

TOP COOKBOOKS TAKE A BOW

China hosts the Gourmand International awards for the fifth time, honoring books, chefs, TV hosts and more. **Mike Peters** reports in Yantai, Shandong.



“Twenty-two years ago, cookbooks were not represented at Frankfurt and other major book fairs. Today, publishers in a very competitive food market need them to be profitable.”

Edouard Cointreau,
Gourmand International
founder

William Wongso seems like a chef in a war zone. Peppered with the pops and splatters of boiling coconut milk, however, Wongso is unfazed and relaxed.

“You need high-fat coconut milk to cook down for this,” he says to a cooking assistant pulled from the crowd, who is trying to dodge the searing drops. “You want it to caramelize while the meat is cooking. And no, the fire is not too high.”

“Good coconut cream will explode like a volcano, or a lover, when the heat from the oil is right,” he grins as the air fills with the scents of fresh lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, fresh turmeric and a flotilla of other spices bobbing in the bubbling broth.

Everyone nods sagely. After all, who’s going to argue with the winner of Gourmand International’s 2017 best cookbook award?

Meeting in Yantai in Shandong province the night before, the culinary society had crowned *Flavors of Indonesia: William Wongso’s Culinary Wonders* (\$29.95, Bab Publishing Indonesia, available on Amazon) and bestowed dozens of other awards on cookbooks, chefs and TV presenters.

“This event started as a joke at the Frankfurt Book Fair,” says a smiling Gourmand International founder Edouard Cointreau. “We wanted place where we could drink Champagne with the foodie crowd at the fair.”

But the idea took on a life of its own, and 22 years later, representatives of about 60 countries and regions have gathered in Yantai to exchange ideas, enjoy good food and gather for the awards dinner.

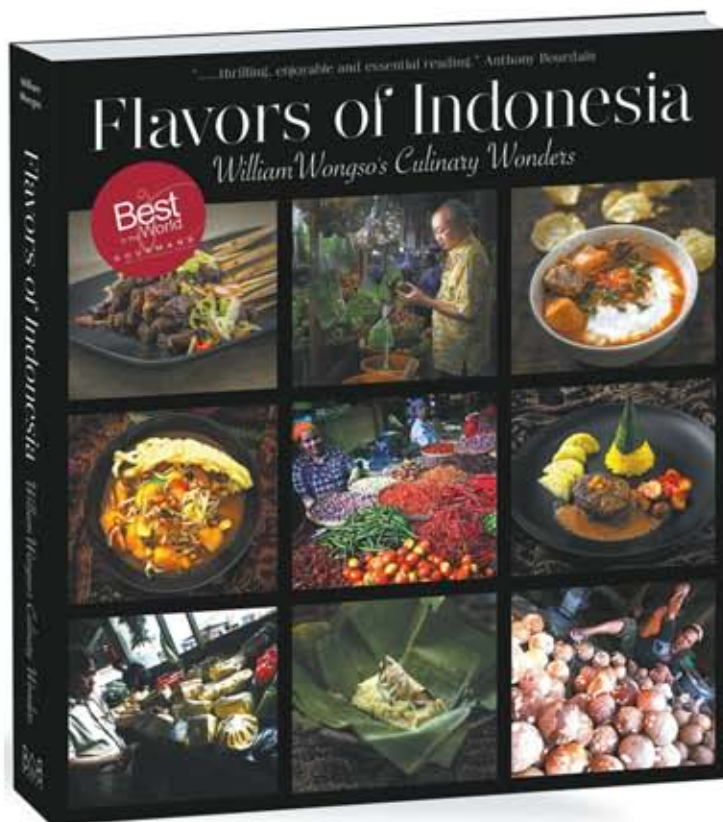
“Twenty-two years ago, cookbooks were not represented at Frankfurt and other major book fairs,” says Cointreau. “Today, publishers in a very competitive food market need them to be profitable.”

The trends ride a couple of others in the marketplace: Consumers willing to go the extra mile for quality food, an obsession with Michelin-starred restaurants, and hyper-busy professionals rediscovering that both quality time and good eating can be found right in their own kitchens.

“That book segment has not been huge in China yet,” says Cointreau, “but China has been a very important market for rights and translations in recent years. Cookbooks will come behind that, in part because China is now pushing food as a key reflection of its culture.”

He notes that the Chinese are “of course the most numerous group at the weekend event, larger than all foreigners combined.”

The US market for cookbooks is \$1 billion annually, he says, and it will be no surprise



Flavors of Indonesia: William Wongso’s Culinary Wonders wins the Gourmand International’s 2017 best cookbook award in Yantai, Shandong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Pure Pascale: Natural Food That Makes You Happy is the second-prize winner of the best cookbook competition.

if China catches up to that figure in five years.

