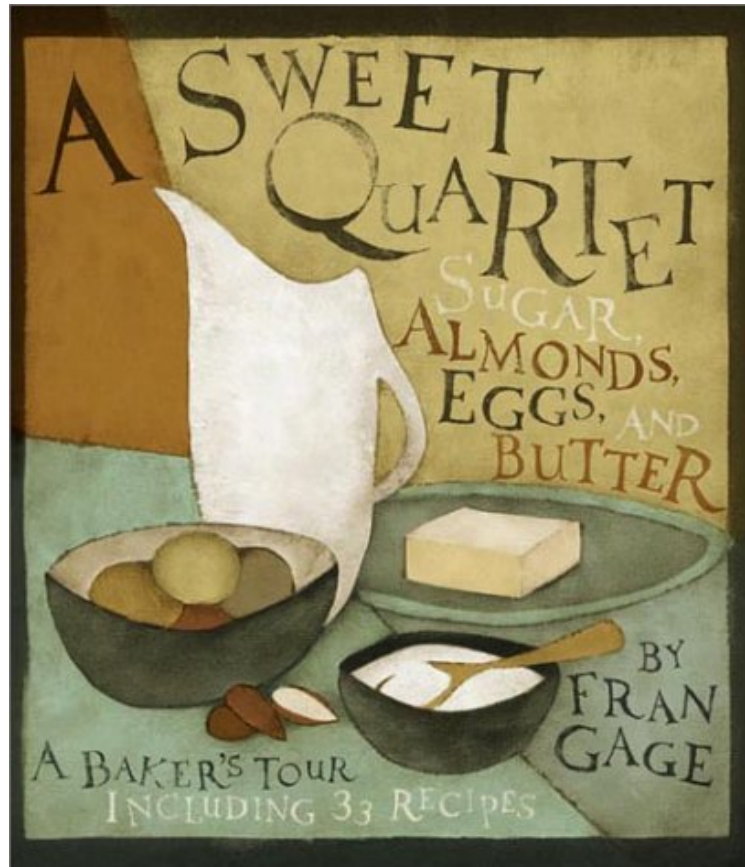


(Online library) A Sweet Quartet: Sugar, Almonds, Eggs, and Butter

A Sweet Quartet: Sugar, Almonds, Eggs, and Butter

Fran Gage

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#3868985 in Books North Point Press 2002-10-23Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 .98 x 7.34 x 8.26l,
#File Name: 0865476098256 pages | File size: 66.Mb

Fran Gage : A Sweet Quartet: Sugar, Almonds, Eggs, and Butter before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Sweet Quartet: Sugar, Almonds, Eggs, and Butter:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy K. GowenEngaging and enjoyable essays about "a few of my favorite things"-- and the bonus of some select recipes.16 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Gorgeous writing about basic ingredientsBy Catherine S. VodreyFran Gage's "A Sweet Quartet" is filled to overflowing with gorgeous writing about four basic baking ingredients: sugar, almonds, eggs, and butter. She refers to these with the charming assertion that they are "the DNA of desserts." Although I'd disagree with her here (in my book, flour would replace almonds, much as I love almonds!), this former bakery owner makes her case so winningly and with such conviction that you are swept along in her cause.The recipes are few--just under three dozen total-- which may seem like very little for a cookbook that costs over twenty bucks. But Gage isn't trying to provide you with recipes as much as she's trying to fill you in on the background, the history, the chemical properties, and the world view of these ingredients. On the task she sets for herself, she does beautifully. Did you know, for instance, that:"The Germans have loved marzipan since it arrived in the sixteenth century from Venice. They sought out the best almonds for it, and trade guilds regulated its sale; only apothecaries were allowed to sell it, much to the chagrin of confectioners

. . . Neideregger, a marzipan maker in Luuml;beck since 1805, still boasts two hundred varieties."or . . . "The rhythmic slapping of balloon whisks beating egg whites in copper bowls is more than a romantic holdover. Atoms from the copper bind with one of the white's proteins, which promotes cross-linking between the protein molecules, resulting in a foam that is creamier and not so easy to overwhip."or . . . "There is real butter, and there is fake butter, and they are not the same . . . Spurred on by a challenge from Napoleon III in 1869, Hippolyte Megrave;ge-Mouriegrave;s came up with a cheaper substitute. Relying on shaky biological knowledge of how a cow produced something that became butter, he mixed the oil from beef fat (oleo) with skimmer milk and water, throwing in a strip of cow udder for good measure. His invention was surprisingly like the veritable item. He called it margarine, after the Greek word for 'pearl,' a name that reflected its glossy appearance. People liked the price, and some may have liked the taste. The new product became popular." "A Sweet Quartet" is filled with fascinating nuggets like this, studded with information that way one of Gage's desserts might be studded with dried cranberries or chocolate chunks or, well, almonds. This is a super book for anyone interested in peeking behind the bakery curtain to see the whys and wherefores of the way these essential dessert ingredients work and how they affect both each other and other ingredients. And the recipes, by the way, are wonderful!7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A charming, and compelling taleBy CustomerA Sweet Quartet is a charming tale about the history of sugar, almonds, butter, and eggs, and how each made its way independently into the kitchen and became the foundation of all desserts. She tells the story of each ingredient by weaving history with personal recollections in the field at a sugar mill, at a hatchery, as owner of a patisserie, and other experiences. The story is compelling, and comes complete with 33 recipes. -rkc

