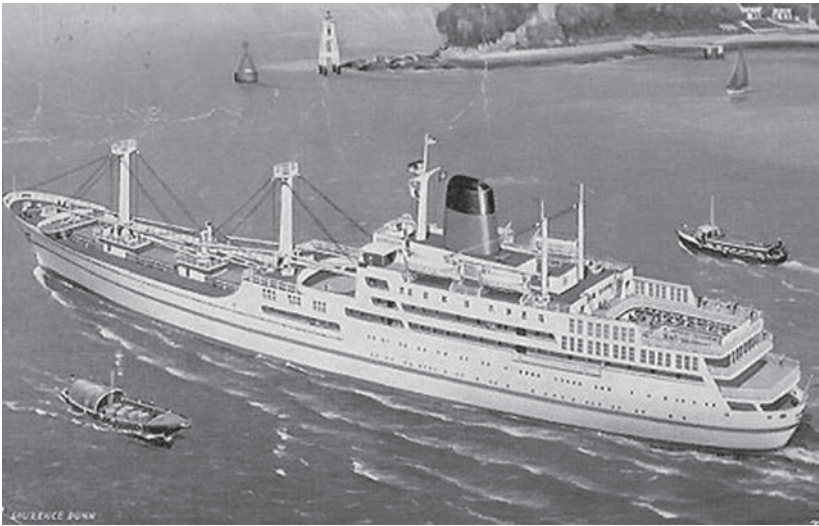


THE CENTAUR'S KITCHEN



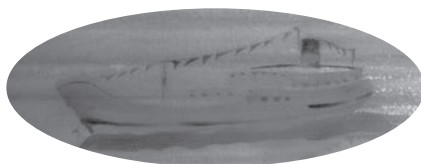
A Blue Funnel Line postcard of TSMV Centaur, from a painting by Laurence Dunn.

THE CENTAUR'S KITCHEN

A BOOK OF FRENCH, ITALIAN,
GREEK & CATALAN DISHES
FOR SHIPS' COOKS ON
THE BLUE FUNNEL LINE

by

PATIENCE GRAY



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

MIRANDA GRAY



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INTRODUCTION



Olive jars in Patience Gray's kitchen.

Many of the ingredients required to achieve the recipes in this book will be normal ship's stores. But the book also contains certain items which may have to be specially ordered.

OIL.

There is, for instance, a considerable emphasis on olive oil, not only in the *Hors d'oeuvre* and Salad section used for salad dressings, but throughout the book as a cooking medium for vegetable, fish and meat dishes. One could say that olive oil is the very basis of cooking in Mediterranean countries. The oil I buy in Greece is remarkably good for salads and for cooking. It tastes of olives, is greenish-gold in colour and costs 18 drachmas a litre which is 4s. 6d. The price of oil in England has risen steeply recently, partly because a bad winter has ruined many crops and the Spaniards in particular have raised the price of their excellent oil to make up for this. I strongly recommend an attempt to buy Greek oil at its source en route for Fremantle. If it is thought expedient to substitute vegetable oil in preparing these dishes in the name of economy, already one of their basic and most characteristic flavours will be lost.

BUTTER.

I have made no extravagant recommendation in the use of butter, but I would like to remind chefs that only unsalted butter should be used in sauté-ing or cooking fish in the oven. Salted butter inevitably burns in the pan. And nor do I think in any circumstances that margarine can be substituted in these recipes for butter.

SALT.

There is a considerable emphasis here on the use of coarse salt. In my opinion the use of refined salt is to be entirely ignored in cooking. I am not going to enlarge on the virtues of sea salt

(*gros sel*) which is normally used in France both for cooking and at table, and which has a far greater pungency (and higher iodine content) than rock salt. But I do recommend the use of unrefined rock salt in the galley.

PEPPER.

I constantly stress the use of freshly ground pepper. The powdered pepper which appears on every restaurant table is far too strong. Peppercorns require a pepper mill, this at least should be commonplace in the galley.

VINEGAR.

I must say again that the use of malt vinegar should be abandoned once and for all on board ship. It is far too strong. French and Italian wine vinegar is good. Italian is cheaper. Red wine and white wine vinegar are both required, and tarragon vinegar is sometimes stipulated.

HERBS, FRESH AND DRIED.

I am concerned about the question of fresh herbs, which seem unlikely, even when obtainable, to retain their freshness in the steamy atmosphere of the galley. Basil, I note, is included in the ship's list of available herbs. This lasts at least a week in water, even in a hot climate, *if kept in a cool place*. Fresh parsley means fresh, not wilted, parsley, and this applies to all fresh herbs.

Herbs in dried form, including basil, chervil, fennel, marjoram, tarragon, thyme are best produced from an Italian importer, because herbs grown in the Mediterranean have seven times the taste and pungency compared with those grown and dried, however professionally, in English herb farms.

PARMESAN CHEESE.

Parmesan is a cheese which, when young, is an excellent eating cheese, but it is more economical to buy the mature cheese which is hard as a rock and grates very fine. The addition of only a tablespoon of Parmesan to, say, a purée of potatoes or two tablespoons to a *gratin* of tomatoes makes the world of

difference. A *minestrone* without grated Parmesan served at table is unthinkable, and the Genoese preparation *pesto* does not exist without it.