That’s why publishers and authors from Brazil, South Africa, Ireland, France, Australia and myriad other countries are huddled in Yantai, eager to claim a piece of the market. Award winners certainly hope that their prizes will help lure rights deals now or later.

Second prize in the best cookbook competition went to Pascale Naessens, a Belgian chef-author and TV host who credits an early trip to China at the age of 22 for some of the inspiration for *Pure Pascale: Natural Food That Makes You Happy*.

“This is not a diet. I hate dieting!” she proclaims in the introduction. “Please don’t



William Wongso, celebrity chef from Indonesia.

call me a health freak — I am not interested in undrinkable superfood juices or weird and wonderful workouts. I want to live a ‘real’ life with ‘real’ food.”

Natural food, she says in Yantai upon accepting the award, “is food that does my body good, food that makes me stronger and more energetic, and food that makes me happy.”

A key guideline for her is combinations: “Do not combine protein with carbohydrates,” she writes.

Plates that are meat-plus-vegetables, fish-plus-vegetables and carbohydrates-plus-vegetables are healthier choices, easier to digest, have a slimming effect, and result in eating more vegetables and fewer “unhealthy fast carbohydrates” like pasta and potatoes. Lots and lots of recipes include salmon with thyme crust, tomatoes and green

Awards for China

At least a dozen people and publications from China grabbed awards in various categories. Some highlights:

BEST AUTHOR & CHEF Xu Long

Xu is the longtime Western chef at the Great Hall of the People. The award celebrates his most recent book, *Fragrance*, his exploration of the cuisines of Yunnan. Xu was recently in an automobile accident and was unable to attend the event.

DESIGN Ounce Magazine, Taiwan

By Leslie Wang
An art publication that captures a different food culture in illustrations every quarter. “We see every dining moment as a piece of art,” says the magazine’s Leslie Wang.

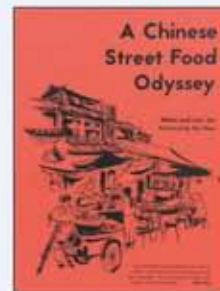
CHINESE CUISINE A Chinese Street Food Odyssey

By Helen and Lisa Tse
\$29.95 (on Amazon and Kindle)

The British-Chinese authors became an internet sensation in China when they cooked for Premier Li Keqiang during his visit to Britain in 2014. The Tse sisters sweep readers with them into the street food cultures of China, vividly evoking the excitement, the smells and the sounds of the markets. From soft fluffy bao, to hot fried chicken, from piping hot bowls of noodles, to coal-roasted squid, delicate tea eggs and bubble tea, they bring the adventure to your kitchen.

ASIAN CUISINE Hong Kong Food & Culture: From Dim Sum to Dried Abalone

By Adele Wong
HK\$360; ManMoMedia
Applauded by local top chefs Alvin Leung and Richard Ekkebus, the book has chapters ranging from traditional Chinese medicine, herbs and spices to Cantonese sauces, dim sum, and



The book *A Chinese Street Food Odyssey* (top) and chef Xu Long (above) are among the winners of different categories at the recent culinary event in Yantai.

wet markets — plus intriguing interviews with local noodlemakers, ceramic bowl painters, dried seafood sellers, fish ball manufacturers and dim sum chefs. The classic Cantonese recipes are easy to prepare at home. Adele Wong was the resident dining columnist at HK Magazine and is now publisher of the lifestyle website The Loop HK.

BREAD Le Pain Passion

By Gerard Dubois
The book was released in November 2016 for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of La Rose Noire Patisserie in Hong Kong, founded by Dubois. His latest venture, Passion by Gerard Dubois, opened in 2012 with a wide offering of breads, cakes and sweets.

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asparagus in the oven; spinach with tomato, turmeric and feta; and cooked pumpkin with bacon.

Two books tied for third place, each with a good story behind it. *The Nobel Prize Cookbook*, a joint project from Sweden, is devoted to the recipes that have been served at the Nobel Prize banquet and written by the best chefs in the country. Now available in Swedish, it will be translated into English soon, according to publisher Max Strong. *Grandma Cooks Gourmet*, a collection of Holocaust-survivors’ recipes from

Israel re-created by the country’s master chefs, is also now being translated into English.

Gourmand International says all four of the top winners can claim the title “best in the world,” and retail copies will bear the award label.

Many of the winning cookbooks, including those published in English, Chinese and other languages, will be featured at the Beijing International Book Fair in August.

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