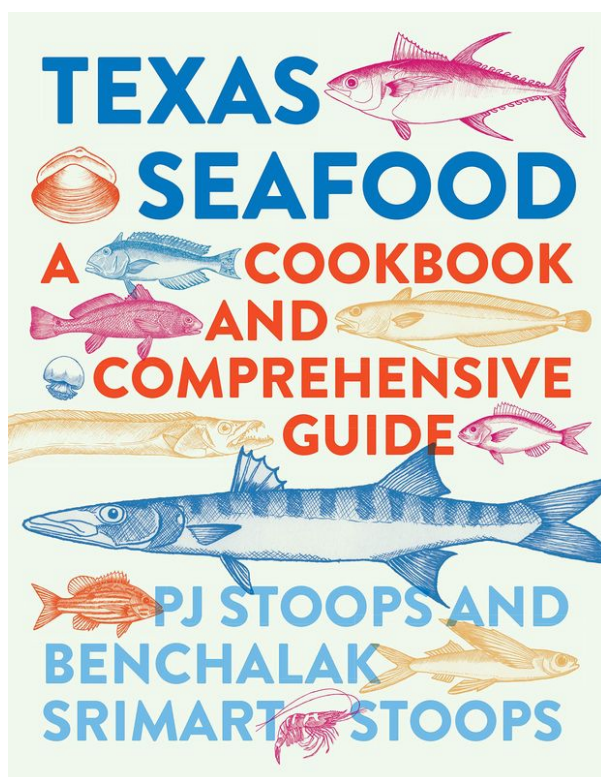
Summer Books 2020: Food

The smell of barbecue may bring Texas to mind, but new books offer a fuller taste of the state.

By Rien Fertel

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If, as John Steinbeck wrote, “Texas is a nation in every sense of the word,” what better way to understand the state’s physical and cultural expanse than through its foodways? A recent handful of cookbooks helps make the case.

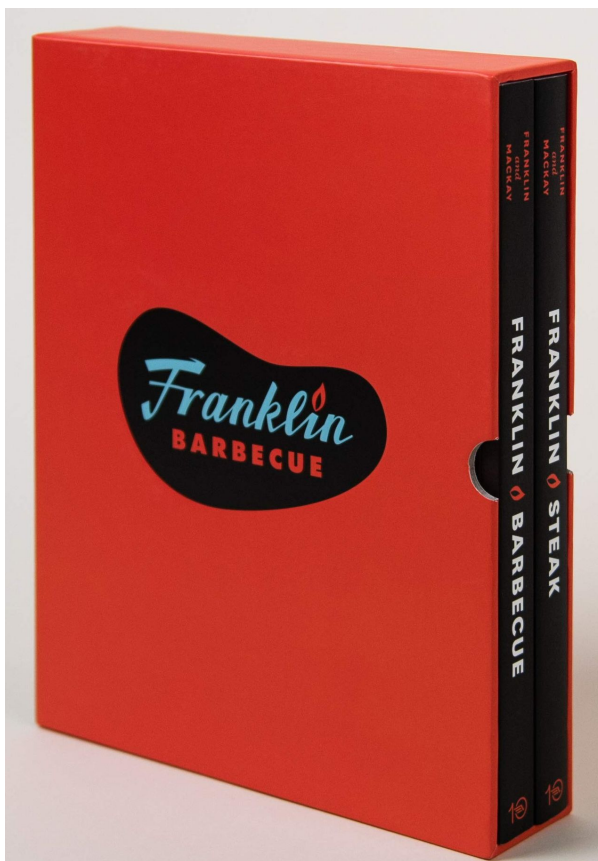


The Texas Gulf Coast is a good place to start. More than 1,400 species of finfish swim in the Gulf of Mexico. “Texas Seafood” (Texas, 310 pages, \$35)—a combination reference guide, cookbook and environmental manifesto by P.J. Stoops and Benchalak Srimart Stoops—has room to consider less than 15% of them yet still feels comprehensive. Houston-area fishmongers, the couple specializes in bycatch, the unintentional harvesting of nontargeted species. A typical Gulf shrimp trawler’s net will contain, for instance, only 16% shrimp. The rest, made up of more than 70 fish and invertebrate species, is often

dumped. Most bycatch is edible; the rest can be used in fish meal and oil production. “Everything should be kept,” the Stoopses advocate. “Everything

should be landed.”

A valuable compendium no matter where you live, “Texas Seafood” encourages you to explore uncommon varieties from your local fishmonger. Swap out red snapper for the less-common vermilion or mangrove snappers. Substitute piggy perch for the overharvested redfish. Seek out the underappreciated rainbow runner. The recipes are inspirational and playful: “Trashfish Soup,” “Appropriately Cooked Whiting,” “The Role of Calamari Will This Evening Be Played by the Lightning Whelk.”



