Of the 20-plus cookbooks Jacques Pépin has written, Chez Jacques is his most personal and engaging. Now starring in his tenth PBS series, Pépin ranks among America’s most beloved cooking teachers, and this book shows us why.

The book’s 100 recipes—for soups and appetizers, main courses, side dishes, and desserts—are Pépin’s own favorites among the thousands he has created over a lifetime of cooking. Using readily available ingredients and relying upon familiar techniques, these are the dishes he makes when preparing food at his Connecticut home. But Chez Jacques is more than a collection of well-liked recipes; it’s also a captivating sentimental journey. Each dish is introduced by a recollection—of picking dandelion greens for a spring salad, of buying fresh eggs from the local farmer—that invites readers to share in the traditions and rituals of Pépin’s most intimate circle.

This treasury of great food, lore, and memory is exquisitely illustrated with a sampling of Pépin’s paintings, as well as hundreds of color photographs of the finished dishes and of Pépin in all his “natural habitats”—pitching boules with a group of friends, savoring a glass of chilled rosé in the afternoon sun, painting landscapes, designing menus, and, of course, working in his kitchen.

Jacques Pepin needs no introduction to American cooking enthusiasts. He is probably the most well known TV cooking personality after Julia Child, not counting Emeril, who is probably better known as an entertainer to feedbag eaters who like to watch food being cooked than he is as a chef speaking about and showing cuisine to cooks who like cooking.
After living for over thirty years in the USA Pepin still radiates and personifies "French Chef" to many Americans. That more of his professional life has been spent in America than in France, and that his food has become a smooth hybrid of classical French and contemporary American sensibilities, and so would not be seen as really "French" by audiences in France, is beside the point. He brings, in every moment of his being, and in his approach to culture and life, a timeless French appreciation for not only the better but also the more genuine things in life.

Pepin's charm and indelible Frenchness are not his only assets. There are many charming people in the world, many of them French, presenting themselves smoothly all the time. What makes Pepin different is his biography and the singular grace, humility, good humor, common sense and perceptive understanding that he has shown in translating the essentials of the classical French cooking in which he was schooled into the world of the America that he immigrated to in the early 1960s.

That America, a food-industrial complex wasteland at the time, where home cooking was thought to be "woman's work" or lowly paid labor, and the foods available at grocery stores were depressing, austere, bland and, for the most part, overly processed by a food industry that had only recently turned from mass manufacturing rations for soldiers, was ripe for the encouragement and the example shown by the likes of Child, Beard and Pepin.

It's easy to dismiss Pepin as a TV chef, or his food as just "home cooking". But this book shows the richness of his background, the charm and warmth of his family and family story, the charm and rusticity of his many lovely amateur paintings, and the simple human joys of his lifestyle. It conveys, through several essays, his knowledge of food and food culture.

The dishes involved are not meant to be fine cuisine but instead everyday fare. That does not make them humble or ordinary. It makes them wonderful expressions of how to bring joy to the table with both everyday elements and a sensibility that appreciates and values that joy being brought to that table, for himself, for his family and for his friends. They are all well worth looking at, and this book, a handsome and lovely book that succeeds in a world of people trying to make lovely and handsome books, is well worth the price and worth having for the inspiration its author brings to the reader.