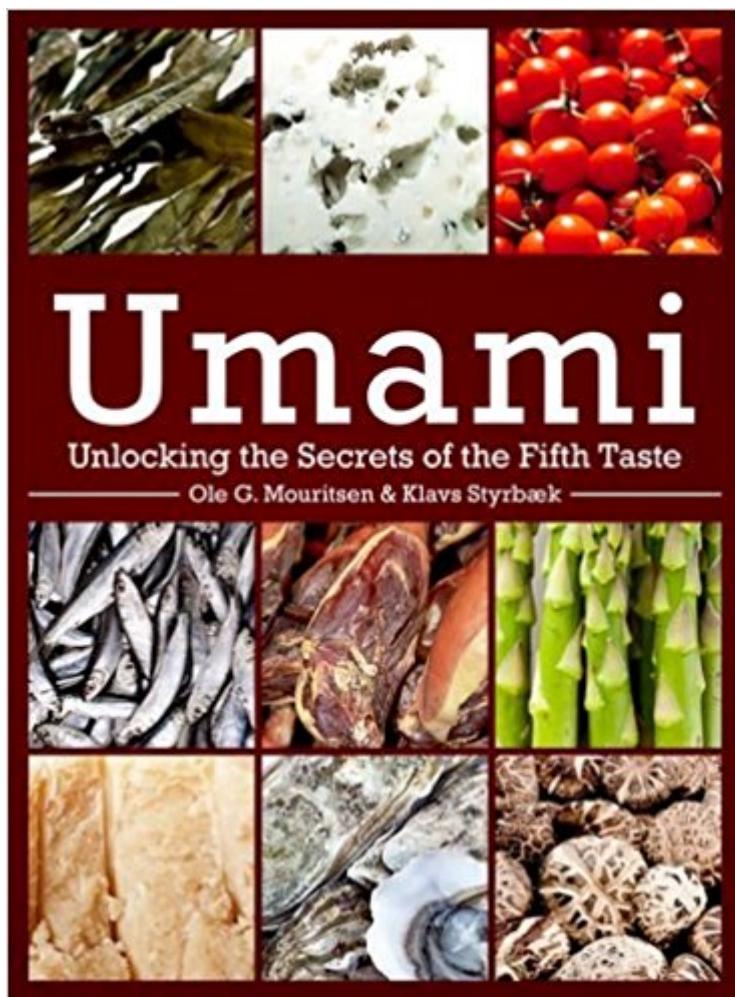


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Umami: Unlocking The Secrets Of The Fifth Taste (Arts And Traditions Of The Table: Perspectives On Culinary History)



Synopsis

In the West, we have identified only four basic tastes—sour, sweet, salty, and bitter—that, through skillful combination and technique, create delicious foods. Yet in many parts of East Asia over the past century, an additional flavor has entered the culinary lexicon: umami, a fifth taste impression that is savory, complex, and wholly distinct. Combining culinary history with recent research into the chemistry, preparation, nutrition, and culture of food, Mouritsen and Styrbæk encapsulate what we know to date about the concept of umami, from ancient times to today. Umami can be found in soup stocks, meat dishes, air-dried ham, shellfish, aged cheeses, mushrooms, and ripe tomatoes, and it can enhance other taste substances to produce a transformative gustatory experience.

Researchers have also discovered which substances in foodstuffs bring out umami, a breakthrough that allows any casual cook to prepare delicious and more nutritious meals with less fat, salt, and sugar. The implications of harnessing umami are both sensuous and social, enabling us to become more intimate with the subtleties of human taste while making better food choices for ourselves and our families. This volume, the product of an ongoing collaboration between a chef and a scientist, won the Danish national Mad+Medier-Prisen (Food and Media Award) in the category of academic food communication.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just so you understand, this is not really a “cookbook” as we normally think of

