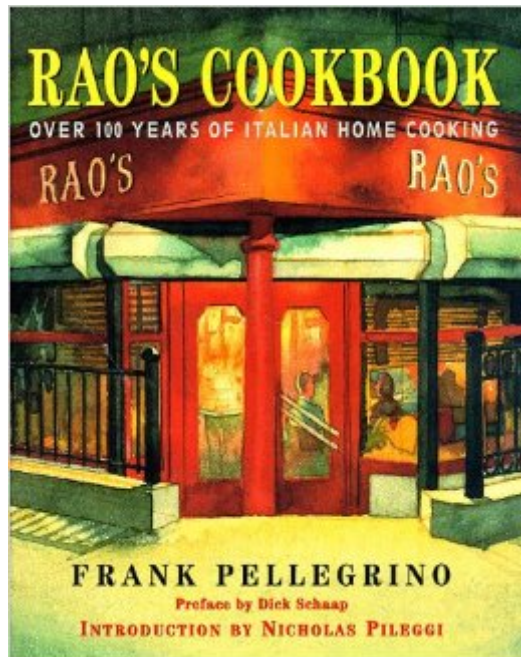


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# Rao's Cookbook: Over 100 Years Of Italian Home Cooking



## Synopsis

Rao's, the hundred-year-old restaurant with a mere ten tables tucked in a corner of East Harlem in what was once a legendary Italian neighborhood, is one of the most sought-after restaurants in all of Manhattan. Its tables are booked months in advance by regulars who go to enjoy what The New York Times calls its "exquisitely simple Italian cooking" from traditional recipes, many as old as Rao's itself. You may not get a table at Rao's, but now with this book you can prepare the best Italian home-style food in the world in your own kitchen. Here for the first time are recipes for all of Rao's fabulous classics--its famous marinara sauce, seafood salad, roasted peppers with pine nuts and raisins, baked clams, lemon chicken, chicken scarpariello, and on and on. The recipes are accompanied by photographs that re-create Rao's magic and testimonials from loyal Rao's fans--from Woody Allen to Beverly Sills. Here too is a brief history of the restaurant by Nicholas Pileggi and a Preface by Dick Schaap. Both will convince you that what you have in your hands is a national treasure, a piece of history, and a collection of the best Italian American recipes you will ever find.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I picked this book up over a year ago now, and from the veal saltimbocca to the stuffed veal chop to the lemon chicken to the Sunday gravy, absolutely wonderful. Then I moved to the shrimp scampi and the accolades just go on. Wonderfully annotated with quotations of those who have been fortunate enough to get a reservation, and historical notes about the restaurant and the family. If you

want to put real Italian food on the table that will impress yourself first, and wow your guests, this is a great place to start. And the good news is San Marzano tomatoes are now readily available in supermarkets. These tomatoes are recommended throughout the book, and once I found them, they are really the bright star in canned Italian tomatoes. The writing is clear, the suggestions on point, and the finished product fit for your best tablecloth.

This is a terrific book that makes a wonderful Italian cook out of anyone -- even an Irish girl from Virginia! I have plenty of great Italian cookbooks, from Marcella Hazan to Mario Batali, but this one really takes the cake for traditional Southern Italian food. Every recipe I've tried has been fabulous. In particular, the meatballs in marinara sauce are out of this world. You won't believe how good they are. Buy the book and make the dish!

Coming from an Italian family, I was a little reluctant to try other family recipes. Well the ones I have made so far were absolutely fabulous! From the meatballs and gravy to the chicken scarpello. Please don't forget the pork chops with sweet and hot peppers. I have to try to eat at Rao's, but unfortunately it is who you know. Soon enough I might have a way in there. But the book will do just fine for now! The stories in the book are so great. As my mother would say "food is the glue that keeps the family together." Oh, and olive oil and garlic is the essence of life.

