



Four Kitchens: My Life Behind the Burner in New York, Hanoi, Tel Aviv, and Paris

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At the French Culinary Institute, Lauren Shockey learned to salt food properly, cook fearlessly over high heat, and knock back beers like a pro. But she also discovered that her real culinary education wouldn't begin until she actually worked in a restaurant. After a somewhat disappointing apprenticeship in the French provinces, Shockey hatched a plan for her dream year: to apprentice in four high-end restaurants around the world. She started in her hometown of New York City under the famed chef Wylie Dufresne at the molecular gastronomy hotspot wd-50, then traveled to Vietnam, Israel, and back to France. From the ribald kitchen humor to fiery-tempered workers to tasks ranging from the mundane (mincing cases of shallots) to the extraordinary (cooking seafood on the line), Shockey shows us what really happens behind the scenes in haute cuisine, and includes original recipes integrating the techniques and flavors she learned along the way. With the dramatic backdrop of restaurant life, readers will be delighted by the adventures of a bright and restless young woman looking for her place in the world.

Four Kitchens: My Life Behind the Burner in New York, Hanoi, Tel Aviv, and Paris Details

Date : Published July 27th 2011 by Grand Central Publishing (first published June 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780446559874

Author : Lauren Shockey

Format : Hardcover 352 pages

Genre : Food and Drink, Food, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Travel, Cooking, Cookbooks



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From Reader Review Four Kitchens: My Life Behind the Burner in New York, Hanoi, Tel Aviv, and Paris for online ebook

lana says

As someone who works in kitchens, I found myself wanting to tell the author-repeatedly- that staging in a restaurant feels nothing like working there. She receives a lot of praise and seems to do well as an intern, but her self-congratulating tone gets old quickly.

She does do a good job of dispelling the notion that kitchen work is exciting or glamorous- it's often repetitive and tedious, especially for new initiates- and I think it's been a while since someone has made that point in print. She also raises some issues that any woman entering professional kitchen life will have to grapple with eventually (questions of family, hierarchy, work environment). Considering all the hype and excitement surrounding culinary careers right now, I think that overall this provides a pretty sober look at what the world is really like, and it would be good reading for anyone who is thinking about spending 40k+ on culinary school.

The brief sections that describe her romantic life- or lack thereof- don't seem to fit into the overall story, and I have to wonder if her editor asked for their inclusion to increase the 'human interest' aspect of the book. Similarly, her writing about friendships is the weakest and seems forced at times.

I was actually more interested in hearing about what she did when she decided to leave professional kitchens, but none of that transition was included in the book.

Jessica Malzman says

Four Kitchens is a must read! I could not put this book down. Lauren riveting tale of her year traveling the globe as a stagier is truly inspiring. She is a brave young woman and a witty and insightful writer. As both an avid traveler and a "foodie" myself I found her story utterly captivating. She is exceptionally observant and her descriptions successfully capture the essence not only of the cities that she lives in but of the people that she meets along the way. Inspired by what I have learned from this book, particularly in the author's fond depiction of life in Hanoi, I have begun research and am already planning a future trip to Vietnam. While I am there I will most certainly visit La Verticale! It is unlikely that I will pay a visit to the famous restaurant that Lauren visits with her friend Hung but you never know...one of the characteristics that endears this author to the reader is her willingness to "do as the locals do" and her sense of curiosity and her genuine interest in learning about other cultures both inside and outside of the kitchen. I highly recommend this book to anyone, especially those with an inquisitive palate and a penchant for an exhilarating travel story. I can't wait to see what Lauren Shockey will do next!

Cheryl says

I applaud Lauren for knowing what she wanted and finding a way to pursue her dreams of wanting to be a chef. After Lauren's disaster in France, some people would have thrown in the towel and been done but Lauren decided to try again only this time at three different locations. Lauren would apprenticeship. The first

being in her home town of New York, than Tel Aviv, Israel and finally to Paris, France.

Lauren's first stop...wd-50. Wylie Dufresne's place. Anyone who is a foodie, works in the culinary world or is a fan of Top Chef is familiar with Wylie. Wylie is into molecular gastronomy. This technique is the movement to incorporate science and new techniques in the preparation and presentation of food. While, I did like getting the behind the scenes look into the restaurant world and Wylie's place, I did wish that I could have learned some more about some of the different techniques Wylie was doing. The recipes though that came from his restaurant that appeared in this book sounded yummy.

In Tel Aviv, the people were really friendly and the restaurant that Lauren worked at had a more laid back approach. Paris, those people say it like it is and as Lauren learned sometimes you just have to take it like a man. Of course, I would imagine the chefs have to be serious as the food that they produce is great.

For anyone who is a foodie or just loves to cook and try new things, than you should check this book out. It will give you a nice brief look into the culinary world and as an added bonus you can try out some of the yummy recipes from each location that Lauren visited that are included in this book.

