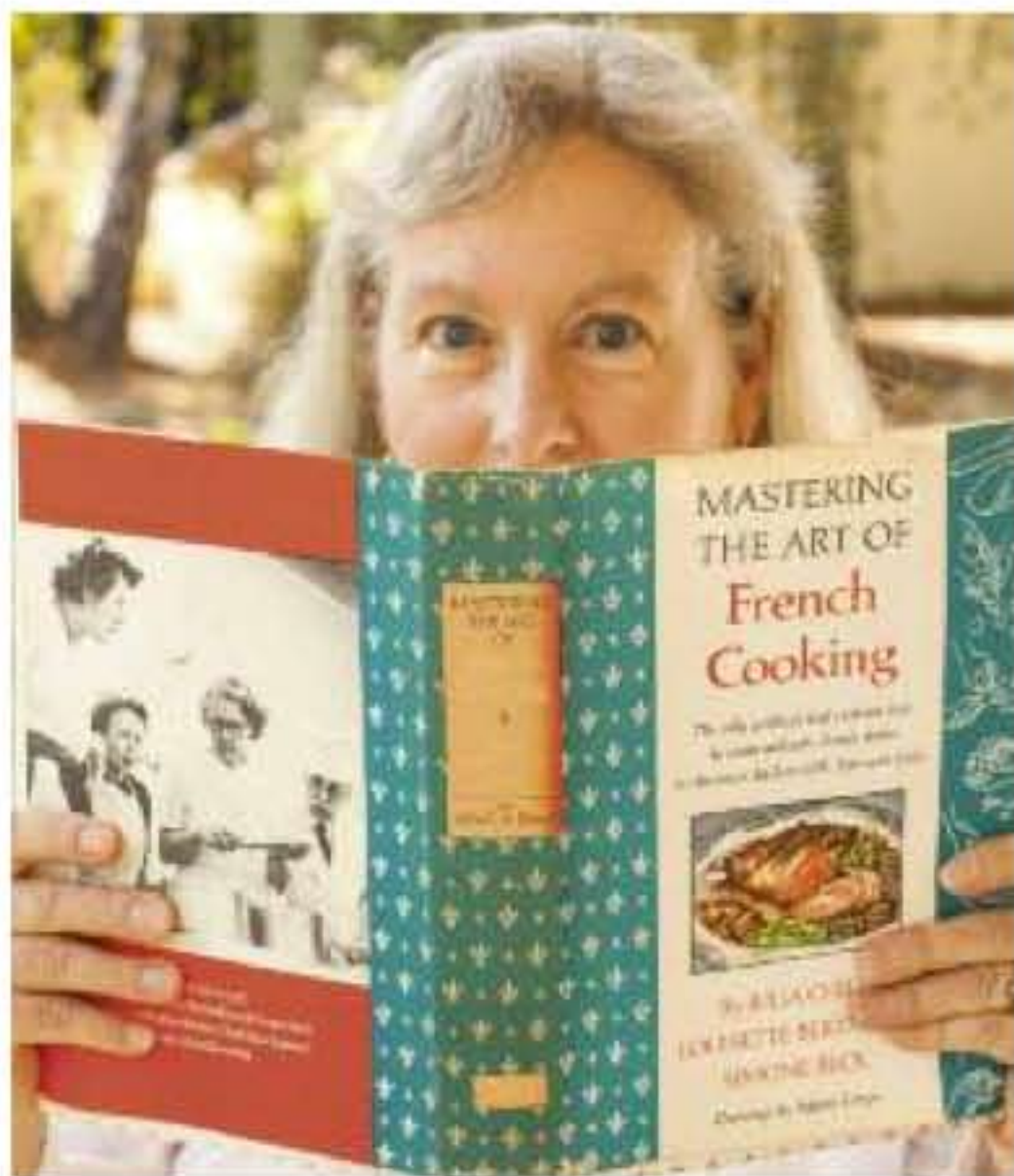


# Department of Unique Gifts for Foodies

*Rare cookbooks ripe for discovery are just a mouse click away*

By Anina Marcus



Liz Pollock has lovingly collected rare cookbooks and vintage cooking ephemera from auctions, book fairs, library sales, private collections and her own personal travels over the last 30 years—and lucky for us, she offers them for sale online or by appointment at her Santa Cruz home.

“When you are a lifelong lover of cooking and books, every vacation turns into bookstore browsing,” Pollock says, speaking about the methods she’s used to assemble what she calls an “old-fashioned” online bookstore, called the Cook’s Bookcase.

Unlike more conventional online book retailers, which automatically spit out titles of any books that relate to your buying patterns, hers is a curated collection of books that Pollock can recommend because she has actually (drumroll, please!) read them. And if

you have questions, she’ll reply personally to your e-mail or take your phone call. She also can special order any new book, and she appraises and buys rare food-related books if you’re looking to shed rather than to acquire.

Just trolling the website’s current book list, which includes photographs of the actual cover of each book (allowing scrutiny of its condition) is a cookbook lover’s adventure. Among the volumes by such food-world rock stars as Julia Child and M.F.K. Fisher are esoteric titles like *Fancy Ice Carving in 30 Lessons* (1947), *Butter Molds: A Primitive Art Form* (1973), *The Poultry Review* (1914) or *The Beautiful Wives Cookbook: Glittering Recipes from Celebrities’ Kitchens* (1970).

One of my favorites is a book from 1930 with black and white pictures of famous chefs, including chef Louis of The Ritz and chef Sabatini of Delmonico’s Steakhouse, called *How Famous Chefs use Marshmallows*. A favorite of Pollock herself is the menu from The Poodle Dog, San Francisco’s first upscale French restaurant, established in 1849. Among the many dishes described in lovely calligraphic style are Veal Tongue Spanish, Shirred Eggs à la Meyerbeer and, of course, what was and still is considered *haute cuisine: escargots!*

And price? Despite their unique and unusual nature, many of the books are priced at no more than a contemporary hardcover volume.

Long before the Internet, Pollock published a catalog of theater and musical books. But she promised herself that when she turned 50, she would devote herself to her passion—the food and wine world. Maybe it was her junior high school years in Pasadena, when she was almost always cooking her family’s dinner, that started it all. Her mother bookmarked the recipes from Irma Rombauer’s classic, *The Joy of Cooking*, so Pollock would know what to make when she arrived home from school. Pollock still considers *The Joy of Cooking* (first published in 1931 and still in print after nine updates) a “must have” for any beginning cook; she keeps current editions of it and other classics in stock.

Pollock is quick to point out that looking for pristine copies is not her first priority, but rather, she is interested in finding the books that teach how things were done long ago. The more smeared and stained, sometimes, the better, because that shows the book was loved and used.

Ultimately, just as the slow food movement aims to preserve the one-of-a-kind flavors and sense of time and place that such culinary heirlooms as Blenheim apricots and bacon avocados can evoke, Pollock with her website seeks to help protect the art of the printed word and the pleasure of holding that rare book—especially that rare cookbook—in your own hands, where you can read the handwritten notes penciled in the margins.

Just recently, I looked at an old cookbook from which my mother baked, and read her note on the margin: “Bake exactly 1 hour from the moment you put it in the oven.” Her oven might not have been the exact same temperature as mine, but isn’t it the thought that counts?

**The Cook’s Bookcase • 831.251.9218 [www.cooksbookcase.com](http://www.cooksbookcase.com)**

Anina Marcus is a lifelong resident of the Monterey Peninsula. When she isn’t cooking, she is thinking about what to eat, and if she can stave off hunger, she writes.