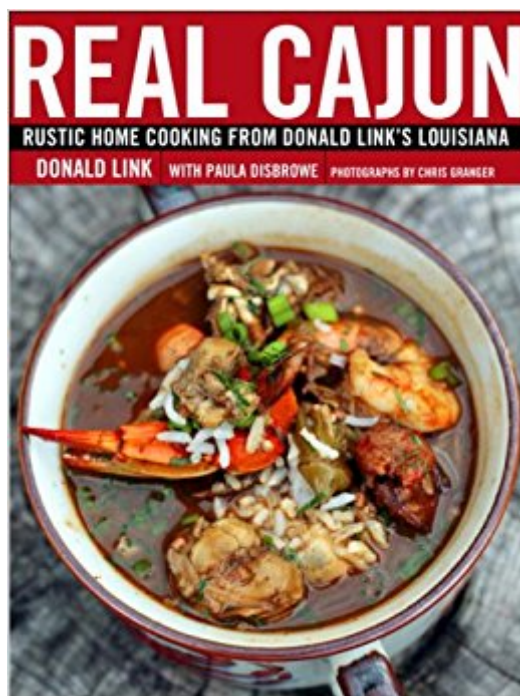


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Real Cajun: Rustic Home Cooking From Donald Link's Louisiana



Synopsis

An untamed region teeming with snakes, alligators, and snapping turtles, with sausage and cracklins sold at every gas station, Cajun Country is a world unto itself. The heart of this area—the Acadiana region of Louisiana—is a tough land that funnels its spirit into the local cuisine. You can't find more delicious, rustic, and satisfying country cooking than the dirty rice, spicy sausage, and fresh crawfish that this area is known for. It takes a homegrown guide to show us around the back roads of this particularly unique region, and in *Real Cajun*, James Beard Award-winning chef Donald Link shares his own rough-and-tumble stories of living, cooking, and eating in Cajun Country. Link takes us on an expedition to the swamps and smokehouses and the music festivals, funerals, and holiday celebrations, but, more important, reveals the fish fries, touffees, and pots of Granny's seafood gumbo that always accompany them. The food now famous at Link's New Orleans-based restaurants, Cochon and Herbsaint, has roots in the family dishes and traditions that he shares in this book. You'll find recipes for Seafood Gumbo, Smothered Pork Roast over Rice, Baked Oysters with Herbsaint Hollandaise, Louisiana Crawfish Boudin, quick and easy Flaky Buttermilk Biscuits with Fig-Ginger Preserves, Bourbon-Soaked Bread Pudding with White and Dark Chocolate, and Blueberry Ice Cream made with fresh summer berries. Link throws in a few lagniappes to give you an idea of life in the bayou, such as strategies for a great trip to Jazz Fest, a what-not-to-do instructional on catching turtles, and all you ever (or never) wanted to know about boudin sausage. Colorful personal essays enrich every recipe and introduce his grandfather and friends as they fish, shrimp, hunt, and dance. From the backyards where crawfish boils reign as the greatest of outdoor events to the white tablecloths of Link's famed restaurants, *Real Cajun* takes you on a rollicking and inspiring tour of this wild part of America and shares the soulful recipes that capture its irrepressible spirit.

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Customer Reviews

If bacon does not immediately come to mind as an essential ingredient of Cajun cooking, then clearly you have been missing Link, the chef-owner of two New Orleans restaurants, Herbsaint and Cochon. He not only begins his premiere cookbook with instructions on making four pounds of homemade bacon, he includes such tempting items as a fried oyster and bacon sandwich, tomato and bacon pie, and catfish fried in bacon fat. Even in his vegetarian twice-baked potatoes, he cannot help mentioning, Normally I like crisp bits of bacon in stuffed potatoes. And where bacon leads, the rest of the pig is sure to follow. A classic boudin recipe is rich in pork liver and shoulder; deer sausage combines venison with pork butt; and a hearty/scary breakfast dish, oreilles de cochon (pig ears), is boudin-stuffed beignets. There is also plenty of crawfish, be it in a crawfish pie, a traditional boil or in a boulette (deep fried balls of crawfish meat and stuffing). A bourbon cherry lemonade or a plate of fresh peach buckle would cleanse the palate nicely, Eighty color photos enhance Link's efforts, as do his brief meditations on crawfish farming, family gatherings and the joys of making a perfect roux. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"Donald Link's book simply makes me hungry the way I used to be around my grandmother's kitchen down on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He is more than a chef. He is a southern artist using tradition as a canvas and acquired culinary magic as his box of paints, with which he brings to life masterpieces of southern cuisine that ignite our taste buds as well as reminding us of who we are and where we come from." • Jimmy

"Donald Link's childhood in Cajun Country taught him that cooking is all about family, local ingredients, and, most important, taste. There's no blackened redfish here, just delicious recipes (think Crispy Softshell Crab with Chili Glaze or Satsuma Buttermilk Pie) and great memories, informed by his wry sense of humor and passion for food and place. Real Cajun is the real deal and proves, once again, that Link is not only the soul of New Orleans but also one of the most talented chefs in the country." • Julia Reed "Donald Link is

rediscovering traditional Cajun food in all of its diversity and simplicity. His flavors come from backyard organic vegetables, local fish, and heritage breed pork. The essence of Cochon's cooking is beautifully revealed in this inviting book.

•Alice Waters "Donald Link's cooking embodies the very best of the heart and soul of New Orleans cuisine; there's no one in the business with more credibility. *Real Cajun* captures the straight-up, un-cut, raw, and wonderful rustic classics in all their unvarnished, unpretentious glory."

