



BakeWise

Shirley Corriher's newest cookbook demystifies the secrets of successful baking.

WHEN THE GRANDE DAME JULIA Child was alive and had cooking questions, she called Shirley. When the little elves in the tree turn out cookies that are not up to par with their elfin magic, they call Shirley. When *The New York Times*' science section has a question about baking, they call Shirley. When NPR wants to teach its listeners how to make a better chocolate-chip cookie and when Terry Gross of *Fresh Air* wants to learn the science of cooking a turkey, they call Shirley. And when Jimmy Kimmel wants to do some serious frying on set of everything from ping-pong balls to a wristwatch with his main man Snoop Doggy Dogg, he calls Shirley.

It is amazing that one of the most respected food authorities in the world lives in Atlanta, Georgia, shopping occasionally at the Whole Foods Market on West Paces Ferry Road virtually unnoticed as she zips about in a motorized cart, carefully choosing her fruit or picking up a bag of almonds. Shirley O. Corriher is anonymous to all but those in the know.

Food Network star Alton Brown comments, "It's impossible to be with Shirley without getting all excited

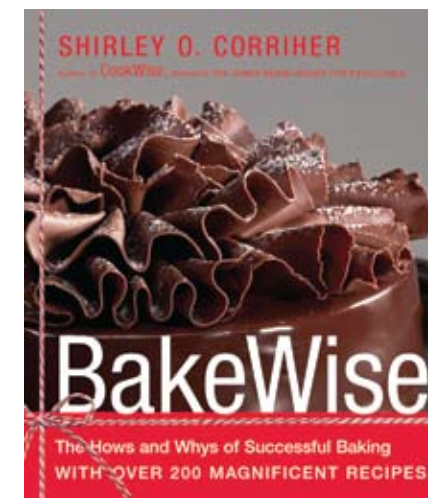
about the possibilities cooking offers." She is the go-to guru and has recently completed a long-anticipated follow-up to her James Beard-award-winning cookbook, *CookWise*, with *BakeWise: The Hows and Whys of Successful Baking with Over 200 Magnificent Recipes*.

Shirley started her career as a biochemist at Vanderbilt Medical School. How did a biochemist become "The Hot Button 911" for the food world? you may ask.

"My husband and I started a boy's boarding school, Brandon Hall, where for 11 years I cooked three meals a day

for 140 teenage boys and their teachers. I got a lot of heavy-duty, hands-on cooking experience," she explains. The couple later divorced, and Shirley was desperately broke, with three small children to support. "I washed dishes at Rich's Cooking School for \$2 per hour (then minimum wage) and set up for and helped teach basic, intermediate, and advanced French cooking classes dozens of times over the next four years," she says. So, in addition to her science and writing background, she gained a tremendous amount of cooking experience, along with classic French cuisine expertise.

Perhaps you are imagining someone unassuming and plain? A nerdy, bespectacled scientist in a long white lab coat with the personality of, say, a doorknob? Or since she's known for her honeyed voice and has roots in Conyers, Georgia, maybe a sweet Southern grandmother in a floral apron? Oh, but no. She's the Johnny Cash of the cooking world. She's sweet yet sassy, wears all black, and keeps her salt-and-mostly-pepper hair in a short spiky cut. She's at the top of her game, and there's nothing remotely unassuming about her.



BY VIRGINIA WILLIS

RECIPES EXCERPTED FROM *BAKEWISE: THE HOWS AND WHYS OF SUCCESSFUL BAKING WITH OVER 200 MAGNIFICENT RECIPES*

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER / FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON / FOOD STYLING BY LEIGH MCINTOSH

PHOTO STYLING BY MOLLY SMITH



Cookbook author and biochemist Shirley Corriher is the person the experts call when they have questions about baking.

Shirley's enthusiasm is infectious. She gets excited talking about protein strands. And when the subject is gluten, she vigorously weaves and wildly gesticulates like Mickey Mouse in the classic animation *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. She waves her hands in the air, coming out of her seat, eyes twinkling brightly, pulling you in, making

learning simple without even going into the recipes.

One might wonder why this book has taken so long to produce. Truth of the matter is, it's incredibly—at least six years—over deadline. Although this may have caused severe angst in the publishing world, you should thank your lucky stars.

her Touch of Grace Biscuits, slathered with soft butter and Chambord jam, were the salve to my wounded soul. Her sweet Southern voice was the virtual panacea I needed to make it through. She was a tonic.

So, when someone asks me about what books to take to a desert island, Miss Shirley's *CookWise* is always

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you understand in layman's terms the chemistry that is going on behind the cooking.

With *BakeWise*, she continues her mastery of demystifying the science of baking for lesser mortals. Just like Miss Shirley, the book is user friendly. At the front of each chapter is an inventory of the fascinating things to learn—“Priceless Knowledge,” she calls it—and a complete list of recipes for an easy overview. There is also a series of boxes containing easy-to-skim information that make

“I will not put a dry cake in this book,” Shirley says emphatically. “The recipes are fabulous,” she giggles, confessing she's completely prejudiced.

OK, I admit I have a soft spot. I admit I am 100 percent completely biased. I, too, studied under Nathalie Dupree from Rich's Cooking School and have always been in awe of Miss Shirley. She visited L'Academie de Cuisine, the cooking school I attended, to demonstrate the technique of making real Southern biscuits. I was homesick, scared, and oh so tired, and

on my list. Now, I just hope they let me take one more, because if I can figure out how to “MacGyver” an oven, I am going to want *BakeWise*, too.

Virginia Willis is the author of the critically acclaimed cookbook *Bon AppetitY'all: Recipes and Stories from Three Generations of Southern Cooking* (Ten Speed Press, 2008) and one of Miss Shirley's biggest fans. Look for Shirley Corriher's cookbooks at bookstores everywhere.