



Best Food Writing 2014

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For fourteen years, Best Food Writing has served up the creme de la creme of the year's food writing. The 2014 edition once again offers the tastiest prose of the year, from a range of voices: food writing stars, James Beard Award winners, writer-chefs, bestselling authors, and up-and-coming bloggers alike. With new sections devoted to "A Table for Everyone" and "Back to Basics," you'll find a topic and a flavor for every appetite—the cutting-edge, the thoughtful, the provocative, and the hilarious—a smorgasbord of treats for the foodie in all of us.

Contributors include: Elissa Altman, Dan Barber, Monica Bhide, Sara Bir, John Birdsall, Jane Black, Frank Bruni, Albert Burneko, Tom Carson, Brent Cunningham, John T. Edge, Barry Estabrook, Amy Gentry, Adam Gopnik, Matt Goulding, John Gravois, Alex Halberstadt, Sarah Henry, Jack Hitt, Steve Hoffman, Ann Hood, Silas House, Rowan Jacobsen, John Kessler, Kate Krader, Francis Lam, David Leite, Irvin Lin, J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, Daniella Martin, Dave Mondy, Erin Byers Murray, Rick Nichols, Kim O'Donnel, Josh Ozersky, Kevin Pang, Ben Paynter, Michael Procopio, Jay Rayner, Besha Rodell, Anna Roth, Adam Sachs, Eli Saslow, David Sax, Oliver Strand, Laura Taxel, JT Torres, Molly Watson, Joe Yonan, Eaganie Yuh

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From Reader Review Best Food Writing 2014 for online ebook

Tracey says

I like these annual collections a lot, and I loved this one. Excellent collection of essays.

Wendi says

Last Christmas, there was a gift under the tree from my boyfriend. It was obviously a book. I was doubtful. I'm a bit obsessive when it comes to books, so I know what's out, and I know what's coming, and it's rare that I haven't already vetted the options and if it's something I want, I've either requested an advance copy from the publisher, am first on hold at the library, or have already bought it, either in print or digital.

So it was a fantastic surprise when I unwrapped Best Food Writing 2014. I'm aware of these collections, and I vaguely remember and I probably had the chance to request it from the publishers but, due to life circumstances in general (still ongoing) and the holidays last year, I've been limiting what I'm accepting.

I was happy to have the "excuse" to read this collection of essays/pieces throughout the year, and without rushing them. If both great writing and food tend to comprise probably-too-much of your mental space, you'll probably love this series as well. It's a fantastic book to have on the nightstand throughout the year, dipping in and out.

The different sections in the book: The Way We Eat Now, A Table for Everyone, Back to Basics, Home Cooking, Stocking the Pantry, Someone's in the Kitchen, Personal Tastes, Extreme Eating. The selections are from varied sources, a wide selection of authors and views, and often cleverly, tongue-in-cheek categorized. There are intimate, family kitchens, broad social programs, terrible prison meals, restaurant communities, and extremes from living and eating on abysmal amounts of money to eating at Rene Redzepi's Noma in Copenhagen (shortly departing for Australia, by the way).

Some of the writings are sad, some depressing, some fascinating, some funny as hell. Though articles about food tend to glint particularly brightly for me, there were less than a handful in this collection that I'd already read (and those I had were so well written that in all but one instance, I read them again).

Having this collection on hand to enjoy throughout the following year may well become a tradition!

Iowa City Public Library says

Best Food Writing 2014, edited by Holly Hughes, is a delightful collection from food writers of all stripes; from chef-writers and food bloggers to food magazine and cookbook writers. Now in its 15th year, Best Food Writing continues to provide a tasty sample of the best in food writing found in print and online. Divided into eight sections readers can sample from 50 pieces beginning with The Way We Eat Now and ending with Extreme Eating.

One of my favorite pieces is The Science of the Best Chocolate Chip Cookies by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, the

Managing Culinary Director of Serious Eats, where he writes the weekly Food Lab column. Lopez-Alt's selection comes from the Home Cooking section and lists 20 Cookie Facts which explain the science behind the recipe and why modifying ingredients and instructions can change the results. He ends with his recipe for The Best Chocolate Chip Cookie. I think it is definitely worth a try.

If you enjoy cooking and/or eating or reading about cooking or food, Best Food Writing 2014, (or earlier years in the series), might just be the perfect book for you.

Beth says

Some really great entries mixed with some that I wouldn't quite consider worthy of the superlative.