Moving from sea to smoke, Texas is nothing if not a barbecue nation, and perhaps no name better personifies the Lone Star State’s barbecue fanaticism than that of Aaron Franklin, proprietor-pitmaster of the eponymous, ever-popular Austin smokehouse. But why wait in line for three-plus hours when you can smoke brisket the Franklin way at home? That’s the theory behind “Franklin Barbecue,” recently reissued in a striking slipcased set alongside “Franklin Steak” (“**The Franklin Barbecue Collection**,” Ten Speed, 448 pages, \$50). Co-authored with Jordan Mackay, both cookbooks function as single recipes, taking the reader from buying—or building—a smoker to sourcing wood and spices and meat, which doesn’t hit the grill until each book’s penultimate chapter. The key to achieving that all-important smoke ring, says Mr. Franklin, is repetition: “Sweat the details and you’ll end up producing barbecue that would make the most

seasoned of pitmasters proud.”

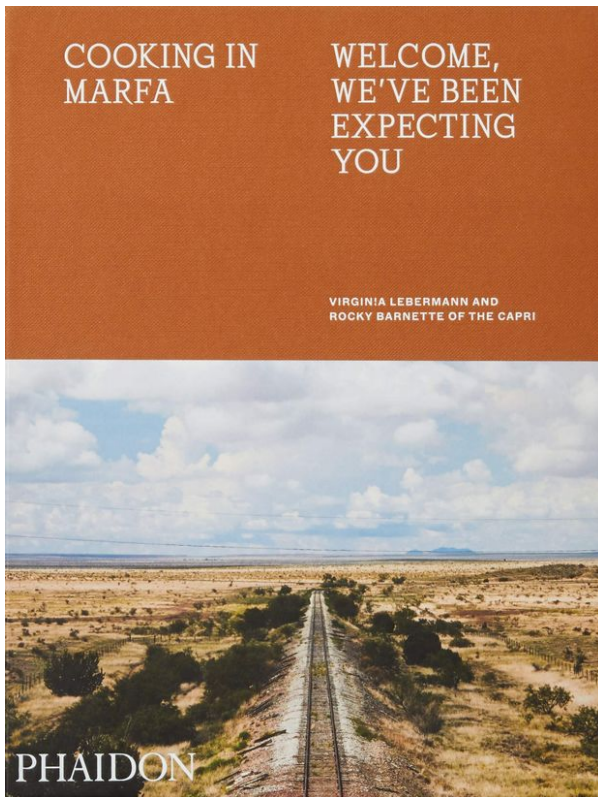


Paula Disbrowe, a veteran cookbook author also based in Austin, prefers a quick, high-heat smoking method—around 300 degrees. Her latest book, **“Thank You for Smoking”** (Ten Speed, 233 pages, \$30), insists that the taste of most any food or drink could be improved by the subtle introduction of smoked hickory, pecan, mesquite, or even teas and herbs. Ms. Disbrowe is interested in smoking key elements of a dish rather than the whole hog. Start with a cocktail, perhaps a dirty martini with smoked Castelvetrano olives or a smoked cherry old-fashioned. Pair with

wild wings with smoked arbol honey or rosemary lamb kebabs with smoky eggplant. Ms. Disbrowe makes room for vegetarians with such dishes as smoked carrot hummus, smoked chickpeas with spinach and saffron yogurt, and smoky lentil tacos with red-cabbage slaw. Leave room for the nine-apple pie with smoked peppercorn crust. Whether you’re a veteran smoker or newbie griller, this book deserves your time and attention.

The artsy mecca of Marfa might not conjure up images of Texas at its most gustatorily authentic, but allow the new cookbook from the husband-and-wife team behind the restaurant Capri to change your mind. In **“Cooking in Marfa”** (Phaidon, 255 pages, \$49.95), co-owner Virginia Lebermann and chef Rocky Barnette document the indigenous foodways of the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. Beans, chiles and nixtamal (masa). Squash, prickly pear and desert flowers such as amaranth and hibiscus.

Like Marfa itself, this West Texas cookbook is ambitious, beautiful and a bit odd. Recipe sections alternate with personal essays—even the restaurant’s designer



pens his own chapter. The book's photography, by Marfa local Douglas Friedman, pairs stunning cerulean desert-sky landscapes with moody-hued shots of food and drink. The recipes are more achievable for the average home cook than at first glance: hibiscus margarita, seven-layer yucca dip, fire-roasted pumpkin soup with soft masa, mesquite-bean ice cream.

“We wanted the Capri to embody the feeling of the history on the border,” Ms. Lebermann writes. But “Cooking in Marfa,” like all these books, embodies the distinct and diverse culinary heart of Texas.

—*Mr. Fertil* is the author of “*The One True Barbecue*.”

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