



The Art of Eating In: How I Learned to Stop Spending and Love the Stove

Cathy Erway

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In the city where dining is a sport, a gourmand swears off restaurants (even takeout!) for two years, rediscovering the economical, gastronomical joy of home cooking

Gourmand-ista Cathy Erway's timely memoir of quitting restaurants cold turkey speaks to a new era of conscientious eating. An underpaid, twenty-something executive assistant in New York City, she was struggling to make ends meet when she decided to embark on a Walden- esque retreat from the high-priced eateries that drained her wallet. Though she was living in the nation's culinary capital, she decided to swear off all restaurant food. *The Art of Eating In* chronicles the delectable results of her twenty-four-month experiment, with thirty original recipes included.

What began as a way to save money left Erway with a new appreciation for the simple pleasure of sharing a meal with friends at home, the subtleties of home-cooked flavors, and whether her ingredients were ethically grown. She also explored the anti-restaurant underground of supper clubs and cook-offs, and immersed herself in an array of alternative eating lifestyles from freeganism and dumpster-diving to picking tasty greens on a wild edible tour in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Culminating in a binge that leaves her with a foodie hangover, *The Art of Eating In* is a journey to savor.

Watch a Video

The Art of Eating In: How I Learned to Stop Spending and Love the Stove Details

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From Reader Review The Art of Eating In: How I Learned to Stop Spending and Love the Stove for online ebook

Emma says

I thought the book started out interesting enough. Being in roughly the author's age demographic, I know the excitement of trying to cook on your own while being brought up in an eating-out culture. Some things she points out- people whose parents didn't cook usually don't cook at home, the price of grocery store shopping vs. eating out, urban foraging were interesting to read. The memoir style writing of it is fine as well, but she quickly loses steam and stretches the most inane stories for way too long. Supper clubs and private food parties in NYC sound fun, but when it becomes about what people are wearing and how awkward she felt and her numerous flings and how exalted she became in the foodie-NYC-sphere it becomes just so tedious and boring! She is so mean about her failed dates too, like being disgusted with one guy just because he's two years younger than her. Whatever. If her publisher didn't ask for 300 pages I'm sure she could have kept her writing much more concise and interesting, but they didn't, and she didn't.

Meh.

Rachel says

I wish it was good. It suffered from giving too much detail and then not enough. She treated us to word for word dialogue when it wasn't needed and overly flowery prose but then didn't give us much detail about her relationship, every day cooking or any real insight.

Jenny Bunting says

This book was an utter slog for me and it's a little bit my fault and a little bit the book's fault.

I'm not a cook and I cook for pure survival and because I'm not rich. I went into the book hoping that it was more "I did this for the frugal" rather than "I learned to cook better and I LOVE COOKING" memoir I got. This memoir, in my opinion, would only work for people who love cooking and not people like me who are simply not interested.

Still, that might also be the book's fault since a good writer can make anything interesting enough to read about. I felt this lacked charisma and that magic needed to be truly engaged. This book took me over three weeks to finish which indicates me that it didn't hold my attention and I finished it to finish it. I never felt compelled to read it and I was forcing myself to finish it.

Dina says

The premise of Erway's book is a simple one: she's a broke-ish twenty-something who is getting bored with the monotony of restaurant hopping around her city and figures not eating out in the capital city of eating out would make pretty good blog fodder. She's not necessarily looking for enlightenment, just a challenge and

way to save a few bucks. This is all well and good, however, it also ends up being the biggest downfall of the book, a drawn out tome at 320 pages. Unlike others in the food writing genre who set out on some far fetched plan hoping to learn about and demonstrate larger ideas through their experiments (Pollan and Spurlock off the top of my head), Erway seems to be doing the not-eating-out thing on a lark and finding a bit of notoriety along the way is just a happy surprise.

