The Vegetarian Option by Simon Hopkinson

Not so long ago, vegetarian choices were an afterthought on restaurant menus or were relegated to side dishes at home. But times—and eating habits—have changed, and vegetarianism is being touted not just for health reasons but for environmental ones, too.

Using fresh produce and combining seasonal ingredients have always been key to Simon Hopkinson’s cooking. Now, in The Vegetarian Option, the celebrated British chef focuses entirely on mouthwatering dishes without meat or fish. By pairing ingredients that naturally go together—eggplants with red peppers, tomatoes with olives, and peaches with plums, for example—he brings out the fullest flavor in foods. Vegetables take center stage in the book’s 125 original recipes, but there are also plenty of creative ideas for fruit, herbs, pasta, rice, legumes, eggs, dairy, and even cocktails. The Vegetarian Option is not written exclusively for vegetarians, but as a source of inspiration for all food lovers.

My Personal Review:
Perhaps one of the more appealing aspects of The Vegetarian option is the relative simplicity of the dishes, simple in that each recipe is based on just one or two main ingredients, yet the resulting dish, far from begin simple, is often quite sophisticated.

The range of recipes include those built around one or two vegetables; pasta dishes; dishes based on pulses and grains, rice or eggs; and include soups and consommé plus a few fruit dishes. They include a few familiar dishes such as macaroni cheese with tomatoes, cauliflower cheese, to more unusual combinations such as onion and blood orange salad and a vegetarian version of the more exotic Oriental fried turnip paste. There are
many imaginative recipes here, with some the basic ingredients are clearly recognisable in the finished dish, in others they are turned into something entirely new.

The book is well laid out, the recipes clear and easy to follow, and each is accompanied by a few personal comments from the author. Each section opens with a brief introduction, which might include an appealing anecdote; I especially liked the account of the small boy horrified that the haricots had been neither 'topped' not 'tailed'. There are plenty of enticing full colour photographs of the resultant dishes, along with some arty little black and white photographs. The book includes a comprehensive index.

This is not a comprehensive, cover-all eventualities book on vegetarian cookery, but an imaginative and creative collection of honest recipes which do not try to be anything other than the sum of their ingredients.

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