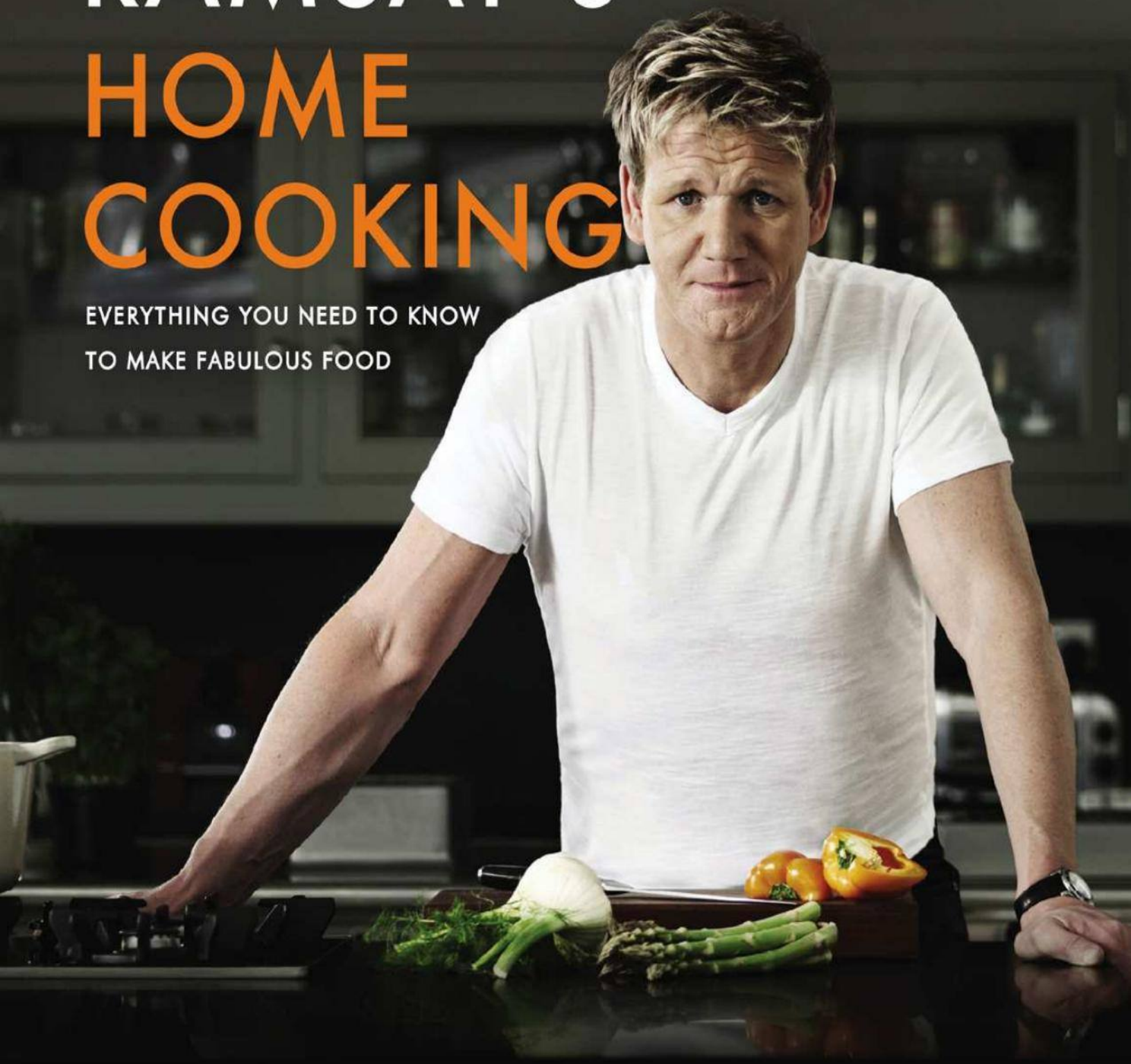


GORDON RAMSAY'S HOME COOKING

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
TO MAKE FABULOUS FOOD



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Everything You Need to Know
to Make Fabulous Food