There are some interesting forays into ways of not-eating-out: dumpster-diving, supper parties, cook-offs, etc. and Erway does a nice job of reflecting if each of these activities is a genuine form of staying away from restaurants, given that the dumpster-food is from Dunkin' Donuts and the supper party meals may well be cooked by big name NYC chefs. There's a fun aside on the act of dating when going out for dinner is off the table, but the challenge isn't observed as closely as each of Erway's suitors are. There-in lies my biggest complaint of the book and possibly the reason for its overly-optimistic page count. If I were a more diligent reader, I might have thought to jot down each time a new friend of Erway's popped up, an occasion I'd guess to occur at no less than 50 times. These friends rarely provide any insight into the not-eating-out challenge, nor do they really appear to be doing anything at all, aside from getting a shout-out in an acquaintance's book. Knowing that Luke asked if you needed help stirring a pot a chili before disappearing from the narrative forever is a waste of space and such occurrences took up a large block of space, such as a completely irrelevant story of a friend's recovery from being hit by a car while on bike. Touching, but irrelevant.

Also frustrating was that Erway's experiment ended as arbitrarily as it began. On a day approaching her two year anniversary of eating in, her mother asks that she meet her and an uncle for lunch. And why not? Soon we're gobbling down Korean in a hole in the wall just like everybody else. The only explanation we're given is that Erway feels she has outgrown the experiment; she knows that she can eat in forever now, so why not eat out? (I'm reminded of a scene in the movie *Coffee and Cigarettes* with Tom Waits and Iggy Pop discussing quitting smoking: "I quit, so can I have one. Right?") Lastly we're left with an ill-thought out "opposite week", in which Erway decides she will only eat at restaurants for an entire seven days. This, too, is not meant explore any real ideas other than 'just to see'. After the week is up we reflect on her weight gain/loss (which was not a concern in any other part of the book) and cost efficiency (duh).

All in all, if you're looking for a book to inspire you to cook at home more often, don't start here. I suppose the recipes tacked on at the end of each chapter are supposed to nudge you in that direction, but reading one that was mentioned 30 pages ago, 30 pages filled with insights of going out to bars and listening to music with friends, makes it difficult for a reader to remember why they might want to cook that recipe in the first place.

Sara says

Cathy Erway loves food. Which is good, because she lives in New York City, which is paved with excellent restaurants. But after one too many lousy, expensive midtown lunches and unsatisfying, greasy late night snacks, Cathy decided to give up restaurants. This book is a chronicle of how she spent two years of her New York life trying new recipes, competing in chili cook-offs, packing picnic lunches and making do, even when her apartment has no cooking gas because the previous resident never turned on the stove.

I enjoyed the way Cathy embraced the challenge of cooking every meal and I envied her energy. She rarely takes the easy way out and she approaches even the most average of meals with creativity. She always seemed practical and relatable, even when she's in the midst of chopping a mountain of onions for a

community dinner party. More than anything, I appreciated the way a story of eating in became a story of how cooking and eating food can be a beautifully social experience.

Lucy says

This is the first time I have ever given a book on Good Reads no stars; it was dreadful.

The book is a collection of anecdotes and stories from Cathy, who -for somewhat inexplicable reasons- has chosen not to eat out in New York. Cathy shares with us her revelations that home-cooking is cheaper, healthier and sometimes tastier than eating out. I fully acknowledge that I entered into the relationship in complete knowledge of Cathy's agenda, however, I do enjoy a good foodie book so was willing to put aside my concern over the premise of the book. I shouldn't have. It was dire.

'Well i decided to give home cooking gimmick of my own. To eat for a prolonged period of time without the assistance of restaurants whatsoever. Was that something that a New York-born, New Jersey-bred, working, middle-class, twenty six year-old American such as myself could achieve?'

It's certainly a question that only a "New York-born, New Jersey-bred, working, middle-class, twenty six year-old American" would pose.

