

James Villas'
THE
Town & Country
Cookbook



Illustrations by Catherine Kanner

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

Boston · Toronto

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FIRST EDITION

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Villas, James.

James Villas' The Town & country cookbook.

Includes index.

I. Cookery, American. I. Town & country (New York, N.Y.) II.
Title. III. Title: James Villas' The Town and country cookbook.
IV. Title: Town and country cookbook.

TX715.V625 1985 641.5 85-10315

ISBN 0-316-90301-9

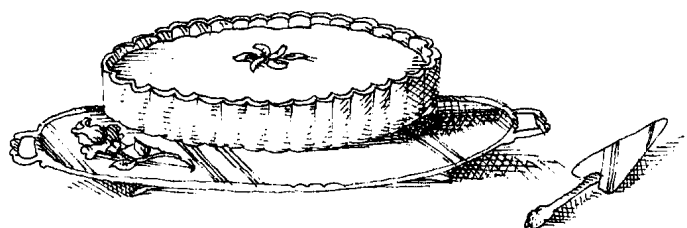
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Designed by Patricia Girvin Dunbar

*Published simultaneously in Canada
by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For
BRUNO and BRUNHILDE
BEAUREGARD and BESS



· A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S ·

I WISH TO EXTEND my warmest thanks to Patricia Brown, Marion Gorman, Leland Smith, and Paula Wolfert, all inimitable, indefatigable eaters who have shared my table so many times, tasted anything and everything, tolerated my often eccentric behavior in restaurants from one continent to the next, and provided the sort of unqualified support, understanding, and friendship that is as rare today as a bottle of Château Pétrus '61.

My thanks also to Mary Homi and Melissa Tardiff, both of whom have traveled the globe with me, eating, drinking, and plucking the cherries from my Bourbon Manhattans.

I owe a great deal to every member of the editorial staff at *Town & Country*, but most especially to Jean Barkhorn for reminding me from time to time of the difference between a teaspoon and a tablespoon, to Cathy Calvert for having turned my rough prose into poetry on more than one occasion, to Kim Waller for keeping a smile as she restructures still another article for the fifth time, and to Arnold Ehrlich for adding that touch of class to everything he edits.

Finally, words cannot express my appreciation to Frank Zachary, the last real editor's editor, the gentleman who has given so much to so many, the man without whose inspiration and guidance this book would have never seen the printer's ink.

· I N T R O D U C T I O N ·

EVER SINCE Frank Zachary offered me the food and wine editorship of *Town & Country* shortly after he was brought in as editor in chief of the magazine in 1972, my efforts have always involved not only exposing readers to the fine cuisines, beverages, and restaurants of the world but also providing plenty of tempting, sensible, workable recipes that illustrate both the great international traditions of the past and the culinary innovations of the present. Reflecting on these twelve fascinating years, I suppose what I pride myself on most at *T&C* is how, year after year, we've managed to remain in the vanguard of everything that has happened in the food and wine world. It's with no false modesty that I point out how (for better or worse) we were one of the first to bring attention to many of the famous new French chefs of the early seventies and their *nouvelle cuisine*, the mounting popularity of northern Italian cooking, the gastronomic advances in England and regional America, and, perhaps most important, any number of those products that have been so instrumental in this country's present food revolution: domestic caviar, cheeses, and wild mushrooms; various new forms of pasta, smoked meats and fish, game, and new types of herbs and chili peppers; and such obvious but neglected items as root vegetables, cured country hams, chestnuts, and leeks. I venture to say we were *the* first major publication to endorse and analyze in depth the first great premium wines of California, and long before what is now termed the New American Cuisine began to gather momentum we

were championing the cause of American cookery and trying to suggest ways it could be better understood and possibly redefined.

We have always zeroed in on trends when they appeared to exhibit worthwhile and lasting qualities, but never once have we allowed current fashion to affect our coverage of such fundamental issues as lobster, *cassoulet*, Bourbon whiskey, hash, breakfast, sandwiches, *foie gras*, truffles, asparagus, and postprandial liqueurs. Those who suffer the illusion that readers of *T&C* eat only beluga caviar and drink only vintage Taittinger were perhaps a little surprised when we ran full-length features (with recipes) on peanut butter, sardines, cheesecake, and the humble potato, and those same people would undoubtedly be even more amazed to know that our quality readership has responded to our coverage of Texas barbecue restaurants, Paris bistros, and San Francisco grills with the same interest and enthusiasm as to articles devoted to the famous three-star restaurants of France. If I've learned nothing else during my years at *Town & Country*, I've learned that the rich and successful love and respect a great hamburger as much as an elaborate fish baked in puff pastry.

