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# REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### EAT REAL VIETNAMESE FOOD

*A Step-by-Step Guidebook to the Classic Cuisine of Vietnam*

Liên Nguyễn

Manuscript

## BOOK REVIEW

A cookbook preserves Vietnamese recipes from the mid-20th century.

The 1950s were a time of change in Vietnam. As migrants from the northern part of the country moved south, the cuisines of the two regions met and mutated to form new versions of old dishes. This was the cuisine of the writer's mother, who passed down these recipes to the Paris-born Nguyen (co-author of *Eat Real Food or Else...*, 2016, etc.). With little in the way of preface, the volume dives right into the recipes, from small plates like *bánh bao* (pork buns) and *gỏi ngó sen* (lotus stem salad) to entrees like *cá kho* (fish in caramel sauce) and *chả cua nhồi* (stuffed crab) to vegetable dishes like *rau muống xào tỏi* (sautéed water spinach with garlic), soups like *cháo tôm* (rice porridge with shrimp balls), and classic Vietnamese desserts like the elegant *bánh chuối* (banana cake). The French influence in Vietnamese cuisine can be seen in such recipes as *ba tê sô* (an adaptation of *pâté en croûte*) and *canh măng tây cua* (crab and asparagus soup). Nguyen even includes some dishes that are not technically period appropriate—like *bông bí lăn bột chiên* (zucchini blossom fritters)—but that are prepared according to traditional Vietnamese methods. Each recipe is accompanied by numerous full-color photographs that illustrate various steps in the cooking process, along with notes on what ingredients might be substituted or added to the mix. An extensive, useful glossary of common ingredients and utensils rounds out this concise but comprehensive introduction to mid-century Vietnamese cuisine. Nguyen writes in a simple prose that encourages the reader with practical tips: “To get a good looking roll, you must press tightly, but not so tight as to tear the rice paper (use all your fingers!).” This is a meat- and shellfish-heavy cuisine, though the author reminds the reader throughout that these are flexible recipes that welcome substitutions, allowing aspiring cooks to shape them to whatever diets to which they adhere. For anyone interested in making Vietnamese food the way that Nguyen's mother would have (mostly) made it, this cookbook delivers a thorough and beautifully compiled set of suggestions.

A delightful collection of Vietnamese dishes from the 1950s.

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