

chefs

Featured Chef: Anne Willan



Renowned culinary authority Anne Willan is the director of La Varenne, the bilingual cooking school in Burgundy, housed in the 17th-century Château du Feÿ.



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Q & A



Bio



Anne's Books



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Recipes

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Meet the Chef

The first time I cooked a soufflé for Anne Willan, I opened the oven door to discover a lopsided disaster, something more like the tower of Pisa than *le Tour Eiffel*. Determined to learn from the master, I cooked a soufflé once a week for months. It was brutal. We'd huddle at the oven, and she'd dissect the soufflé (and my technique) — the whites weren't beaten enough, or I'd needed more butter to coat the dish, or it needed a pinch of salt. Finally, I called her in to see what I'd hoped to be my triumph. I squirmed nervously hoping for praise as she tasted the puffy and golden brown soufflé. She nodded and proclaimed I'd finally done it.

Anne has witnessed many such moments with anxious students in her more than 25 years as founder and director of the prestigious cooking school La Varenne in the heart of Burgundy, France. As a teacher, she has imprinted the classic techniques of French cooking on the likes of pastry chef Gale Gand, grilling expert Steve Raichlen, and *Gourmet's* executive food editor Zanne Stewart, among countless others. There are so many graduates scattered throughout the food writing world that Anne will often spot a recipe in a book or magazine written in "La Varenne style."

It is a style that is rooted in Anne's philosophy of cooking: Master the basic techniques and ingredients, and success will follow. With her culinary bible, *La Varenne Pratique*, several influential instructional series including *Look and Cook*, and her most personal cookbook, *From My Château Kitchen*, no one since Julia Child has gone so far in demystifying the arcane techniques of classic French cooking for the home cook.

I first came to La Varenne in 1995, initially as an editorial apprentice, to polish my cooking, writing, and editorial skills. I tested recipes for *Cook It Right*, an exhaustive tome that documents the various states of "doneness" (and over- and under-"doneness") of everything from whipped cream to braised pheasant. It was hard work, but life in the French countryside was life-altering and was a priceless opportunity to learn how to actually *cook it right* from Anne herself.

Hundreds of sauces and soufflés later, I found that I had gained more than just an encyclopedic knowledge of specific techniques — I had elevated my confidence in cooking. Now, years later, in the role of senior producer for *Epicurious Television*, I returned to La Varenne to tape several segments for the upcoming season about Anne and her school. During a terrific thunderstorm, while Mark, her

husband, was in the basement flipping circuit breakers, we sat down to talk, and I was able to ask her some things I had been wondering about all these years. [Read more.](#)

—Virginia Willis

La Varenne
Château du Feÿ
89300 Villecien, France
800-537-6486

Read more about Anne Willan on [La Varenne's Web site.](#)