This cookbook, therefore, is intended to reflect not only a certain attitude toward food that is at once personal and professional but also the many gustatory avenues we've opened up to readers over the past dozen years. The book should be useful to anyone who knows the fundamentals of the kitchen and is interested in producing primarily dishes that have new flair, that illustrate today's fascination with fresh native ingredients and modern cooking equipment, and that lend themselves to lots of individual interpretation and experiment. Rest assured that you'll find recipes here for such old-fashioned favorites as French onion soup, short ribs of beef, crab cakes, and pecan pie, classics that few of us ever tire of and that I want to see in the repertory for decades to come. But you'll also be introduced to duck *rillettes*, onion, feta cheese, and olive pizzas, johnnycakes with creamed shrimp and oysters, sautéed rabbit with anchovies and black olives, scrambled eggs with crabmeat and vermouth, strawberry-peach cobbler, and hundreds of other creative dishes meant to spark the appetite and inspire the imaginative cook. You'll also learn (especially in Parts Three and Four) how certain dishes can take on new dimension when conventional menu formulas are bypassed and engaging new options are suggested. Jellyed country ham with parsley, sardines in aspic, and *œufs aux crevettes grises*, for example, make excellent appetizers, but when preceded or followed by certain other dishes, they might also be

served as main courses at brunch or lunch. Similarly, something like the classic Greek spinach and cheese pie known as *spanakopita* has always been considered a main course on any menu, but now professional and amateur cooks alike think nothing of serving a small portion of the dish as a tasty starter when more substantial fare is scheduled as a main course. If this sort of menu juggling sounds a bit unorthodox, it's because I do indeed tend to be unorthodox when it comes to making the eating experience more and more exciting. At *Town & Country*, we have never embraced novelty for novelty's sake, but when a new idea or concept that is sound and intelligent comes along, we're always ready to test it out.

Which brings me to the touchy topic of why you won't find in this cookbook many of the dishes commonly associated with the so-called *nouvelle* style of cooking. It is certainly no news to anyone who has followed my reportage over the past few years that I am no great admirer of either the French *nouvelle cuisine* or the embarrassing imitation in this country known as the New American Cuisine. As I stated above, *T&C* has always been willing to pay serious attention to any food trend that might contribute to the pleasure of great eating, and when, in the early seventies, there seemed to be impressive innovation taking place in France, I wasted no time planning a trip. Suffice it to say that I had nothing but praise for the initial efforts of Paul Bocuse, Roger Vergé, Jacques Manière, Pierre Troisgros, Paul Haeberlin, the young Georges Blanc, and a few other real pros who have made a very important and lasting impact on cooking styles everywhere. But the disgraceful abuses by amateurs that have followed, the attempts to discredit a classic cookery that took centuries to develop, and the almost total disregard for *la cuisine bourgeoise* in favor of what often turned out to be little more than manipulative, laboratory food gradually forced me to lose all sense of objectivity. That many young American chefs, untrained, a little overconfident and arrogant, and utterly infatuated with the French *nouvelle*, have managed to dupe so many and shove our wonderful regional dishes even further into oblivion by proclaiming a new style of cooking which is little more than the superficial application of tired *nouvelle* principles to native ingredients has hardly helped my attitude.

In any progressive, civilized culture, formalized cooking must indeed be allowed to evolve, as evidenced by numerous dishes included in this book. But the idea that old culinary concepts must be tossed in the fire to make way for unbridled, undisciplined invention, that traditional dishes

do not merit at least serious reevaluation and possible refining, and that such age-old staples as salt, flour, butter, and cream should be automatically discarded all in the name of better health and our “new life-style” is contradictory to everything the art of gastronomy is about and to my own philosophy. I could belabor this point for hours, but no one hits upon the truth of the matter with more down-to-earth, trenchant accuracy than that witty, wise, perceptive amateur of the kitchen, Nora Ephron: “Anyone who believes for one second that the *nouvelle cuisine* has had any impact on the way Americans eat in their homes is crazy. It has nothing to do with anyone except possibly ten people who have chefs and are silly enough to think raspberries go with meat and kiwi with shrimp.”