A baker celebrates the four elements that make dessert possibleFran Gage calls sugar, almonds, eggs, and butter "the DNA of desserts." Simple as they seem, they make possible a profusion of pastries and other sweets, from the elemental lollipop to the ethereal realms where marzipan, meringue, and puff pastry hold sway. No one appreciates this fabulous foursome better than Fran Gage, who relied on them for her daily output during the ten years she owned and ran her acclaimed San Francisco bakery, Patisserie Francaise. Nor could anyone do a better job of ferreting out how each found its way into the kitchen and yielded up its alchemy, influenced by technological innovation, genetic manipulation, and government intervention--not to mention human error and, of course, the weather. In A Sweet Quartet, she tells the story of each ingredient, from its origins to its transformation into culinary gold, drawing upon her travels, tastings, experiments, and remembrances. Each section ends on a sweet note, with a baker's half-dozen of recipes that show off the multiple talents of the ingredient. The book concludes with a look at the meaning of desserts, from ancient times to the present day, and--the piece de resistance--ideas for a dessert buffet.

From Publishers WeeklyThe author of Bread and Chocolate returns with another book that combines nonfiction and recipes. Rather than the autobiographical sketches in her previous book, however, here Gage folds in essays on four of baking's primary ingredients. The four central essays each follow a similar pattern: a trip to a producer, such as a hatchery or almond farm; a discussion of artificial substitutes such as aspartame or margarine; a dollop of history and science (e.g., an investigation of bitter versus sweet almonds), often followed by folklore on the subject. The recipes, from Palmiers to Green Almond Panna Cotta to Classic Shortbread, are clearly the product of a practiced hand (Gage owned a patisserie in San Francisco for 10 years). Logically, Gage has attempted to include recipes that present these ingredients in their most elemental form, but sometimes the choices for such a limited group seem odd. The sugar chapter includes recipes for Green Tea Granita and Popcorn Balls with Cashews, as well as for two pound cakes that, as Gage notes, could also have been filed under butter or eggs. A final chapter on all four ingredients, which includes one recipe an elaborate Croquembouche blends the four to their best and communal advantage.Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalFormer owner of San Francisco's well-known Patisserie Fran aise, Gage (Bread and Chocolate) traces the four building blocks of baking-sugar, almonds, eggs, and butter-from origin to kitchen. Dividing her book into four corresponding sections, she examines the history of sweeteners, natural and artificial; takes a behind-the-scenes look at egg and chick production; explores the circular connection among bees, honey, almonds, and humans; and chronicles the evolution of buttermaking from filling animal skins with milk and swinging them from tree branches, to a butter company where cows with computer chips embedded in their ears receive individually formulated portions of feed. Each chapter ends with a handful of recipes showcasing the featured ingredient, such as Peppermint Lollipops, Marzipan Ruffle Cake, and Meringue Triangles with Almonds. While many of the 33 recipes could easily fit under another section, the final chapter combines all four elements into one delightful recipe for a Croquembouche, a pyramid of mini cream puffs. A well-researched and fascinating look at ingredients that most bakers take for granted, this title is recommended for medium to large culinary history and bakery collections.Pauline Baughman, Multnomah Cty. Lib., Portland, OR Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Do play with your food' instructs the author of this inventive, informative and thoroughly engaging work which feeds our hunger for desserts with far more than recipes. Combining history with science, folklore with reportage, Fran Gage explores the four building blocks of her baker's craft with the delight of a writer and scholar, who knows that knowledge is a form of play as satisfying as Peppermint Lollipops and Apricot Tarte Tatin." --Betty Fussell, author of

My Kitchen Wars" These stories about sugar and almonds and eggs and butter are fascinating. They are love stories and mysteries and histories and travelogues. And the recipes are a joy -- and very delicious." --Maida Heatter, author of Maida Heatter's Book of Great Desserts "Reading Gage is absolutely delicious." --Saveur