

Published December 21st, 2022

New cookbook offers a wealth of delicious holiday side dishes

By Jennifer Wake



Hericots verts with roasted fennel and shallots
Photo provided

The holidays are the one time of year that brings all of Moraga resident Craig McMullen's family and friends together, and for these festive occasions, as an amateur chef, McMullen has taken the opportunity to create a considerable number of side dishes. "Over the years I have experimented and swapped new ideas into our rotation and made adjustments to other recipes, year after year keeping notes and using my family's feedback to perfect the holiday meal."

During the pandemic, McMullen - a retired biotechnology CEO who has been tinkering around the kitchen "for as long as I can remember" and cooks almost every night - sat down and selected some of the more popular side dishes from the past 30 years and wrote his own cookbook, "Sides for Holiday Entertaining."

"My side dishes range from a single vegetable dish to make ahead gratins, and purees, impressive and delectable souffles, terrines, and delicious and surprising combinations of vegetables," McMullen said, adding that each recipe has a handy make-ahead note which offers convenient stopping places that may be the day ahead, prepped in the morning, or finished just before the meal is served.

One of his most complicated dishes is a broccoli soufflé, which McMullen says many amateur cooks think is too complicated to try at home. "I have developed several helpful preparation steps and hints along the way to take the mystery out of making a soufflé and incorporated them into my cookbook," he said. "Additionally, there are two pages of step-by-step illustrations to guide you through its preparation." He said he has found it very gratifying when he's met a reader who has successfully made their first soufflé. "One of my friends who was an early editor [of my cookbook] tried my soufflé recipe to check out the book and was surprised by his success and has become a true supporter."

Finishing his manuscript was a significant accomplishment only to learn that this was just the beginning if McMullen wanted to publish a cookbook. "Photography became a real adventure and I had over 30 photoshoots," he said. "I was very lucky to learn that a close friend was a talented amateur photographer with the correct equipment and knowledge of lighting. Together we set out to learn food photography and it was fun and a real learning experience."

"Sides for Holiday Entertaining" is available at Amazon as well as being sold locally at Across the Way in Moraga, Diablo Foods, and at the Lazy K at Orchard Nursery in Lafayette. For info, visit sidesforholidayentertaining.com

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