



## The Breath of a Wok

By Grace Young, Alan Richardson

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### The Breath of a Wok By Grace Young, Alan Richardson

When Grace Young was a child, her father instilled in her a lasting appreciation of *wok hay*, the highly prized but elusive taste that food achieves when properly stir-fried in a wok. As an adult, Young aspired to create that taste in her own kitchen.

Grace Young's quest to master wok cooking led her throughout the United States, Hong Kong, and mainland China. Along with award-winning photographer Alan Richardson, Young sought the advice of home cooks, professional chefs, and esteemed culinary teachers like Cecilia Chiang, Florence Lin, and Ken Hom. Their instructions, stories, and recipes, gathered in this richly designed and illustrated volume, offer not only expert lessons in the art of wok cooking, but also capture a beautiful and timeless way of life.

With its emphasis on cooking with all the senses, *The Breath of a Wok* brings the techniques and flavors of old-world wok cooking into today's kitchen, enabling anyone to stir-fry with *wok hay*. IACP award-winner Young details the fundamentals of selecting, seasoning, and caring for a wok, as well as the range of the wok's uses; this surprisingly inexpensive utensil serves as the ultimate multipurpose kitchen tool. The 125 recipes are a testament to the versatility of the wok, with stir-fried, smoked, pan-fried, braised, boiled, poached, steamed, and deep-fried dishes that include not only the classics of wok cooking, like Kung Pao Chicken and Moo Shoo Pork, but also unusual dishes like Sizzling Pepper and Salt Shrimp, Three Teacup Chicken, and Scallion and Ginger Lo Mein. Young's elegant prose and Richardson's extraordinary photographs create a unique and unforgettable picture of artisan wok makers in mainland China, street markets in Hong Kong, and a "wok-a-thon" in which Young's family of aunties, uncles, and cousins cooks together in a lively exchange of recipes and stories. A visit with author Amy Tan also becomes a family event when Tan and her sisters prepare New Year's dumplings. Additionally, there are menus for family-style meals and for Chinese New Year festivities, an illustrated glossary, and a source guide to purchasing ingredients, woks, and accessories.

Written with the intimacy of a memoir and the immediacy of a travelogue, this recipe-rich volume is a celebration of cultural and culinary delights.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Among Chinese cookbooks, this one is unusual. It doesn't strive for comprehensiveness or focus on a regional cuisine. Instead, it analyzes that sacred object of the Chinese kitchen: the wok. The wok's "breath" is the heat rising from the sizzling instrument as a dish is finished, but also much more, according to Young (*The Wisdom of the Chinese Kitchen*). She offers a profound meditation on the wok's spiritual place, as well as its history and uses. As such, the book may be appreciated as a work of food scholarship as well as a cookbook. Nearly half of it concerns wok arcana, from an assessment of the best wok for a home kitchen to half a dozen "recipes" for seasoning a new wok (like Mr. Wen's Chinese Chive Rub). Naturally, the majority of the recipes are for stir-fries, such as the familiar Kung Pao Chicken. Usually, Young takes great care to attribute her recipes to her sources (e.g., Mary Chau's Shanghai-Style Snow Cabbage and Edamame). Those sources are refreshingly varied, including home cooks, like the author's many female relations, and well-known names like Martin Yan and writer Amy Tan. Although this is by no means a definitive Chinese cookbook, its elegance and meditative outlook make it a welcome gift. Photos.

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#### From *Booklist*

In the 1970s the wok burst into the American consciousness, along with the flurry of interest in all things Chinese inaugurated by Nixon's memorable trip to Beijing. Today, plenty of American kitchens have a wok of some sort, but cooks may not know how to use the implement properly. Young and Richardson set out to remedy that with this comprehensive treatise on wok cookery. More than 50 pages of text cover the manufacture, selection, and the seasoning of a new wok, a process for which Chinese chives turn out to be indispensable. Once technical concerns are overcome, the wok can finally be put to use to create "wok hay," the special, unique flavor achieved by the truly practiced cook. Young's recipes reflect a very personal repertoire that originates from dishes cooked within her extended family. Recipes, sorted into groups by cooking style, use generally available staple Chinese ingredients and a wide spectrum of fresh meats and vegetables. This practical, smart, and savory collection of lore and recipes promises to set off a rebirth of Chinese cooking in American kitchens. *Mark Knoblauch*

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#### Review

Amy Tan, author of *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings* and *The Joy Luck Club* Grace Young takes us into the heart of wok cooking -- from the master cooks of China to the culinary luminaries of the United States. We're privileged to hear the age-old secrets of seasoning a wok and the stories behind family recipes. This is a cookbook that sizzles, sings, and ultimately has you sighing with pleasure.

Ming Tsai, chef-owner of Blue Ginger and author of *Simply Ming The Breath of a Wok* will bring to you a new appreciation of Chinese culinary history. Grace takes us on an unforgettable journey, traveling throughout China's provinces to learn about this ancient culinary tool, accompanied by the phenomenal photography of Alan Richardson.

Betty Fussell, author of *My Kitchen Wars: A Memoir* If you've never used a wok, you must have this book. If you've always used a wok, you must have this book. This book is not just about the care and feeding of the wok as a useful kitchen pan, but 'the wok as a way of life,' a bridge between cultures for a Chinese American in search of history and destiny. It is also a remarkable collaboration between a writer and a photographer seeking to integrate text and images in a form that reveals what the wok symbolizes -- a craft, an art, a

container of communal harmony and balance.

Deborah Madison, author of *Local Flavors: Cooking and Eating from America's Farmers' Markets* *The Breath of a Wok* is a truly inspired book. I loved every piece of it -- from the journey into the complex and fading world of wok culture to the pictures of the people cooking to the recipes. This is the ideal book on food -- history, culture, people, *and* recipes all together, as they should be.

Lynne Rossetto Kasper, host of public radio's national food show *The Splendid Table*® What a joy this book is. If you're a rookie cook, Grace Young is a generous, profoundly knowledgeable guide. If you live to stir-fry, Grace will be your new guru. *The Breath of a Wok* is an "A" list work.

Pang-Mei Natasha Chang, author of *Bound Feet & Western Dress: A Memoir* I've been in Chinese kitchens all my life, but Grace Young has opened my eyes to the splendor of the wok and its place in Chinese culture. This tribute to the workhorse of Chinese cooking resonates with the passion of a travelogue and intimacy of a memoir.

Paula Wolfert, author of *The Slow Mediterranean Kitchen: Recipes for a Passionate Cook* Grace Young's *The Breath of a Wok* is an exciting addition to my collection. I now at last understand *wok hay*, the sublime seared taste that only great stir-fry dishes possess. Anyone who loves Chinese food will learn much from this beautifully written book.

E. N. Anderson, author of *The Food of China* *The Breath of a Wok* is the best and most thorough book on the wok so far. No one else has stepped forward to evaluate the different materials and seasoning methods so thoroughly. It reminded me of wonderful days in the now-long-lost world of Hong Kong.

Ken Hom, author of *Ken Hom's Top 100 Stir Fries* Grace Young weaves wok stories and savory recipes with clear instructions; she makes you understand why the wok is one of the world's most popular cooking utensils.

## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### **Jimmy Hicks:**

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until adult are different content. We all know that that book is very important for people. The book *The Breath of a Wok* has been making you to know about other knowledge and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The reserve *The Breath of a Wok* is not only giving you considerably more new information but also being your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship with the book *The Breath of a Wok*. You never experience lose out for everything in the event you read some books.

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**Scott Hicks:**

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**Jonathan Rodriguez:**

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