GRAND CENTRAL
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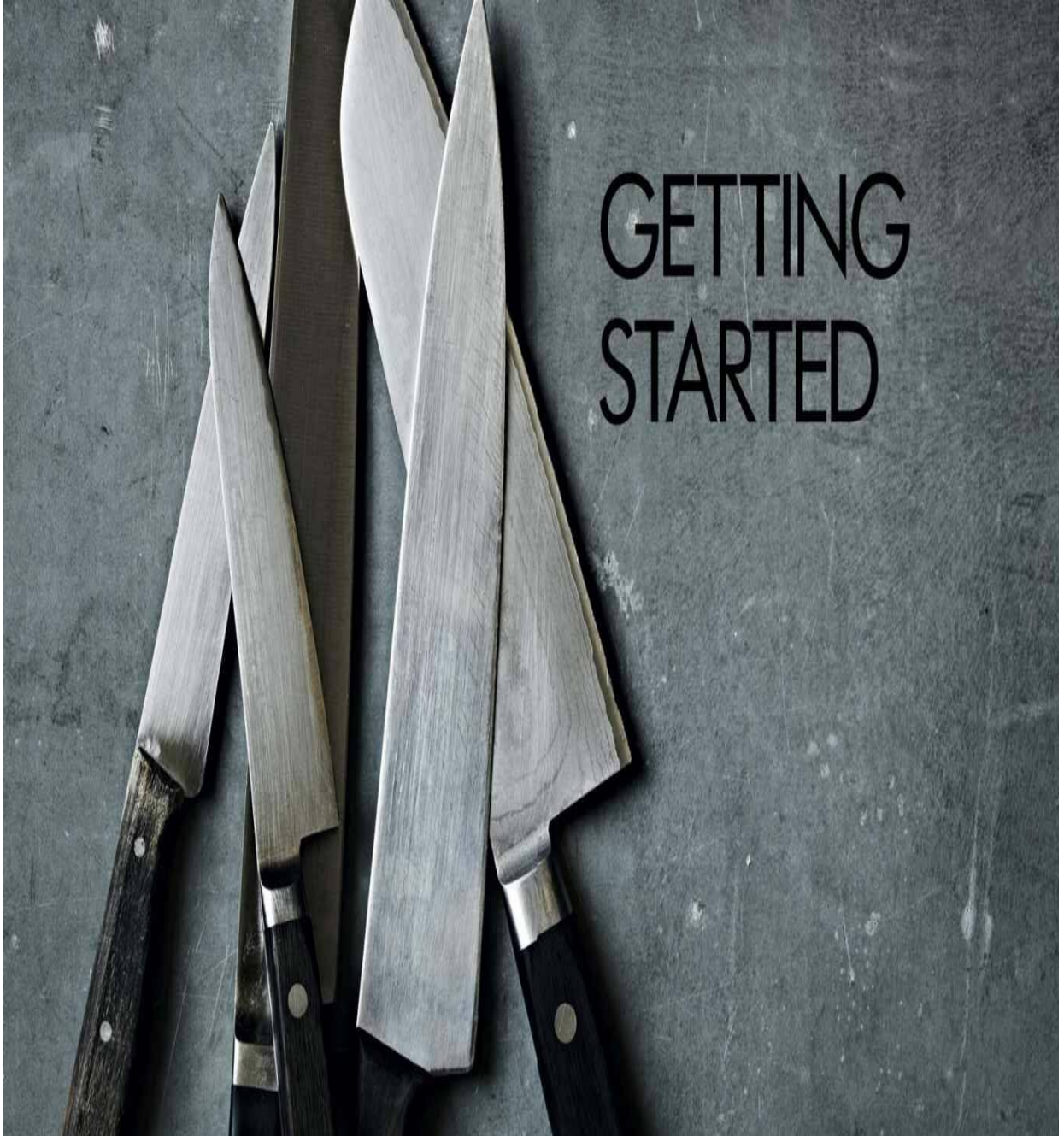
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**A DECADE OR SO AGO, THERE WAS A
FASHION FOR
MICHELIN-STARRED CHEFS TO PRODUCE
THESE
INCREDIBLY COMPLICATED COOKBOOKS.**

You know the sort of thing I mean—where following one recipe meant you had to turn to five other recipes to prepare the various stages before you could even begin to tackle the featured dish. It was crazy, and completely failed to recognize that home cooking and restaurant cooking are two very different things.