Elizabeth says

I've read a number of autobiographical tales from behind the spoon. Each one offers a unique view of cultures and experiences that as a home cook, I will doubtfully ever experience myself. Congrats to Lauren Shockey for having the guts to follow her dreams. It takes courage and spirit to travel the world and find your bliss. I enjoyed the descriptive aspect of the new scenery though the conversations were not well written.

However, the level of whining and ingratitude for the training and patience she received at these restaurants is unbelievable. Yes - they are getting free labour. Yes - the kitchen life is hard. None of this should have been surprising so, no - you should not disrespect the same people who helped you build your skills, vocabulary, life experiences and welcomed you with quite little to offer in return. It costs the restaurants time, money and staff to help you learn. Smack talking their cuisine and techniques is rude and ungrateful. Maybe one thing on your list of skills to acquire, according to this book anyway, is some humility and appreciation. Maybe some understanding that all professions require hard work and that your boss shouldn't be grateful that you deigned to bless them with your presence.

I've not read anything else by this author so perhaps this is a blip or some maturity has been acquired in the past three years. Either way, I hope the chefs who gave so generously of their experience, regardless of their actual presence in the kitchen which was so frequently referred to, are a forgiving and understanding sort. Otherwise, I'd stay out of their kitchens in the future. You wouldn't be able to take the heat.

Michelle says

I found the cooking pretty interesting and enjoyed some of the cultural info. I had a hard time putting aside the feeling that the author had no idea how privileged she was to stop grad school, complete cooking school, then work around the world unpaid for a year without ever mentioning money concerns.

Gretchen Hicks says

I liked this even more than I thought I would. I am an avid home cook with occasional aspirations of becoming pro. It was like she did everything I have dreamed of doing, described it in great detail and came to the same conclusion I think I would. That being a chef is not really what she wanted to do with her life and that she was not able to express herself through cooking in the medium of a professional kitchen.

Liz says

I hate to bash on an ambitious young person, since I am only a few years older than this author, but man, does she need a slice of humble pie. The premise is that after growing up in Manhattan and graduating from the U of C, she decides to spend her savings (?) from a year at a crappy PR job to support a four-country jaunt as a stage in highly regarded restaurant kitchens, then write a book about it. She comes from a family whose parents have "eaten foie gras in virtually every possible iteration" and manages to get her first stage assignment at wd-50, one of NYC's most famous (and expensive) modern restaurants. But this will not prove to be sufficient reward. Her childhood was shaped by a two-year stint in Budapest (warning to my Hungarian friends, you may soon feel wrath), where her lawyer father worked to "get the country up to speed with the rest of the world that hadn't been locked behind the iron curtain." Thinking back on her time spent as a 10-year-old absorbing Hungary's "outdated, drab Communist facade," "somber grayness" and "daily aggravations and hardships," the intrepid author realizes she yearns to travel to places not "completely tainted by globalization and commercialization."

With this background, I hoped that she would have recognized the likelihood of coming off as entitled and/or spoiled and would emphasize her own naivete as a young chef, but no. Instead we are treated to a repetitious litany of the compliments bestowed on her by Chef Wylie and the other staff, a complaint that after a whole two weeks working in the prep kitchen, she "was finally deemed competent enough to go upstairs and assist with plating and preparing all the appetizers during the dinner service," and a rather personal skewering of a brief-lived fellow stage whose only purpose for appearing in the book seems to be to make its author look awesomer. After her three months at wd-50 (which holds three stars from the NY Times), she deems it "too focused on technique," and flies away to Vietnam on the next stop of her quest for "a restaurant that focuses more on taste."

If the chefs, co-workers and others who appear in this book nodded their heads and cheered her on while reading it, then I stand corrected in my assessment of her presumptuousness. But after 100 pages, I mostly felt sorry about the unfairness of someone who's already benefited from--and absorbed--such privilege being given a book deal.

Randal says

I really wanted to like this book -- it's been on my to-read list for a couple of years. The content is fine -- working as an intern (called throughout a *stage*) at restaurants around the world, including Wylie Dufrense's wd~50. The recipes are worth looking at. But overall it falls flat.

A few little *pas amusants* to go with all the *amusés* the author samples along the way ...

* As noted by many reviewers here, her combination of self-entitlement and apparent lack of gratitude adds a harsh note. Not everybody can afford to travel the world and work for free (says the guy who cooked his way through two university degrees); to then snipe at the restaurants where she worked seems rude (Except perhaps for the French restaurant that charged her for her going-away meal). Yes, they get free labor, but the trainees get to learn cuisines and techniques that can't be acquired any other way ... a literally invaluable experience for someone in the trade. It's probably inevitable she should pass judgment on the experience, but the tone is ... wrong.

She comes across as a person I would not want to sit down and spend an afternoon with over a drink and a couple of plates of food, which made me sad, because those are the writers I like to read.

