

BAKER SPOTLIGHT: THE QUEEN BEE

LAURA CORTÉS IS THE ACCOMPLISHED HOME BAKER BEHIND CHUBBEE KITCHEN, A BLOG DEDICATED TO A VERY DELIBERATE BAKING CHALLENGE. LAURA BAKES THROUGH ONE COOKBOOK EVERY TWO MONTHS, ATTEMPTING TO BAKE AS MANY RECIPES AS POSSIBLE FROM EACH TOME. FROM OUR OWN BAKE FROM SCRATCH: VOLUME ONE TO JOANNE CHANG'S PASTRY LOVE, LAURA HAS BAKED THROUGH ONE SWEET LIBRARY. HERE, WE CHAT ALL THINGS HOME BAKING AND WHY COOKBOOKS ARE ONE OF HER FAVORITE WAYS TO LEARN.



How did you first get into baking and when did you decide that a blog was the next step on your baking journey?

LC: My mom had a cake-decorating business when I was a small child, so I remember her teaching me the basics,

and I was certainly raised in a baking environment. Then, in 2014, I started working for a company that is very social, and I would bake things to bring into the office every day. It was so fun to have a captive audience, and I was definitely popular around the office for bringing in goodies! Over time, people encouraged me to start a side business, which is how the blog was born. I stuck with it for a while but realized I wasn't interested in the business side of baking—it became a chore to me. Baking should never be a chore! So, I just refocused my efforts back into baking for the moment and flexing my creative muscles.

We've all been spending more time at home recently. Have you challenged yourself with any difficult or more-involved bakes during the pandemic?

LC: I started my "One Book/Two Months" challenge in 2019. During the pandemic, I have been able to spend a lot more time in the kitchen, so I've been baking through my cookbooks more thoroughly. I've also made an effort to bake things that I wouldn't typically have tried. I just made a butter mochi cake for the first time, something I never would have bought in a bakery or restaurant. It's been so wonderful to be surprised by recipes.

How do you feel that cookbooks compare to recipes found online?

LC: When I crack open a new cookbook, I read it from cover to cover. There's so much valuable information found in forewords, prefaces, authors' letters, chapter openers, etc. A lot of people just go straight to the recipe, but I love to learn the background of the author and why they make certain decisions in the kitchen. To me, it's like going to school and taking a class, learning from one person for a whole semester.

What has been your favorite cookbook to bake from so far?

LC: *The Artful Baker* by Cenk Sönmezsoy is amazing. I have baked through close to nine cookbooks since I started "One Book/Two Months," and *The Artful Baker* is hands down my favorite. I love the style of instruction and the attention to detail. I like how Sönmezsoy is an unapologetic home baker, and he writes for home bakers. He doesn't assume you're going to have technical training and professional equipment. It's the perfect combination of approachable style and challenging recipes, my ideal cookbook.

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