So the first thing I want to do is to reassure you that this book isn't going to be anything like

that. I'm not setting out to turn you into Michelin-starred chefs here. I'm not expecting you to spend hours bent over plates, tweaking and primping in pursuit of perfection. I just want to teach you how to cook and enjoy good food at home. I'm going to strip away all the hard graft and complexity and show how, from humble beginnings, anyone can produce mouth-watering recipes. Put simply, I'm going to show you how to cook yourself into a better cook.

Not that I'm turning my back on my experience. Over the past 25 years I've
been lucky enough

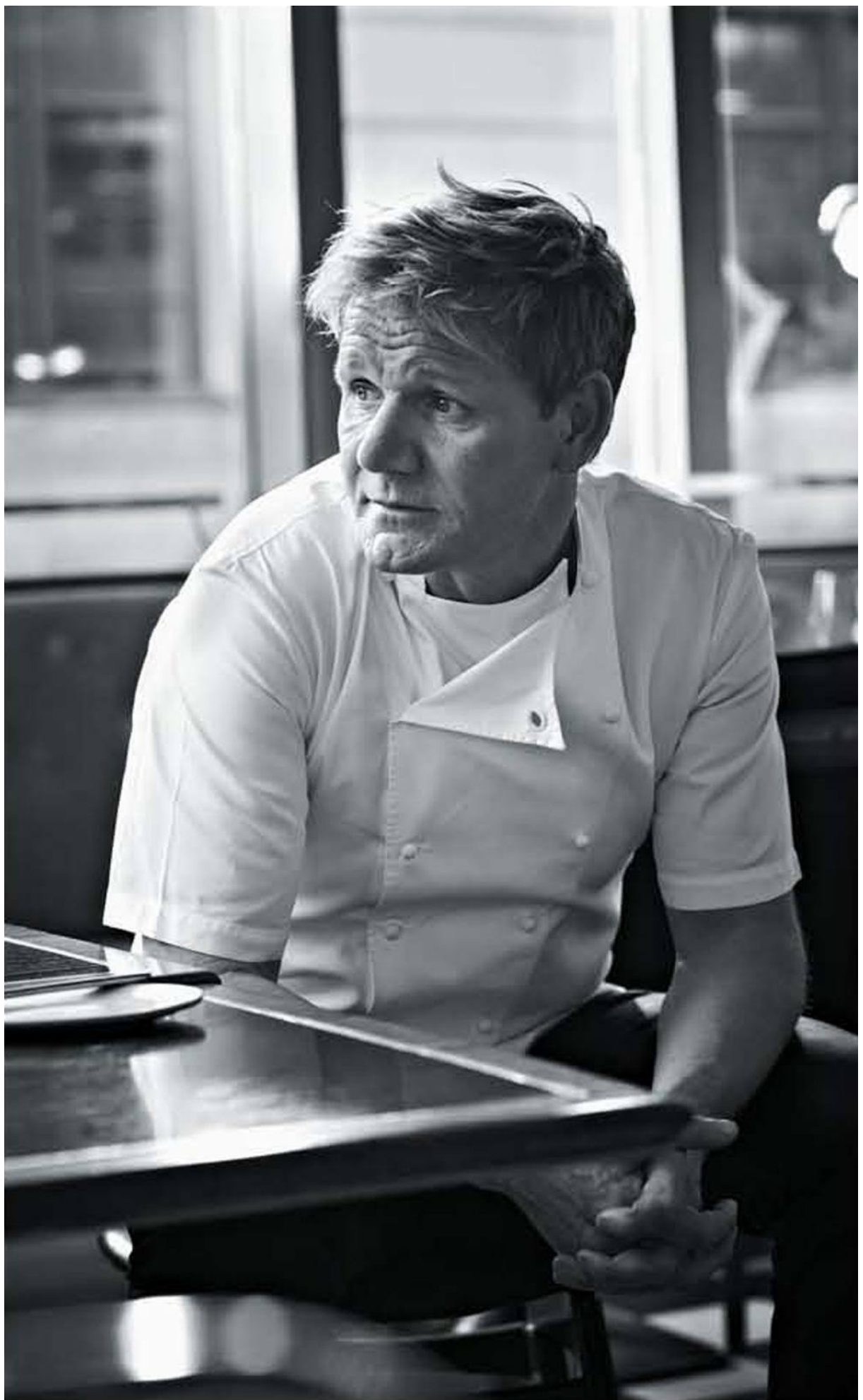
to work with some of the best chefs in the world, from Albert and Michel Roux in London to Guy Savoy and Joel Robuchon in Paris. I've held Michelin stars in many of the major cities of the world, including three at Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London for more than 10 years now. Like all chefs, I've learned an incredible amount along the way: techniques, tricks—cheats, even—that I incorporate instinctively into my cooking every day. Half the time I don't even know I'm using them, but they are always there, giving me confidence in the kitchen.

