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Palate-pleasing cookbooks By By AMANDA GOLD /San Francisco Chronicle

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Cookbook authors will tell you these days it's more difficult than ever to get a book published. Between market saturation and the recession, it seems that only the strong survive. That makes our job of reviewing them even harder, because several of this year's crop have something good to offer.

Recent weeks have brought highly anticipated books like David Chang and Peter Meehan's "Momofuku," packed with recipes from Chang's popular New York restaurants; "Simple Fresh Southern" specialties from experts Matt Lee and Ted Lee; and a slew of baking books.

After sifting through the stack (albeit a little smaller this season), here are some gift-able favorites.

— "Canal House Cooking, Volume 2": Veteran food editors Christopher Hirsheimer and Melissa Hamilton spend their days cooking and designing books in their Canal House studio in New Jersey. The second volume in a three-part series, this book focuses on fall and the holidays. The recipes, such as Pear Sorbet With Brandy, and Mashed Rutabagas With Loads of Scallions, are easy, comforting and appealing. (Canal House; 134 pages; \$19.95; available at thecanalhouse.com.)

— "Coco": Although filled with enticing and inventive recipes, this is less a cookbook and more a volume for the coffee table or armchair. Ten culinary icons, including Spanish innovator Ferran Adria, British whole-animal chef Fergus Henderson and Chez Panisse's Alice Waters, each picked their 10 favorite contemporary chefs. The result is 100 chef profiles, with menus and recipes. It's informative and fun. (Phaidon Press; 440 pages; \$49.95.)

— "**Lobel's Meat Bible**": The **Lobels**, well-known New York butchers who have written several books about **meat**, have divided this one into chapters on beef, veal, pork, lamb, poultry and rabbit, game birds and game, and variety **meats** (a/k/a offal), and supplemented them with sauces and condiments. Each chapter provides easy-to-understand descriptions of the cuts and suggestions for use. (By Stanley, Evan, Mark and David Lobel, with Mary Goodbody and David Whiteman; Chronicle Books; 319 pages; \$40.)

— "Mastering Cheese": Max McCalman knows cheese — he's curriculum dean at Artisanal Premium Cheese Center in New York and has written two other highly regarded books on the subject. His latest is for the connoisseur. It's an exhaustive look at cheese, including lessons on organizing tastings and pairing beer and cheese, to name a few. (By Max McCalman and David Gibbons; Clarkson Potter; 384 pages; \$40.)

— "Seven Fires": There's been no shortage of buzz surrounding this handsome book, a collaboration between South American celebrity chef Francis Mallmann and food writer Peter Kaminsky. Exploring the concept of cooking with fire, it's a wildly fun read and littered with pictures that will make you grimace and salivate at the same time. (Artisan; 278 pages; \$35.)

APPLE AND RIESLING SAUERKRAUT WITH GRILLED SAUSAGES

Serves 4

Adapted from "**Lobel's Meat Bible**," by Stanley, Evan, Mark and David Lobel. The sauerkraut can be made

up to one week ahead.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

5 ounces salt pork or fatty unsmoked bacon, such as pancetta, sliced thinly and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

2 medium onions, chopped

1 large sweet apple, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

4 bay leaves

12 juniper berries

1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground fresh black pepper

Kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon sugar

1-1/2 cups off-dry Riesling wine

2 pounds sauerkraut in brine, thoroughly rinsed and drained

1 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth, or water

8 German-style sausages, such as bratwurst and/or bockwurst

German-style mustard (optional)

Put the oil and salt pork in a 5- to 8-quart heavy pot over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until most of the fat has rendered and pieces are crisp, about 10 minutes. Remove the solids with a slotted spoon and save for another use. Add the onions to the fat and cook without browning them, stirring occasionally, until very soft, about 20 minutes.

Increase the heat to medium-high and stir in the apple, bay leaves, juniper berries, black pepper, 1 teaspoon salt, the sugar and the wine. Bring to a simmer; cook for 3 minutes. Add the sauerkraut, stirring to coat. Stir in the broth, cover the pot and cook at a bare simmer over low heat for 45 minutes.

Uncover the pot and raise the heat to medium. Simmer until the liquid has nearly evaporated, stirring regularly, 5 to 10 minutes more. Add salt to taste. If making ahead, cool, then cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Grill or pan-fry the sausages according to package instructions. Reheat the sauerkraut if necessary and divide among serving plates. Top each with two sausages and serve with the mustard, if you like.

Wine pairing: Choucroute garnie is classic Riesling fare because sauerkraut's fermented tang is mellowed when simmered in Riesling. Try the 2008 Jekel Vineyards Monterey Riesling (\$13).