cookbooks. This is Umami from a scientific point-of-view, with about 50 recipes included as examples. It was originally written in Danish, but has been translated exceptionally well. I think this book is for those who are deeply into the concept of umami and who thrive on the scientific and technical aspects of food and taste and all things culinary. Even if you are not scientifically inclined, and not so into the technicalities, this can be an intriguing book for you to read and digest. Take a look through the “Look Inside” feature and your logical imagination will clue you in to the fact that information far outweighs pictures and recipes. That is not a bad thing. But an abundance of luscious and gorgeous pictures and more colorful writing could have steeped this book in an umami of its own. Without the pictures, it is a terrific reference book, and while it spurs your imagination to create wonderful combinations of umami-rich foods, it does not excite. It does not ignite. It does not have the spirit to give it a soul. I think any book trying to be intimate with umami should reach deeper: Hence 4.5 star rating where a five-star rating could have been. The authors take quite a few pages to describe how umami was “discovered”. I put umami in quotes because the hard-to-describe and unique flavor was always there, but what it was composed of and how to capture that flavor was not. What is umami? This question was answered by explaining glutamic acid/free glutamates in great detail. MSG is one umami substance, and there is quite a discussion on the fact that it has an undeserved bad reputation. Then other umami substances were introduced: For instance, mother’s milk, (and another interesting discussion about the paradoxical fact that MSG is not put into infant formula, thereby robbing babies of being exposed to umami (and the formation of taste preferences) in early life). Then there is the “concept” of umami, (which is much broader than the taste of glutamate), and the Western world’s slow acceptance of the idea that there are taste sensations other than sweet, sour, bitter, salty. And a discussion on the fact that umami is still controversial: There might be at least 50 different primary tastes?! (You just must pay very careful attention to discover them.) The reader will learn about what foods contain glutamate or basal umami, and what foods contain nucleotides or synergistic umami. By the time you get to page 43, you will understand what the authors mean when they write: “The culinary arts can be said to be a study of how to maximize umami by taking advantage of the gustatory synergy produced by combining different ingredients. In the preparation of a dish, one will typically incorporate some ingredients that contribute glutamate and others with nucleotides.” They use dashi as the textbook example of this. The reader is offered nine dashi recipes, with plenty of explanation, over the course of ten pages. It was very insightful and if you are deeply into and interested in dashi, these pages might well be worth the price of this book. By the time you get to

page 58, you will begin to see some recipes: Monkfish Liver, au Gratin with Crabmeat and Vegetables, or with Raspberries and Peanuts; Pearled Spelt, Beets and Lobster; Crab Soup; Seriously Old-Fashioned Sourdough Rye Bread; Anchovies, Grilled Onions, Sourdough Bread, Ham and Mushrooms; White Asparagus in Miso with Oysters, Cucumber Oil and Small Fish (cucumber oil is made with peel and neutral oil); Parmesan Biscuits with Bacon and Yeast Flakes; Beef Estofado; Cassoulet; Sicilian Ratatouille; Quail Pate; Asparagus Risotto, and Oxtails Braised in Wheat Beer. The reader will learn about umami foods that come from the oceans: A technique to kill a fish to retain umami, fish sauces and pastes, recipes for garum, preserved fish and fish roe; and umami foods from the land: Fermented, pickled, aged, dried vegetables, dairy products and grains; soy sauce and miso; green tea; preserved, salted and dried meats; cheeses; eggs and mayo. How to make the most of umami? There is info on Knorr and Maggi, Bovril, Marmite and Vegemite, yeast flakes, ketchup, Worcestershire Sauce, umami in a tube, anchovy paste, dried cheese rinds. There are pages on soup stocks: *Soup is Umami*, and slow cooking, and umami in sweets. There is a chapter dealing with umami and wellness, too. And if the entire book was not scientific enough for you, the authors finish up with a chapter on *Technical and Scientific Details*, complete with many charts, a bibliography and a glossary. There is a very complete, 9-page index.*I was able to post a review of this book on the day it was released to the public because the publishers sent me a temporary download of the unfinished book many months ago.

I just received the book and have read the first section and find it most interesting. I was of the old school that MSG was unsafe so was glad to read the modern clarification of this myth. The recipes look like a fine addition to my collection and the photographs are excellent. I actually bought the book to give as Christmas gift to a gourmet friend and I think I made a good decision with it.

This product is going to take a while to read. You get a history lesson about Umami. and it's an advance course on the stuff. IT's like being at cooking school without enrolling. But I am learning about Umami, and might in the future learn how to power pack punch the flavors of dishes.

This is a fascinating book on a topic that is not so straightforward. I appreciated the wide breadth of coverage, from western cuisine to asian, from meats to vegetables, with recipes, experiments, and science to back it all up. Highly recommend.

This book is a must have for any Modernist Cook. Its got the Science the how to & what goes with

what. You will not be sorry.

Beautiful book with most interesting facts, history lessons, and recipes. Helped my food preparation already

Great book about natural flavour enhancing of umami, the fulfilling taste that makes food better.

Extremely interesting flavor concept

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