SALT PORK.

Salt breast of pork occurs in several meat recipes as the foundation for the braise. A supply of this should be available. The pork needs to be steeped in brine for at least a week. This is specifically required because it is an excellent and economical browning medium and because it imparts a particular unctuous quality to the sauce which can be provided by nothing else.

LEMONS.

In some of the fish, soup and sweet recipes lemons frequently occur. The juice of a freshly cut lemon is always preferable to the lemon essence which is often used in kitchens as a substitute.

VANILLA SUGAR.

Fresh vanilla pods are required to make vanilla sugar, which is simply done by inserting a fresh pod in a two pound jar of castor sugar and keeping the jar closed.

PINE KERNELS (*PINOI*) AND PISTACHIO NUTS.

Pine kernels are imported from Italy; they are expensive, about 11s. a lb, but the flavour they impart when used in small quantities, for instance in making *Stuffed Vine Leaves (Dolmâdes)*, in the Catalan method of cooking spinach, and in the *Mantuan cake*, justify the expense. Pistachio nuts are also dear, they cost £1 per kilo in Athens. But the one dish of roast veal where I recommend their use is worth it.

TINNED FOOD.

I am as a rule predisposed against tinned goods. There are however a few invaluable exceptions. Italian tinned tomatoes and tomato purée (Cirio is the biggest supplier) somehow manage to retain the flavour of fresh picked fruit. Tuna fish in oil, Spanish and Italian brands, is a far better product than

tinned salmon. Filleted anchovies in olive oil have several uses. Tinned roasted pimentos in olive oil are also mentioned, as are tinned morello cherries.

ONIONS AND SHALLOTS.

Several of the recipes in this book contain the mention of sweet white onions grown in Mediterranean countries. These are far less sharp than English onions. If these are unobtainable, I recommend the use of Breton onions which are mild, imported from Roscoff. Nowadays it is quite difficult to obtain either shallots or the small variety of onion which in England seemed only to be used in autumn for pickling. These are required for inclusion in several meat and chicken recipes.

WINE.

Quite a number of the meat and fish dishes require the use of wine. I do not consider any wine which is not fit to drink is fit to cook in. In a few recipes a wine of superior quality to mere drinkability is specified, the three that come to mind are the *Matelote of eels*, the *Coq au vin*, and the *Bœuf en daube*. Where white wine for cooking fish is concerned, a certain dryness is essential, or the resulting sauces will have a sweetish (undesirable) taste. Quantities of wine are measured in wine glasses. There are 6 wine glasses in a bottle (English), and 7 in a litre bottle.

COGNAC.

I have never been an enthusiast for indiscriminate use of cognac in cooking. The practice of setting light to things which have been soaked in brandy in front of the eyes of astonished guests always seems to be a kind of posh restaurant hocus pocus. Cognac does occur in a few of the recipes, in *Paprika chicken* for instance, in the *Civet of hare*, and in the *Matelote of eels*, where it has the specific function of removing a certain oiliness which attaches to eels.

FORTIFIED WINES.

I propose a recipe for fresh haddock which is cooked in Madeira, and mention port, sherry and Madeira to be used in moderation in chilled *consommés*.

LIQUEUR.

Various liqueurs occur in the sweet section used in very small quantities, peach brandy, apricot brandy, kirsch, Anis (in the *Mantuan Cake*), Grand Marnier, Calvados.

ALUMINIUM FOIL.

This is required for cooking trout and red mullet '*en papillote*', i.e. wrapped in buttered foil and baked in the oven, for wrapping salmon trout for baking, and for shielding roasting chickens.

OVEN TEMPERATURES.

I have nowhere specified exact oven temperatures, relying on the experience of the chef who will know the precise performance of his ovens when roasting, baking, for *gratin* dishes and casseroles, or braising. I use the terms very hot, hot, fairly hot, moderate and low.

A low oven temperature is between 280 and 320° F.


A moderate oven temperature is between 320 and 370° F.

A fairly hot oven temperature is between 370 and 400° F.

A hot oven temperature is between 400 and 440° F.

A very hot oven temperature is between 440 and 480° F.

There is nothing in this book that I have not cooked at some time in the last few years. If it seems that I am making too precise demands on the chef who has to prepare food for not 8, but 100 or 200 people, I can only say that the dish as described, with its specific ingredients and precise method of preparing them, is the only one to achieve the described result. If ingredients are changed or modified and the method diverged



from, the dish will inevitably emerge as something else. I can only hope that the book, in which I have put a great deal of thought, effort and research and which is the outcome of living and cooking abroad in France, Italy, Greece and Spain, will be an inspiration to the Blue Funnel chefs.

While I was preparing it, it struck me that only a person who really loves their fellowmen is capable of taking the endless pains and paying the attention which the preparation of food requires, if it is each time to be appetizing, perfectly cooked, delicious. I thought how I, faced with the prospect of twice daily satisfying the appetites of one or two hundred strangers, might after a week at sea, flag in my endeavour towards perfection. Because, in cooking, perfection is what one is always aiming at, even if only a dish of potatoes and a poached fish are in question. If the ship is to acquire a real reputation for good food it can only emerge from scrupulous attention to detail.