'Rao's Cookbook' by restaurateur / chef / actor Frank Pellegrino is the restaurant cookbook of what may be considered Manhattan's premier corner bar. The story is that the restaurant is only open five days a week, has but eight tables and each and every one of them is booked solid, like corporate boxes at the Astrodome. So, virtually the only way to get a sitting at Rao's is to be invited by a person with a permanent table reservation, or have such a benefactor lend you their reservation or, for a single evening, have the table revert to the discretion of Rao's mother. The attraction of Rao's is not the same as that for Mario Batali's 'Babbo' down in the village. Rao has no celebrity chef and its cuisine is simple Italian-American fare. There are no pilgrimages to the Union Square market for superfresh artisanal provisions. All their goods are bought at local shops in what is left of 'Little Italy North' on the corner of Pleasant Avenue and 113th street in East Harlem. This book is much more a celebration of place and of a very simple cuisine than it is any attempt at haute cuisine. At less than 180 pages of text, with lots of those pages taken up by Rao family snapshots, the book lists for a hefty \$40, possibly to support the stipend to Dick Schapp and Nicholas Pileggi, who contributed a Preface and an Introduction respectively. As chance would have it, I reviewed author Pellegrino's

newer book before opening this volume, and I discover that there is a lot of overlap in the titles of recipes between the two books. That may not be an entirely bad thing for owning the two volumes, as the earlier one presents restaurant recipes while the later book presents personal 'Italian-American' cuisine. This means that the earlier book's recipes may be more elaborate, but in general they are not. There are some few differences in the way a lot of the recipes are written, but few of these differences are likely to make a big difference in taste. Both books share the same attention to simplicity and the same pantry. Both books, for example, consistently use canned San Marsano tomatoes in all recipes. The restaurant book does make a point of manually removing any hard flesh in the tomato while mashing up its pulp. There are also instructions with several recipes on how to prep a dish so that it is ready to be served after just a last minute saute. The recipe chapter's names are virtually identical to the newer 'Neighborhood' book. In general, the newer book is much more consistent in its presentation of an English dish title with an Italian subtitle. The 'Neighborhood' book is also much better in consistently providing captions for all photographs, contemporary or historical. I would also rate the recipes in this book a bit better than Rocco DiSpirito's latest effort, and equal to recipes in John Mariani's excellent book on Italian-American cuisine and recipes. Neither book's recipes are quite as good as Lydia Bastianich's much longer book on Italian-American cuisine. The numerous quotes sprinkled throughout the book range from cute to interesting, and contribute nothing to the culinary value of the book. The selection of desserts is nothing special. The ultimate reason for buying this book may be to taste the dishes you simply cannot get from Rao, because it is impossible to get a table there. I am happy to have read this book and I will refer to it and its partner, the 'Neighborhood' book when I am looking for good, simple, pasta or chicken recipes, but I will continue to rely on Hazan, Bastianich, and other professional writers for my staple source of Italian recipes. This is a good book of recipes, albeit a bit overpriced. If you need to choose, I recommend the newer book, as it has more recipes and less fluff for the same price. If the discount is deeper on this earlier book, get it instead. Recommended source for good Italian-American recipes and southern Italian sentiments.

If you're an Italian-American, (or want to cook like one), this is a must have book. It will evoke memories of the wonderful times, sights and aromas of family dining in your neighborhood Italian restaurant. The Italian comfort food recipes, entwined with stories of the Pellegrino family, make this a great read. I know because I own a collection of about 30+ Italian cookbooks.

I must have 40 cookbooks, and I hardly ever use the ones written by even the best restaurant chefs.

They usually demand too many wierd unavailable ingredients, take too much time, are too fussy about details, and often don't work particularly well. That's just my personal pet peeve. THIS cookbook is the exception to that rule. The recipes are a beautiful example of what makes italian cooking great, a few very nice ingredients, put together simply, in a delicious and creative way. This is classic family-style italian, done in an irresistibly delicious way. The recipes generally use a few basic ingredients, and are both easy to execute and well laid-out. Nearly everything I've cooked from the book has been at least very good, and some things have been outstanding. Usually, I'm pretty impressed if more than half the recipes are any good. I cook from this book on WEEKDAYS, for heaven's sake. This is easily in my top 3. Favorites include lemon chicken (yum)!, chicken cacciatore, veal marsala, meatballs, marinara sauce. As a final added attraction, there are anecdotes throughout the book, by folks from customers including Dick Schaap and Billy Crystal, among many others. This is a cookbook that's even fun to read!

Nothing impressive in the recipe department that I didn't already have in other cookbooks. I'll keep trying a few other recipes and see what so great about it, given the other reviews..because I haven't found one that I like yet.

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