Although this cookbook includes virtually every tested dish that has appeared in *Town & Country* over the past twelve years, I decided to include also numerous recipes from my own personal files and from other sources. No matter where I travel, for instance, I collect recipes from restaurants the way others collect matchbooks, a rather demanding hobby, I must say, that keeps me hanging around kitchens for hours begging and pleading with chefs to reveal their most sacred secrets. Some of the recipes here were developed by professional chefs at my request; others come from close friends, long-time colleagues, and such charity events as the March of Dimes Gourmet Galas with which I’ve been closely involved; and still others were inspired by random recipes published elsewhere. Since I’m a firm believer in proper attribution when it comes to recipes, I’ve tried to the best of my ability throughout the book to give credit when credit is due in the headnotes. I’m certainly not one who sets out to “invent” recipes. I do, on the other hand, love to experiment with cooking, meaning I never hesitate to take a given recipe, develop and adjust it according to my own taste, and possibly call it my own. With most responsible food writers, the exact point where recipe modification assigns new identity to a dish is a sensitive topic that must be dealt with fairly and intelligently. If I have slighted anyone unintentionally, I offer my apologies.

Having fought these many years against the wrong type of snobbism so often associated with the name *Town & Country*, let me emphasize that very few of the dishes in this book utilize the sort of fancy, expensive ingredients that would frustrate most home cooks. Nor, in my opinion, is there a single recipe that could be considered beyond the scope of any chef with a grasp of kitchen basics. What I’ve tried to produce is a practical,

sensible, self-contained cookbook that will appeal to those who are aiming toward a certain sophistication in their food preparation, menus, and eating habits, a book that addresses an American audience that is considerably more knowledgeable about food than just ten years ago and that loves to entertain and eat well like never before.

New York, February 1985

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• P A R T O N E •

Appetizers



German Onion and Chive Pie

Serves 8

<i>1 envelope active dry yeast</i>	<i>8 Tb. (1 stick) butter</i>
<i>1 cup lukewarm milk</i>	<i>5 medium onions (about 3 lbs.),</i> <i>well chopped</i>
<i>3 tsp. sugar</i>	<i>¼ cup sour cream</i>
<i>8 Tb. vegetable shortening, room</i> <i>temperature</i>	<i>1 tsp. caraway seeds</i>
<i>3 eggs</i>	<i>Freshly ground pepper</i>
<i>1 Tb. salt</i>	<i>3 Tb. chopped chives</i>
<i>4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted</i>	

Sprinkle yeast over ¼ cup of the milk in a small bowl, add 1 teaspoon of the sugar, stir, and let proof for 10 minutes or till mixture is bubbly.

Pour the yeast mixture into a large mixing bowl, add the remaining milk, the shortening, 1 egg, the salt, and 1 cup of the flour, and blend well with a pastry cutter. Add the remaining flour 1 cup at a time, stirring well with a wooden spoon. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface, wash, dry, and butter the bowl, and knead the dough till it is smooth and no longer sticky. Return dough to the bowl, turn it to grease all surfaces, cover with a towel, and let rise in a warm area for about 1 hour or till doubled in bulk.

Meanwhile, heat the 8 tablespoons of butter in a large, deep skillet, add the onions, sprinkle on the remaining sugar, and sauté over moderate heat, stirring, till golden. Transfer onions to a large bowl and let cool.

Preheat oven to 400°.

Punch the dough down, transfer to a lightly floured surface, and roll into a 12×16-inch rectangle. Fit the dough onto a lightly greased baking sheet about 12×16 inches in size and push sides of dough up to form a 1-inch border.

In a bowl, beat the remaining 2 eggs, add the sour cream, caraway seeds, and pepper to taste, and stir mixture into the cooled onions. Distribute the onion mixture evenly over the dough and bake for about 45 minutes or till edges of the dough are browned.

Sprinkle chopped chives over the top, cut pie into squares, and serve as a first course.

Dilled Lobster Mousse

Serves 4

1 cup cooked lobster meat

1 Tb. butter

1 Tb. flour

1/3 cup milk

Salt and freshly ground pepper

2 eggs, separated

1/3 cup heavy cream, whipped

1 Tb. finely chopped fresh dill

Sprigs of fresh dill for garnish

Preheat oven to 350°.