And believe me, the best thing you can have in a kitchen is confidence.
I really think that's

what separates good cooks from the mediocre ones. Sure, you need to be able to taste and to master a few basics, but being able to act boldly and decisively, to have the confidence to ramp up the seasoning, for example, or to turn the gas up high and use the heat to your advantage—that's the real secret. That's what takes your cooking to another level.

Some people say they can't cook—that given half a chance, they'll burn water.
I just don't buy

that. I think they're just not very interested in trying. Fair enough. I'm not interested in needlepoint and I'll tell you that I can't sew. But in truth, there's no one with a genuine interest in learning who can't improve and, with enough practice, become a decent cook. They might not get to the stage where they can hold down a job in a professional kitchen, but they can learn to produce good home cooking and to get pleasure from it. And if you are already a good cook? Well, that's the great thing about cooking —there's always something new to learn, another way of doing things, a different way of combining flavors that takes a recipe in a new direction.



So where do we start? With the absolute basics, of course. Before you even get to turn on the gas, the first job in any new kitchen is always, always, always to get to know your environment, to get familiar with the layout and be comfortable with the location of everything in your kitchen. Are the pans within easy reach? Are your sieves close at hand? I'm not talking about major DIY here. I'm not suggesting you need to rip out your kitchen sink and shift it across the room. It's just a question of getting yourself familiar with where everything is. You don't want to be just about to finish off your risotto and have to spend 10 minutes looking for the cheese grater. That's the kind of thing that throws you off your stride and from then on you'll be playing catch-up.

Time spent getting yourself ready is never wasted. Get out the ingredients and
the equipment