Melissa says

This was a wonderful collection of short stories on a broad range of food topics--everything from cooking the best chocolate chip cookies to giving prisoners their last meals to the ways that food connects us to family. I thought it was well-curated and a delightfully diverse collection. I'll definitely be looking for the 2017 version when it comes out next year!

Lisa Feld says

This is a thoughtful collection that lives up to its name, both for the quality of the writing and the attention to the trends and priorities of the food world right now: the articles on sustainability question whether local is necessarily better, explore food sources like foraging, and catalog the flavor profiles of insects. There are in-depth pieces that include one on the surprising source of the \$4 toast craze and another on the reasons we hold onto the myth of the condemned prisoner's last meal. And there are pieces that appeal to the heart more than the head (as is only right, when writing about something as emotional as food!): a moving Thanksgiving story on what happens when the baton doesn't pass to the next generation as expected, and a giggle-inducing, cuss-laden recipe for the best effing chicken cutlets for a cold day.

Several times, reading this anthology, I wanted to talk the articles over with someone, to share them with friends and family. That's surely the best praise one could wish for either food or writing.

Erin Nudi says

Not riveting the entire way through, but there was definitely some excellent food writing in here, not to mention a few great recipes. My favorites were:

1) The Science of the Best Chocolate Chip Cookies by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt - Cookies are examined from a scientific point of view, examining what happens when you add cake flour over bread flour, baking soda over baking powder, etc., etc, allowing you to perfectly tailor your preference for chewy or soft or spread out wide or standing tall, etc., etc., etc., cookies.

2) How to Cook Chicken Cutlets and Give Yourself a Reason to Keep Living by Albert Burneko - A hilarious explanation of how to cook chicken cutlets with tomato sauce. It is very much a man talking to other men about how to cook. This is manly cooking at its best.

3) The Invasivore's Dilemma by Rowan Jacobsen - A really interesting look at a chef who is attempting to rectify the invasive species dilemma by cooking them. This is a lot more challenging than it sounds.

I also really enjoyed the two pieces about prison food, one specifically on the ritual of last meals.

I will definitely be looking to pick this gem up every year.

Antigone says

Holly Hughes has been at this since 2000; fourteen years sieving through articles and essays on food, food prep, and the people engaged in the art of satisfying hunger. Her judgment here is exceptional, her selections not only cutting edge but top drawer in terms of writing and personal expression. In this one modest, annually-produced paperback is a treasure trove of material on taste, trend and tribulation at work in the current culinary world. It's got to be the best-kept secret in the cooking section of the bookstore, and thrilled am I to have stumbled upon it.

Many factors inform the tenor of collections like this, not the least of which is the editor's emotional space at the time of compilation. In her introduction, Ms. Hughes relays the news of the recent loss of her brother - a brother who had taken great interest in these yearly books of hers. That loss and the grief it brought go a long way toward explaining a stronger focus on conflict and struggle. Her choice of pieces dealing with poverty, food stamps; halfway kitchens reaching out to train the impoverished; the meaning of food to a depressed father; the rediscovery of a passion for cooking by a mother who'd lost her sense of smell; the state of American prison cuisine, to cite a few, betray an effortful attempt at rebalance. My favorite of these, "A Toast Story" by John Gravois, talks of a woman in San Francisco who opened a tiny café called Trouble where she serves very few things - among them coffee, cinnamon toast, coconuts and shots of grapefruit juice. (She'd heard you could live on coconuts as long as you had a supplemental source of Vitamin C. The toast came later, as a supplemental source of comfort.) Her aim was not to feed but to survive, not to appease but to connect. She suffers from schizophrenia and bipolarity, and by providing herself with human contact she finds she's better able to keep in contact with who she is.

It's not all dark and stormy consequence, however. Hughes includes some great work on street food, the trend toward foraging, pizza, kale, sugarcane, chocolate chip cookies, the tuna salad sandwich and common sense turkey prep. You could find me nodding my head as I read through the essay about the over-reliance on exact times given in recipes. (Best Captain Barbosa Voice: *It's not really a code, it be more like guidelines.*) And Frank Bruni's piece on the joys of being a restaurant regular? Preachin' to the choir here, dude.

This is terrific holiday reading, especially in the kitchen with the scent of gingerbread wafting through the air, surrounded by those many festive tins of food prepared to go out to the legion of bachelors among us. The spirit of the season impends...

Linda says

Fun read. For my "taste" there were a few essays that I found not to my liking. For example, I cannot imagine eating insects. I did enjoy the writers I follow and found a few new ones. For "foodies" and those interested in following food trends, I recommend this highly. Best of all, one can select an essay and move on to other reading material. Good book to bring along for standing on lines or places with long wait lines. Enjoy!