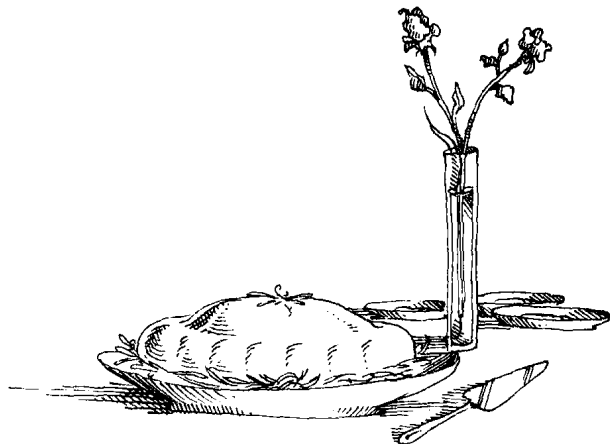
Place lobster meat in a blender or food processor and chop finely.

Heat the butter in a saucepan, add the flour, and whisk over low heat for about 2 minutes or till smooth. Increase heat to moderate, gradually add the milk, stirring, add salt and pepper to taste, and cook for 2 minutes.

In a small bowl, beat a spoonful of the hot sauce into the egg yolks, return mixture to the saucepan, cook for 1 minute, and remove pan from the heat. Stir in the chopped lobster, transfer mixture to a mixing bowl, and stir in the whipped cream and chopped dill.

Beat egg whites till stiff, fold into the lobster mixture, and spoon mixture into a buttered 5- or 6-cup mold. Place mold in a baking pan, pour in enough boiling water to reach halfway up the sides of the mold, and bake for 35 minutes.

To serve, run a sharp knife around edges of mousse, turn mousse out onto a platter, and garnish edges with sprigs of dill.



Chilled Country Ham Mousse

Serves 6–8

This is one of the best ways I know to utilize the fatty ends of a succulent country or Smithfield ham. If you don't like your ham flavor salty (I do), soak the ends in water for about 6 hours before preparing them for the meat grinder.

4 Tb. (½ stick) butter

¼ cup flour

1 cup milk, heated

1 Tb. Dijon mustard

¼ tsp. powdered sage

Cayenne

¼ cup Madeira

2 egg yolks

½ cup heavy cream

2 Tb. gelatin

½ cup Chicken Stock (p. 521)

*1 lb. country ham, skinned,
trimmed of all fat, and cut
into chunks*

Watercress for garnish

Heat butter in a heavy saucepan, stir in flour, and cook roux, stirring, over low heat for 2 minutes. Add hot milk gradually, stir well, and cook mixture over low heat till very thick. Add mustard, sage, cayenne to taste, and Madeira, and stir till very well blended.

In a small bowl, combine egg yolks with cream, whisk, and stir in a little of the hot sauce. Add mixture to the hot sauce and continue cooking sauce over low heat, stirring, till thickened.

In another small bowl, soften gelatin in chicken stock for 5 minutes and stir into hot sauce. Place ham in a meat grinder or food processor, grind finely, and stir into sauce.

Pour mixture into a 1-quart mold or 6–8 ramekins, chill for at least 6 hours, and unmold in center of a large serving dish or small salad plates. Garnish with watercress.

Onion Gougères

Serves 6–8

Classic French *gougères* do not contain onion, but after I once prepared these to accompany a huge lamb salad with fresh tomatoes and basil at a farmhouse in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, they became almost a regular feature at Saturday lunches. By themselves, they make a very nice, zesty appetizer.

<i>1 cup water</i>	<i>1 cup flour</i>
<i>8 Tb. (1 stick) butter, cut into pieces</i>	<i>4 eggs</i>
<i>1 tsp. salt</i>	<i>1 Tb. grated onion</i>
<i>Pinch of nutmeg (preferably freshly grated)</i>	<i>8 oz. Gruyère cheese, shredded</i>
	<i>Cayenne</i>
	<i>1 egg yolk mixed with 1 Tb. water</i>

Preheat oven to 450°.

Combine water, butter, salt, and nutmeg in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce heat, add flour, and stir till dough forms a ball.

Remove pan from heat and beat in eggs one at a time. Add onion, cheese, and plenty of cayenne, and stir well. Drop dough by tablespoons onto a greased baking sheet, brush with egg wash, and bake for 20 minutes or till puffed and golden.

Slit side of each puff with a knife, return to oven with door ajar, and let dry for 10 minutes.

Mushrooms Tapenade

Serves 4–6

Made with capers, anchovies, garlic, and olive oil throughout southwest France and the Riviera, *tapenade* is a pungent mixture traditionally spread on toasted bread, cooked eggs, fish, or beef. I love also to stuff it into mushrooms, squash boats, cauliflower, and even scooped-out ripe tomatoes. Do not try to prepare *tapenade* in a blender or food processor unless you want a soupy texture.