The book offers us insight into Cathy's homecooking: including her first foray into bread making where - despite claiming to be an avid cook- she states " I didn't think I'd ever seen one of these packages of yeast before". Unfortunately I ignored this giant flag to "STOP READING NOW!" Cathy is clearly a keen and competent cook but does she 'homecook' like normal people? Does she hell. Her dinners always appear to take hours of preparation and end up on the table at 11pm at night. Occasionally she tries to excite us by listing those things she just 'threw in a pan': I cannot believe that she doesn't realise this is how most people usually cook/eat.

She also visits freegans; supper clubs and cook-offs in an attempt to widen her culinary horizon. This could have been really interesting, perhaps if she told us some more background or studies or facts about any of these things, then I might have been more interested. As it was we heard Cathy's non-too-deep thoughts on the matters: "I didn't feel that I was sacrificing my health by having meat only once or twice a week. On the contrary you could argue less meat in our diets keeps humans and the earth healthier".

The whole book was written like a diary of a 14 year old girl. A 14 year old girl with no writing talent. I am flabbergasted that Cathy pens a very successful blog and has made her career as a copy writer. The woman cannot write. I'm not sure I've ever read a book with so many examples of poor sentence structure and ill-advised word choice. Was this book even edited? Here are a few of my choice favourites:

"I decided it was a good time to bring others into the fold by having guests over-if only because of the fact that there were so many different dishes I wanted to make and not enough mouths to serve them to'.

'Plus there are a million and one uses for leftover bread- it can become bread crumbs used to stuff or coat things in a thousand different ways".

"If you search "wild edibles" in Google you're likely to come up with Brill's website first and foremost"

And so here I make a little confession... I actually finished the worst book I've ever read because I really

enjoyed looking for these humdingers of sentences. Did I learn anything about not eating out in New York? No not really. Did I learn anything I didn't already know about the benefits of eating in? No not really (although it should be noted that Cathy estimates her grocery bill for a week of eating in to be \$25 which is about £15 or €19. What?! I knew food prices in America were artificially low, but that is ridiculous!). Would I recommend it to anyone else? Er no.

*I actually read this on the kindle: my first e-reading of a book for fun and not for academic purposes. There were points where I think the punctuation errors were not the fault of the author. I think the e-book also needs a good editor. There were also occasions in which I thought the wrong word had been used "by friends sitting on a pastiche of blankets in a clearing of trees'. I wouldnt put it past Cathy to use the wrong word here but I think she meant patchwork, I am giving her the benefit of the doubt and blaming this on the e-book.

Sally81ha says

I chose this book as part of a desire to change some poor eating habits. I am just now taking what I eat more seriously, at age 33, but better late than never. I eat out more than I would like to, mostly due to laziness and poor planning. The author describes a brief history of how restaurants came to be and how eating out is so expected and normal in our lives. Overall, it is not positive for our health, our bank accounts, or the environment. The author researched many different eating-from-home movements, evaluating their pros and cons. She is a natural writer and it made for a delightful read. It is unrealistic to think we will all stop eating out altogether, but it is a push in a good direction.

AnnaBnana says

There were parts of this book that were interesting, and I confess that I added Erway's blog to my feed reader after reading it (mostly for the recipes).

That said, the lower star rating is because this book is not what I thought it would be based on the title or the marketing. Erway did indeed embark on a quest to stop eating out in NYC and she learned to love the stove. I thought the book (and its tips) would be more practical. I wanted to read it and feel like I could do it. But Erway doesn't just stop eating out. She also starts cooking in crazy competitions, going to underground supper clubs, foraging for food in the garbage and in the park...it just wasn't what I thought it would be. I wanted to be inspired to love my own kitchen more. I wanted to read tips about how to fit cooking into my life when I don't get home from work until almost 7 some nights. I didn't really want to read about picking edible weeds from the park.

Stacy says

I think I was expecting more practical tips for less eating out when I picked this up. What I got was a memoir of a twenty-something New Yorker who gives up eating out for two years and starts a blog about it called Not Eating Out in New York.