* Her entirely tin ear for dialogue. She quotes whole conversations with people from several different cultures over the book and amazingly they all speak in the same voice except she throws in the occasional grammatical error by the non-native speakers and has the English expat say "brilliant." The rude boys in the kitchen, her parents, her expat friends and chefs from three different continents all sound pretty much like Lauren Shockey.

* She doesn't evoke tastes all that well, so when I saw that she is now a food critic I was surprised. Perhaps because she did this when she was 25 and didn't have the range of experiences to provide good comparisons. Mostly the book lacks wisdom -- she generalizes about too many things (how expats eat; how Frenchmen act; the reasons why molecular gastronomy is popular) -- where the reader would be better served by close observation and detail. It is billed as "my life" in the kitchens, but it's not a life, it's not even a year. From the title I was expecting a career's worth of insight, not a few months. But the observations, and the book's value as a read, are correspondingly shallow.

So kudos to her for taking on the experience (even if Daddy's billable hours at a Manhattan law firm paid the freight). But it wasn't worth the wait.

Glen U says

Enjoyable, informative, surprisingly well written, this book follows an American woman through her travails and discoveries , as she works as an unpaid intern in four different but reputable restaurants around the globe. A good read, but Anthony Bourdain does it better.

Joni says

Got 3/4 of the way through and returned it to the library. I got sick of the author 'humble-bragging' about her kitchen prowess and travels around the world.

Denise says

I'm calling this "read" even though I am only 82% done. This book is taking me forever to read - I want to read it (mostly), I read a little every night, I don't want to DNF it, but it puts me to sleep every time. It moves so slow, there are so many scenes of cutting vegetables (I now hate shallots), and it just seems like there could have been much more.

The author decides after culinary school to "stage" at 4 different restaurants in 4 different countries for no pay, just the experience. Apparently financed by her parents she comes across as a bit entitled, and a bit

ungrateful. She has more complaints than compliments about each restaurant, and while she does give a good feel for working in the different kitchens, does not seem to have much respect for the overall experience she was lucky enough to have.

For me this was read like the adventures of a privileged young adult.

Pam says

The book had its good points, like the recipes and descriptions of what kind of work goes into a kitchen like wd-50's. But the biggest problem I had with this book was that I just didn't like the author. Since this is a memoir, not liking the author and her voice is a big problem. She started coming off as a bit entitled and never really happy with anything. wd-50 was too bogged-down in technique rather than satisfying food. La Verticale had delicious food, but the other chefs weren't passionate about their work and cooking was just a job. Carmella Bistro in Tel Aviv was too mundane. Senderens, a restaurant in Paris with 2 Michelin stars, was too fussy and Parisians were snobs. I will also freely admit that part of my dislike of the author stems from jealousy. When she didn't like doing office work after graduating from University, she was able to drop \$40,000 on culinary school then spend a year travelling around the world learning from chefs in top restaurants without ever having to hold down a paying job. Must be nice.

<http://www.damngoodfood.net/2014/04/2...>

Elizabeth C. Haynes says

It's just...boring. It's ok writing overall with the exception of dialogue, which is very badly written. Really there just is nothing particularly interesting going on. Going to the giveaway pile.

Zovig says

Following in a spate of food memoirs that I've read recently that are by extraordinarily talented writers (Ruth Reichl and Fuchsia Dunlop among the best), this book about a young culinary school grad who stages at restaurants in nyc, paris, vietnam, and israel, is underwhelming. The author never recognizes the privilege of her life as an upper middle class kid who gets the chance to stage around the world (with parents who can afford to visit her wherever she goes). More interesting than her story would probably be trying to get the stories of the people she works with around the world. While she does a little bit of that, she stays at the center. Even more damning, there's no real urgency to this story. She decides to take a year to stage around the world. Aside from some crushes on boys that go nowhere, one Parisian boss who makes inappropriately sexual comments, and this one time that Wylie Dufresne scolded her for her plating of a dish, there's no conflict. She just floats along, rather boringly.

I'm going to try her tip for cooking sous vide without a circulator though. That sounded like a good tip.

Emily says

A well-written and engaging book, but unfortunately, the writing doesn't do much to make the writer terribly likable. Ms. Shockey portrays herself as nearly faultless - every restaurant seems to think her the best stage ever to work there, all offer her a job - or comment that she's obviously going far better places than staying in the kitchen with them. The book would have benefited greatly from a degree of humility about things more than inexperience and a dimming down of the self-satisfaction that fills the writing. It seems apparent that the author is used to writing blog posts and articles - what can pass in a short piece grows grating over the length of a memoir.

However the different cultures - restaurant and country - portrayed are very interesting. I definitely enjoyed seeing how the different kitchens were run and how the different chefs approached their work. As a Top Chef fan, I especially enjoyed the look into Wylie Dufresne's restaurant.

Thanks to NetGalley for the reading copy.