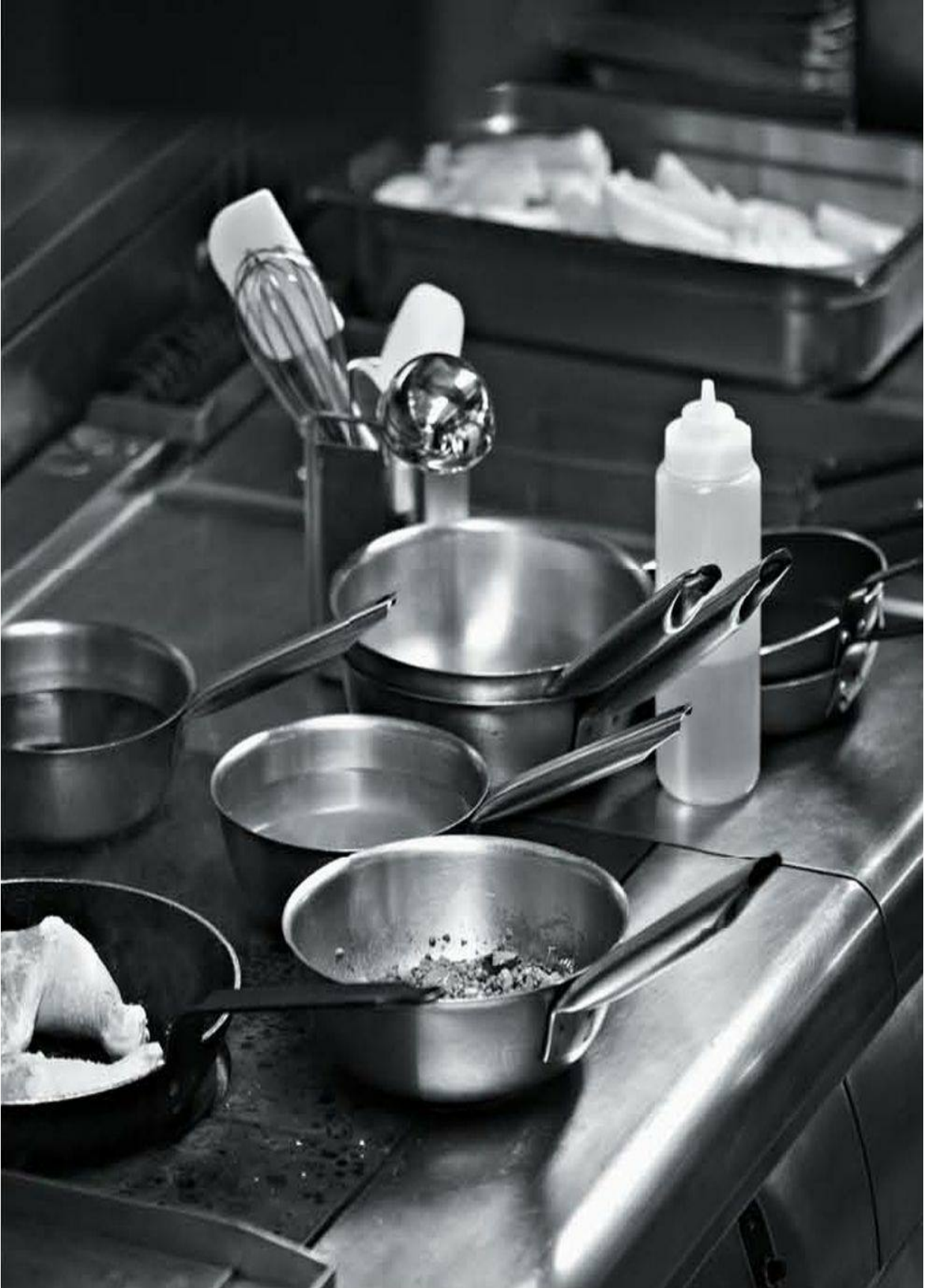
you need. This *mise-en-place*, as we call it, is crucial. It sets you off on a calm course and takes the stress out of cooking. Without it, any professional kitchen would be dead in the water, and it's equally important for the home cook too. Get it right and you have won 90 percent of the battle.

KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

Speaking of equipment, what do you need? Less than you might think. I'm always suspicious of people who have every gadget under the sun because I suspect they collect them as a kind of displacement therapy, to make up for the lack of cooking they actually do. Like a footballer who's afraid to make a tackle for fear of getting grass stains on his uniform, they line up their blenders and juicers and pasta machines to look the part, and then let them collect dust. Better to be a poorly equipped doer than an over-equipped poseur.

Essential kitchen equipment starts and pretty much finishes with a good set of knives and pans.