Carrie Padgett says

It's a bit daunting to offer a review of a book that is already self-proclaimed as "The Best." Good thing Best Food Writing 2014 lives up to its name. A well curated collection of essays, profiles, and articles, each selection deserves its place in this annual compendium. The articles range from serious examinations of current events (feeding families on food stamps and food bank handouts) to humorous (choosing homemade ketchup over a longtime friend). There are memories (tomato pie in Rhode Island) and commentaries (beyond the locavore to invasivore and free range gatherers). I was surprised (although I shouldn't have been) when what I was reading intersected my real life. I witnessed the lines at Hapa Ramen in San Francisco, shopped the farmers market there. After reading about \$4 toast, I began seeing it. For anyone who appreciates good food, whether it be as a home cook or diner at a fine restaurant, Best Food Writing 2014 has something for you to appreciate. I received a free advanced e-copy of this book in return for a fair review. I ate it up and am grateful.

Biblio Files (takingadayoff) says

This anthology series, The Best Food Writing, is not part of those other anthology series you see every fall. It's all on its own, edited by the same editor, Holly Hughes, every year since 2000. Although I didn't discover Best Food Writing until 2003, once I found it I had to go back and read the volumes I'd missed up to that point. I discovered new writers and publications -- what a treasure.

Then, about ten years into the series I stopped enjoying the annual collections. They'd become "Pollan-ized," that is the articles were more and more about sustainable food and locavore eating. Not all the articles were so earnest -- some were downright snooty, about self-important celebrity chefs and exclusive four star restaurants. No thanks.

But this year, Hughes has returned with a collection reminiscent of the old days -- essays about quirky food memories and found recipes. It's not just fluff either -- there are some gritty and pointed articles about prison food, eating on an ever-shrinking food stamp allotment, and the myth of the condemned prisoners' last meals.

Over fifty writers have contributed to this 400-page buffet of essays, articles, and recipes from newspapers, magazines, and websites. Chow down!

(Thanks to NetGalley and Perseus Books for a digital review copy.)

Mtbike40 says

Stories about food have become more popular than ever, and with so many places to go to get great stories and view points on food you are bound to miss some of the best. The 2014 collection of Best Food Writing is a great way to get some of the best possible articles, opinions and thoughts about food that you might have missed.

One of my favorite parts about this collection of stories is the diversity of food writing that has been put into one source. While I may not agree with all of the stories or have a strong belief as some of the authors, my thinking about food grows because I have the opportunity to have access to view points that I may have not otherwise sought out.

I enjoy that some of the articles are about food experiences and that others are about food safety or food sustainability. This is what makes this book special. As a reader you can search out the articles that fit your mood, there is not reason that you have to read this book from cover to cover.

This years collection is well put together, Holly Hughes has assembled a diverse collection of food stories that will enhance your own culinary knowledge and appreciation.

Dan says

Surprised by how much I enjoyed this compilation. Had read just a few pieces previously but even those were worth revisiting (Saslow on SNAP and J. Kenji López-Alt's best chocolate chip cookies endeavor). Learned, laughed, and maybe even shed a tear. Warning: reading before bed may increase late night snacking urges.

Katie says

"If a great-tasting carrot is tied to the abundance of soil organisms, a bad-tasting carrot comes from the absence of soil life. Which is the big distinction between organic and chemical agriculture." (187)

Kayl Parker says

1// *Learning How to Taste* / "The taste of these shrimp changes from day to day, depending on the conditions of the ocean. Eating them is really like tasting the ocean on that day."

2// *Tomato Pie* / "...and the recipe is smeared but still readable and the tomatoes are so fresh and so red that I swear, there has never been anything that red since."

3// Fixed Menu / "What's most remarkable to me is the culinary creativity the limited resources of prison yield. All Indiana Department of Corrections offenders in dorms have access to an ice make, hot-water dispenser, and microwave. That's enough to concoct some wildly elaborate dishes out of commissary food...I coaxed David Lawhorn into sharing his proprietary cookie cake recipe: 'You take Oreo cookies, split them apart, and put the cream in a separate bowl. Take the cookies and crush it down. Then take Kool-Aid, put it with the crushed-up cookies and add Pepsi to make a batter. Microwave it for seven minutes, and it turns out fluffy, like a cake you'd put in the window that costs \$20. Take the Oreo cream and put that on top. I also sprinkle trail mix on mine.'"
