The dishes at Grant Achatz's award-winning Chicago restaurant Alinea are entirely new, yet what diners taste often resurrects their most cherished food memories. Achatz has said that flavor is memory, and of all the ways in which Alinea appeals to the senses, its flavor that he has harnessed and reinvented in a kitchen that never rests on its laurels. (Although, Achatz has employed everything from smoking oak leaves to cinnamon torches to impart flavor, so whos to say that laurel branches are out of the question?) For a menu as ambitious as Alinea's, its cookbook incarnation is as clear a window into a chef's creative process as you could hope for, buttressed by stunning photography and thoughtful essays from Achatz and food literati Michael Ruhlman and Jeffrey Steingarten, among others. This doesnt mean necessarily that youll cook from Alinea often, or perhaps ever: the 600 recipes are composed precisely to show that any motivated cook can recreate Alineas dishes at home, but to do so may be missing the point. What makes Alinea remarkable--and unlike any other cookbook on the shelf--is its passionate insistence that there isnt just one recipe for being a cook. --Anne Bartholomew A Conversation with Grant Achatz

Amazon.com: Can you describe what sets Alinea apart from other restaurant cookbooks? Grant Achatz: We took the approach that we will present exactly what we do in the restaurant without concessions. That...
means that while we scaled the recipes to 8 servings, we did not convert to teaspoons or cups. This assures us that the recipes are tight and sound because we have made each of them a thousand or more times. Equally important is the fact that every single finished dish is pictured in the book. I always find it frustrating to read a great recipe and then not see the finished product. I understand that usually cost factors into showing only a portion of the recipes in picture form, but we decided that we had to take pictures of everything and we did. I also think because the creative team involved in making the book is the same that has made Alinea what it is, the feel of the book exemplifies that of the restaurant. This is truly important when taking on a project of this scope, the hope is that the reader felt an Alinea experience without dining here. We wanted the book to capture the essence, the spirit of the restaurant, and I think we accomplished that. Many cookbooks set out to simply highlight recipes, we wanted more.

Amazon.com: When you started developing the book, did you have other cookbook models in mind? How did you want yours to be different?

Achatz: We wanted the book to mirror the restaurant and its philosophy in a consistent manner. We looked at various other books to set different bars--one for the aesthetic, one for the quality of the printing, others for their clarity in recipes--then we decided what we didn't like in other books and went about finding solutions. For example, giant ingredient lists at the top of a page are often frustrating when you begin to go through the recipe. So we eliminated the overall ingredient lists and placed the ingredients right next to the instructions on how to make that sub-recipe. We think that makes a ton of sense and simplifies making the recipes a great deal. We were encouraged by pretty much everyone to explain each and every dish in a header--something most books do--and realized that they all start sounding the same. At one point we started reading headers from ten different books and they were interchangeable. So we got rid of those and put the over-arching explanations and technique descriptions in the front.

Amazon.com: You designed a website to complement the cookbook. How do you hope cooks and chefs will use the site?

Achatz: Ideally a community forms where home cooks, professional chefs, and our staff can interact with each other as a community interested in pushing the culinary arts forward. By community, we mean an open exchange of ideas and encouragement. Now that we are done with the book and it is hitting stores and homes we are going to turn our attention back to the front of the Mosaic as well and start adding more content--videos, recipes, essays....

Amazon.com: Speaking of websites, how do you think Alinea at Home blogger Carol Blymire will fare? (She did make it through The French Laundry Cookbook...)

Amazon.com: Speaking of websites, how do you think Alinea at Home blogger Carol Blymire will fare? (She did make it through The French Laundry Cookbook...
Achatz: We already have a section on the Mosaic where early buyers who gained access to preview recipes made dishes and posted their results—and they look fantastic! I think she will do quite well but will be forced to scale back in a few areas unless she makes this her full-time job. And that is fine—we encourage ambitious amateurs to tackle the recipes by picking out key elements and making the dish their own.

Amazon.com: Since Alinea opened its doors three years ago, both you and your restaurant have earned the prestigious James Beard Award. Could you have envisioned this enormous success when you first started out?

Achatz: Our goal was to build the best restaurant in the country...that was our stated goal. Did I think we would get there? Is there such a thing? We push to refine and get better. We are certainly not the best restaurant to go to if you want a pizza. But within the high-end haute culinary world I think we compare well. I don't believe there is such a thing as the best. But we strive for that ideal.

Amazon.com: Molecular gastronomy is something of a vogue classification these days—do you think the food at Alinea fits this description, or is the high-tech aspect of your kitchen just one piece of the puzzle?

Achatz: It is a small piece of the puzzle. Questioning convention is the bigger piece. We do that with almost every dish...and with the book. Technology is used where necessary to achieve a specific goal for a specific dish. As we say in the front of the book, we create first and worry about technology second. At the end of the day, I am a cook.

Amazon.com: Does a molecular approach to cooking necessarily mean that you're working with greater precision and efficiency than you would if you were only using traditional methods?

Achatz: I believe that Herve This did not mean molecular in the sense of chemistry when he coined the term...regardless, our approach is to do everything with a sense of purpose. Does that mean we are a precise and efficient kitchen? Absolutely. But I don't know if using unique ingredients and techniques pushes us in that direction. I think, rather, it is a commitment to overall excellence that does that.

Amazon.com: In today's ever-competitive culinary lands

**Personal Review: Alinea by Grant Achatz**
Like most foodies, I was well aware of Grant Achatz and his amazing Chicago restaurant, Alinea, even though I haven't eaten there and live 2,000 miles away. Word of this cookbook was buzzing about for months, and we were anxious to get it and look at it and...well...be amazed. Just by looking at it.
But a funny thing happened, which was a blogger we love, Carol Blymire, decided that after cooking and blogging her way through The French Laundry Cookbook, she was going to take on the Alinea book. Now, suddenly, this complicated book became a kind of ongoing educational text. And as Carol tried out the recipes, we then pulled out our copy and tried the recipes, too.

Achatz is known for molecular gastronomy, which means he uses chemicals and innovative tools to turn a meal into an explosion of flavor and surprise. This book shows his food being served so it looks like something from outer space; and there is a section that discusses things you might never really buy, but which he uses, like antigriddles, which freezes food instantly.

It’s fun to take a book that seems so extreme and out of our comfort zone as home chefs, and to prepare actual recipes from it. This book has us ordering crazy ingredients, and doing things like turning homemade caramel into a powdery shotglass of yumminess.

We’ve had a blast with the Alinea cookbook, and I highly suggest buying it and having fun. Read Carol’s blog, AlineaAtHome.com, for inspiration, and try out a recipe or two on your own. We went from thinking it was a book to look at only, to having our children use some of the recipes (a cracker one, for example) to create their own snacks.

Definitely, one of our favorite cookbooks of all times.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Alinea by Grant Achatz 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!