

# THE JOY OF COOKBOOKS AT THE COOP

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By Oluwakemi Aladesuyi

Deciding which cookbooks populate the tall narrow bookcase that runs parallel to the

cheeses is a fun blip in a busy week for General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky, who manages the weekend evening shifts and facilities.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Despite General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky's busy schedule, she finds time to select the books that the Coop sells.

"For years and years," she said, "I looked for a cookbook of Ethiopian recipes, mostly because I just love Ethiopian food and I didn't know how to make it myself." When

*Ethiopia: Recipes and Traditions From the Horn of Africa* was published in 2018, Astrinsky purchased some copies for the Coop. “Then it went out of stock, and now it’s returned. It’s not easy to keep that book in print.”

The availability of cookbooks reflects the general nature of how the Coop is stocked: The cookbook shelves are fuller in November and December, for example, in preparation for end-of-the-year holidays. A hefty book with lush pictures can make a salivating gift. Throughout the year, however, shoppers can expect a variety of texts, such as the bold, vegetable-forward Ottolenghi cookbooks, whose ingredient-rich recipes shouldn’t be too much of a challenge for the adventurous Coop shopper.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Currently in stock are five books by Yotam Ottolenghi, the Israeli-British chef and restaurateur.

"I try not to buy books that are around a single subject area, like those books about eggs," Astrinsky explained. "I think people are looking for a much wider range of recipes rather than a single topic."

The cookbook selection at the Coop aims to represent a wide swath of regions, and the books are loosely organized by continent. Astrinsky also brings a bit of seasonality to the shelves, hoping that titles like *First Generation: Recipes From My Taiwanese-American Home* and *Banchan: 60 Korean American Recipes for Delicious Shareable Sides* can inspire shoppers during new year celebrations.

Though thousands of cookbooks are published every year, distribution issues constrain what is and is not on the Coop shelves. Before the pandemic, the Coop worked with only two book distributors, allowing for a more boutique experience. "I was able to say...this book will sell really well at the Coop. Can you bring it in for me?" Astrinsky recalled. However, the smaller of the two distributors shut down during the pandemic, and the remaining distributor can bring in a new shipment of books in a day or two but also services many bookstores. "It's rare that I can say, 'Please bring this in.' I don't really have that influence anymore," Astrinsky noted.

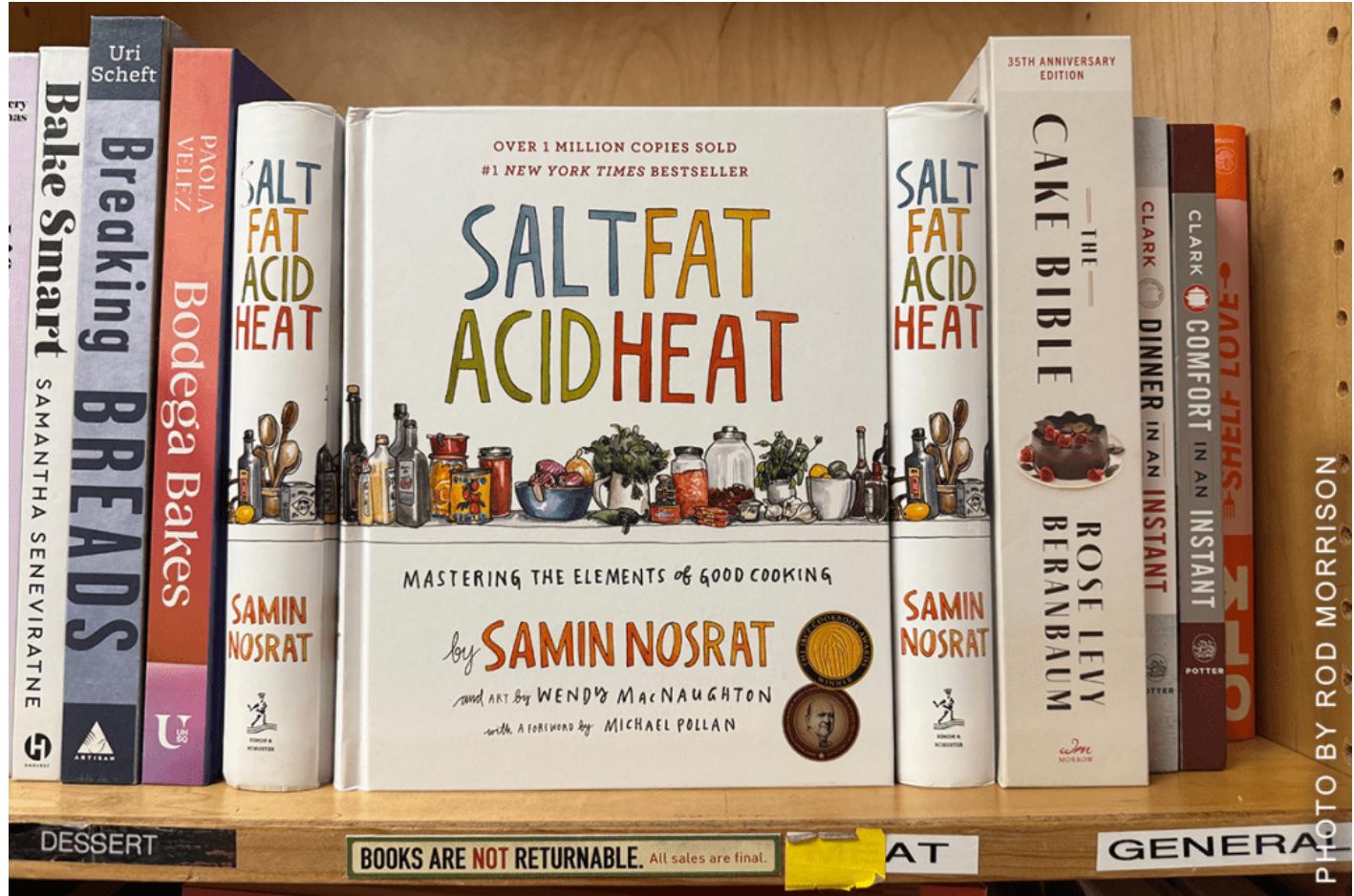


PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Samin Nosrat's million-copy-selling book—and her social media presence—captivated a new generation of cooks.

The internet also influences what is on the shelves. Astrinsky pointed to the trend of food bloggers leveraging their social media followings into print-cookbook deals and hopefully sales. Samin Nosrat's *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, for example, captured the attention of the multimedia ecosystem and has been foundational to a new generation of home cooks. "I think that that book was kind of a big change for lots of people learning how to cook different things and what makes something extra special," Astrinsky reflected.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

As cooks know, cookbooks offer an opportunity to step outside of the status quo and the go-to utilitarian weeknight meal. And in an age where online recipes are ubiquitous and one might be tempted to scroll through different recipes, scan comment sections, and watch videos on technique before even deciding what to eat, the physicality of a cookbook offers something tangibly different.

"You just open the page," said Asrinsky. "You can make adjustments, you figure out how you're going to do it, and just write it down right into the cookbook." Browsing without the intrusion of an algorithm might in fact be the true joy of Coop cookbooks.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

So this spring, Coop cooks, keep an eye out for a few selections that celebrate seasonal vegetables, salads and vegan recipes, such as *Tarkari: Vegetarian and Vegan Indian Dishes With Heart* or *Vegan Pasta Night: A Modern Guide to Italian Style Cooking*. Enjoy!

*Oluwakemi Aladesuyi is a journalist and creative strategist. Her favorite season is fig season.*