I did a lot of the same things she gets into when I was that age - the supper clubs, trips to the Farmer's

Market, cooking classes, cook-off contests, hanging out with friends. At my current life stage with 2 kids under 4, I was looking more for easy budget-friendly ideas for cooking at home. There were a few recipes, but I guess her blog is better for that sort of thing.

Towards the end of the book, the author goes on a date and is asked what else she's into, and she replies, "I don't know." I think that sums up what the book lacks: depth and variety of interest. She's kind of a one-trick pony, at least as far as this book goes.

I hope she does a sequel called Not Drinking Out in New York, because she consumes an alarming amount of alcohol, thus offsetting the financial and health benefits of not eating out. The number of times she describes biking home in a drunken state worried me - and several of the people she describes in the book. I kept waiting for disaster, but while a couple of her friends got hit by a car, she doesn't in the book. She muses briefly on the fleeting nature of health and life... then continues biking home drunk. I hope by now she has changed this habit - yikes!

Emma Kaufmann says

Only in America could a book be based on the premise of the author going on a fast - and guess what the fast was - it was nothing remotely difficult like living on soya beans - it was not going to restaurants for two years and cooking for herself!! WOW!! lol

Okay and even if that premise is flimsy at best a better writer might have made something of it that was astute or insightful. But all Cathy's observations were trite and obvious and read very much like a mid twenties woman with little/no experience of life which is what she is.

Cathy Erway has a website called <http://noteatingoutinny.com/> and there are some good recipes on it but why someone thought that should be turned into a book is a real head scratcher as Cathy is a poor writer. I couldn't finish it sorry.

Oriana says

My brilliant friend Leila is a garblogger -- I think she may have even invented the term. Go to her blog, everydaytrash, which is a trove of insightful and unusual and fascinating things about garbage, here, there, and everywhere. She is amazing!

When this book came out, they sent her a copy to review, which she kindly loaned me, saying that if I wanted, I could post a review on her site. So naturally, being a good friend, I fucking forgot all about it. Ugh. But then! I got these new bookshelves, which has given me a much-needed excuse to sort and cull my massive book collection, and I found this. So I'm reading it finally! Maybe I'll have brilliant things to say when I'm done, and maybe Leila (and her readers) will even still care.

Marci says

I had such high hopes for this book. With a teenage son and a soon-to-be teenage son, plus three other kids, I'm trying to find ways to cut back on my food budget and was hoping to find ways to make eating in an

easier experience (not being so fond of cooking and all). The book started out promisingly enough with a young lady in NYC looking to cut expenses and deciding to eat in and blog about it. In the course of blogging she decides to delve into different ways to cut her food budget and tries different things such as foraging in the local parks and freeganism (dumpster diving for food). This is where she started to lose me. There is now way I can imagine dumpster diving to try and find dinner for seven people each night. "Well kids, why don't we see if we can find some slightly stale bagels and maybe some soon-to-be expired lettuce for dinner tonight!" I understand that this was about her journey but it seemed like a poor-man's attempt at Julie and Julia. In the end I was completely befuddled about why she included an impromptu sexual encounter in the book and where she was going with the story line. It seemed like the book was a series of social mishaps centered around food and her attempts to win various food competitions. Each episode in her book seems to rely heavily on booze. I guess many young people drink that much but I was getting pretty tired of reading about the beer in her hand. The recipes also seemed way out of the league of what I might make for my family. I'm sure there are others who connect to her life in a better way but I was bored and disappointed by the book.

