One of Americas best pastry chefs explains the techniques of making a wide assortment of French cookies, from ever-popular Ladyfingers to delectable Gerbet Macaroons, and offers concise recipes, complemented by pastry lore and personal anecdotes. 25,000 first printing. $25,000 ad/promo.

My Personal Review:
The authors, sadly, seem to be correct: fine cookies are a mostly lost art, even in France. I have read descriptions of and seem pictures of displays of cookies in sweet shops in Paris about a century ago. They contain a bewildering display of massive amounts of cookies in endless varieties. Today, these displays are almost extinct. This book is probably your last chance to learn how to produce these cookies, both for the amateur home cook and the professional. The authors seem to have done quite a bit of research and trial-and-error, as most of the recipes seem to be revivals and recreations as opposed to a recording of how they were actually done in production. As a result, the recipes have much more in common than they would have if they were the actual, original recipes. The key to all these different types is variation. In this book, there are many dozens of cookies, all very different in look and taste, yet all are based on only 7 basic recipes. With minor alterations in forming and flavors, you get a totally different cookie from the same recipe. Once you can make the basic recipe in a chapter, you can make all of the other cookies in the chapter, which is usually one or two dozen more. The seven types are: creamed sugar and butter, meringue, almond paste, sponge cake, tuiles, pâte sucrée, and puff pastry (yes, the authors expect you to make your own). I should also point out that these are traditional, fancy French patisserie; you will not find chocolate chips, oatmeal raisin cartwheels, or gingerbread men. The book also has several unusual instructions. Some recipes require a resting period of a few hours or even overnight. Whipping egg whites requires that you go past the stiff peak stage, a no-no in my book. It also calls for baking on a piece of newspaper, and wetting down the paper after baking to get the cookies off. They may seem odd, but
each one worked as advertised, and you are well advised to follow the
directions to the letter; attempts to skip them and do it the "normal" way will
meet with failure. You will also need a substantial collection of unusual and
specialty baking pans which are hard to find, if you can find them at all. I
also find the instructions for tempering chocolate to be inadequate, and
used a standard method for tempering chocolate. In the chapter on pâte
sucrée, one is instructed to use the "smear" method of dough, it specifies
ammonium carbonate and not baking soda, and it states that if the
temperature is above 75, you can not do these recipes (the same author
remark applies to the chapter on puff pastry). It also instructs you to wet
the baking pan before putting down the dough so it stays glued down.
The chapter on puff pastry has a good recipe for using up scraps along
with recommended recipes that can use it. It also has a good and reliable
recipe for chocolate puff pastry. There are several nice touches to the
recipes. All have a specific list of equipment that you need; however, they
only list the baking sheets and preparation, and not other equipment like
food processors or blenders. Each recipe also has a specific amount of
time that you can store the cookies; some will last a week, while others
must be eaten the same day, while frozen, uncooked dough will last
longer. The procedure of each recipe is also extremely detailed, and
leaves nothing to chance; in this respect, this book is exemplary and would
be a good template for anyone contemplating writing a cookbook. Some
recipes take up 2 pages. Also worthy of note is that the recipe amounts are
listed in weight, as well as volume. The first part of each chapter also
features a rather extensive primer on the techniques featured in the
recipes for that chapter. The beginning of each chapter also features a
very handy and useful index to all of the recipes for that chapter. This
book is a massive tome of 500 pages, including an impressive 90 pages
just on references and detailed procedures. Here, for example, you will
find a complete explanation of the brief and inadequate procedures of
tempering chocolate in the recipes. The explanation and diagrams for
making a cornet is hopelessly wrong. It has a rare explanation on the
proper use of the pastry bag. It also calls for Vaseline as a pan coating (I
would advise against this; try non-stick cooking spray with lecithin instead).
Best of all, every one of the cookies I tried were wonderful and worth the
effort, and most were not harder to make than ordinary cookies from
standard cookbooks; in some cases, they were easier since this book had
the details missing from most recipes. This is a reliable and extensive
resource for traditional, French cookies. In this book, I found several years
worth of cookie baking (including several for that neglected cookie gun
hidden at the back of the cabinet), and I recommend it highly.

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