•Anthony Bourdain "Real Cajun tells Donald Link's captivating story of growing up in southwest Louisiana and shares with us the incredible no-holds-barred type of cooking and eating that Cajuns live for. With great traditions, vivid tales, and passionate cooking from a real Cajun chef, this cookbook will be a treasure for all who turn its pages."

•Frank Stitt "Real Cajun is honest, gutsy, and proudly provincial. Read this book and you'll want to mainline shrimp and crab gumbo. Cook from this book and you'll rationalize an all boudin diet."

•John T. Edge, general editor of *Cornbread Nation*

Initially, I wasn't overly impressed with this book, primarily because the recipes that stuck out in my head were the homemade sausages, home made bacon, pork cracklins, boudin and such. They may be Louisiana staples but alas, I would never make them. However, after perusing the pages more carefully, I found there is much to appreciate and enjoy here. The stories Mr. Link relates convey his personality. His love and appreciation for his family, friends, food and tradition are all conveyed and provide an enjoyable read. There are lots of pristine color photos of both food and family. A sturdy, quality made book. But the heart of any cookbook are the recipes. And there are some good ones here! So far I haven't found a bad one in the bunch. I've made the Vietnamese marinated shrimp. (Delicious, but I did have to get used to pulling off their heads....hey I'm a Yankee...and I just couldn't bring myself to suck the fat out of them). The crab cakes with jalapeno remoulade (mine fell apart despite using almost double the bread crumbs recommended but it was still out of this world....and using fresh crabmeat as Mr. Link suggests DOES make a difference). Lake Charles dirty rice, German Festival Ham and White Bean Stew (great in the winter), Post K meatloaf, smothered collard greens, cast iron hush puppies (a little bland but still good...I'll tweak it next time). The Jambalaya was very tasty but I found the rice did not cook evenly. I'll use instant rice next time. Still on my list is the Baked Oysters with Herbsaint Hollandaise, Billy Boy's Crawfish Etouffee, Chicken Sauce piquant, Spicy Shrimp Creole, grilled oysters with garlic chili butter, chicken and bacon hash to name a few. I've also made his spice mix that he uses for the Vietnamese shrimp. This is a great all purpose spice mixture you can use in many dishes. Seafood,

poultry, pork are all represented (there are surprisingly few beef recipes) He also gives recipes for cocktails and desserts but I'm not a big sweet fan so I haven't made any of those. If your looking for good "home cooking" type recipes (like his Link Family Crawfish Boil recipe), this book will more than meet your expectations.

This is my favorite cookbook hands down, the stories are great and the recipes have all been tremendous. You cant go wrong buying this it really is a gem for the kitchen! I find it more than cajun as well, generally good recipes even for general southern cooking. The smothered pork roast is tremendous, always cook that for New Years Day along with the black eyed peas, rice and turnip greens (different recipe)

I have tons of cook books. I was sold on this one because the dirty rice recipe was the best that I have ever tasted. Dirty rice is supposed to be easy to make, and it is, but this recipe the best ever. Also tried the jambalaya and it was fantastic. This being my third Cajun cook book, my collection is complete and will be looking no further.

This is the only cookbook I've found that has the down-the-bayou recipes. It has the standard New Orleans stuff (gumbo, etc.) but it also has dirty rice, crawfish pies, white beans and rice and so on. I grew up eating this exact food and I'm so happy (now as a cajun living outside of Louisiana) that I can have a taste of home by just cooking from this cookbook.

I have had many Cajun cook books and this is by far one of the best. It is authentic and the stories told along the journey through the book are worth it alone. Those stories tell the real flavors and culture of that region using the influences from family and friends. Understanding the connection to local foods helps define the food and how they have lived it from generation to generation make this book special. I have found that the recipes I have already prepared are easy to follow and the results are wonderful.

My sister wanted "a gumbo cookbook;" knowing a few things about Cajun/Creole cooking, I figured I could cover that one. Visiting a bookstore, I spent a good 20 minutes reading a lot of the recipes and some of the commentary... and I was severely impressed. It makes plain the point that Cajun cooking is far from pretentious, and suggests certain types of paprika and other spices with the assurance that whatever says "paprika" in the grocery store will work fine. There's a lot of very

practical advice on basic ideas like roux (and some reasoning for using butter in some cases and oil in others), three really great gumbo recipes, a good jambalaya recipe, even tasso, a simple sausage recipe, and at least three recipes that depend on homemade boudin -- for which he provides what seems to be a pretty good recipe and technique. There is cornbread. The recipes are great, the text is very honest and... earthy... and the whole thing just exudes "this is what works, it's not that complicated, and this is how to do it." I bought my sister a copy for her birthday (didn't leave myself time to wait for shipping), and after wrapping it, used the web browser in my cell phone to hit and buy myself a copy -- as well as a cast iron pan, which I've needed for a while, and of which this book makes excellent use. This is right up there with James Peterson's 'Sauces' in terms of useful culinary references. It's a solid, enthusiastic 5/5.

Gotta love it. Classic Cajun recipes, that reflect what my Big Mama used to make before she passed. Maybe it's the nostalgia speaking, but this is a really great book with quality recipes.

This book was a joy to read. The writing is very good and an interesting read. The dishes are introduced by Donald Link's experience or memory rather than the history of it. It is a personal preference which one means more to you. I enjoy both styles. We all know that there are dishes out there that makes us think back to our childhood or another place in time. The most important thing in a cook book for me is pictures. This book has plenty of them.

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