Liza says

Sorry, this book is just far too San Francisco for me. I enjoy Erway's website because I made an *amazing* recipe from it, but I don't like when people come across as self-important about their dining choices. It's just completely absurd to me when most people on earth don't have enough to eat. Also, I'm reminded of my friend who lives in an area with absolutely no restaurants within a 5-mile radius. So she has no choice about eating in, and she doesn't make a big deal about it, because it would be ridiculous for her to do so since it's just the way things are. And yo, I have hypoglycemia, so I'm not going to feel guilty for buying an extremely processed/probably unsustainable energy bar when I'm about to pass out from hunger. Good for you for Erway for being able to make lots of snacks, but it's not possible for a lot of us. I volunteer with kids who can't feed themselves because of physical disabilities, so I just can't take this book seriously.

But really, Erway's recipes are awesome if you have the resources and time and ability to cook.

P.S. I don't think it's fair, also, to be *selectively* preachy about how one should eat. If you're going to talk about the environment, then why eat beef? Or fish? I personally don't care if people do, but if they are preaching about sustainability, then it seems like a high level of cognitive dissonance for them to do so given how unsustainable those industries are. (Unless she's buying free-range beef/"wild" fish, which kind of throws the thriftness factor out the window.)

P.P.S. I'm not trying to be mean. I'm genuinely curious.

Carly Ellen Kramer says

(As posted on crowdedearthkitchen.com)

"...people will say that the world of restaurant food is vast. But the world of cooking and eating in far exceeds it in scope, even in a city as seemingly disinclined toward home cooking as New York." -p. 317

As someone who used to have an (almost) daily restaurant habit and slowly became a (mostly) scratch cook,

I truly loved this book. In *The Art of Eating In*, Cathy Erway tells the story of both extremes. Immediately on Page 1, she sets the context of common food attitudes in New York City by describing a showing for a two-bedroom apartment that didn't have a kitchen. While the very idea sounds like science fiction to my Midwestern sensibilities, Ms. Erway patiently and thoroughly explains the saturation of dining establishments, normalcy of evening take-out, and patterns of socializing over food that are common in the burgeoning city she calls home.

Then, she deconstructs these norms with precision as she unveils her plan to avoid any and all New York City restaurants for an entire year. Cathy Erway leaps right in, walking the reader through her own personal journeys of cooking and baking, creative food sourcing, and grappling with the sometimes awkward realities of developing and maintaining personal relationships sans restaurants. From urban foraging adventures to unabashed dumpster diving to underground supper clubs, Cathy Erway leaves no stone unturned in her exploration of the expansive culinary world beyond the restaurant scene.

As I read this book, I was captivated by Ms. Erway's candor and her learning curve. For example, while she entered into this project without any experience (and little enthusiasm for) yeast baking, she was undaunted by meat processing or cooking with offal. This runs completely contrary to my own kitchen experiences, and was fascinating to ponder. I found myself on more familiar ground as Ms. Erway earnestly described how her project made her acutely aware of the waste associated with restaurant food. At one point, she even designed an experiment whereby she weighed and measured the waste associated with a restaurant meal compared to a similar home cooked meal. Very interesting. Her commitment to becoming better informed is clear in her references to the works of authors such as Michael Pollan and Mark Schapiro.

Cathy Erway's book is written from a refreshing perspective – rather than teaching the reader from a position of preexisting expertise, Ms. Erway invites the reader to share in her own journey of learning and discovery. Along the way, Ms. Erway shares fun recipes and quirky stories guaranteed to keep the reader engaged. If you could use a boost of enthusiasm to enjoy your kitchen even more, I highly recommend picking up a copy of Cathy Erway's *The Art of Eating In*!

Tonya says

I'd give this negative stars if I could. Utter twaddle. Not compelling reading, tedious writing, and the author is insufferable. I literally threw this book across the room after reading where she said she "understood" why Chinese restaurants might cook cats after dealing with her roommate's cat. What utter crap.

But, the cat bashing aside, it's just badly written and so overly "Wow! let me name drop" and "I can cook anything!" I didn't even get to her dating...

Whatever you hope this book will be, it won't be. It's less about eating in and more about painfully long passages of picking lint from her naval and trying to show us how utterly fascinating it is!