Armed with these, there are not a lot of jobs you can't tackle. A knife will do the job of both food processor and garlic press, a pan can be both meat mallet and flan tin. Buy the best quality you can, and by that I don't necessarily mean the most expensive—as in everything, you'll sometimes pay dearly for fashionable brands—but I do mean something built to last. Spend the money now and these kitchen workhorses will last you a lifetime, saving you a fortune in the long run.



HOW TO CHOP AN ONION

1. Cut the onion in half lengthwise, going through the pointed end and the root. Peel off the

papery skin to get to the shiny layers, but leave the root intact or the juices will start to bleed and

make you cry.

2. Make a series of parallel vertical cuts down the length of the onion, stopping just short of the

root.

3. Holding the onion steady, make two horizontal cuts through the onion, again stopping just short

of the root.

4. Now grip the onion like a tennis ball to hold it together, pushing down with your forefinger,

middle finger, and ring finger on top and thumb and pinkie at the sides. Have your middle finger

slightly ahead of its two neighbors and use the knuckle to guide the knife down to make repeated

slices, inching your fingers back toward the root as you go.

5. You should be left with a pile of neatly diced onion, and a root, which you can trim more if

you like or reserve for the stockpot.

KNIVES

Knives are the first thing every aspiring chef buys. I still remember the day I came home as a pimply teenager clutching my first set tightly under my arm. From day one, they stay with you, taken from kitchen to kitchen and guarded with your life. At cooking school I was taught that the test of a good knife was in the balance. The blade should be forged all the way through to the butt of the handle and you should be able to balance it on an extended forefinger where the blade and handle meet.

Most knives are made of stainless steel. French steel is softer, so easier to sharpen, but more

vulnerable to wear. German steel is harder, so takes more skill to sharpen, but it will maintain its sharp edge for longer. Japanese knives, too, are made of

very hard steel and tend to be lighter and more stylish-looking. I favor Wüsthof, a German brand, but the important thing is to find a make that feels comfortable in your hand. That way it will become your best friend.

A basic set of knives should include a 2- to 3-inch paring knife for peeling fruit and cutting

small vegetables, an 8-inch chef's knife for chopping, a 5-inch boning knife with a slightly flexible blade for cutting around meat and bone, and a 10-inch serrated or bread knife. You'll also need a honing steel to keep them sharp. A blunt knife is far more dangerous than a sharp one as it can easily skid off what you are cutting and do serious damage to fingers. Get into the habit of brushing your knife against a steel every time you use it. Hold the steel confidently as you would a tennis racket in your left hand (or right, if you are left-handed) and place the heel of the blade (where the sharpened edge meets the handle) on top of the steel near its base. Now draw the knife up the steel in a sweeping motion so that you stroke the entire length of the blade against the steel, keeping the angle between the blade and the steel at a steady 20 degrees. Now hone the other side of the knife by placing the blade edge underneath the steel and repeating the motion. Do this five or six times, always alternating the side of the blade, until you have a sharp edge.

With practice, you'll be able to build up a rhythm and do this instinctively in fast and fluid movements, but speed isn't the issue—it's about keeping the blade in contact with the steel at a consistent angle and stroking it all the way to the tip.

If the knife has lost its edge, no amount of honing will bring it back. In that case you'll need to

regrind the blade, either with a household knife sharpener or, better still, by asking your kitchen shop to do it for you.

When using a knife, always make sure you are cutting onto a solid surface such as a cutting

board. Glass and marble boards may look the part, but they have no real place in the kitchen as they will blunt the knife. Heavy wooden boards, which are what I use at home, are more knife-friendly but still look good. They can be cleaned with hot water and a little detergent, but never leave them to soak. They should be treated periodically with oil (wood, vegetable, it doesn't really matter, but probably not your best extra virgin). Plastic boards are highly practical as they can be put in the dishwasher. We use polyethylene boards in my restaurants—color-coded for meat, fish, and vegetables. That's probably overkill for the home kitchen, but do be aware of hygiene and certainly don't chop anything that isn't going to be thoroughly cooked on a board you previously used for raw meat. Don't forget, you can always flip a board over if you need a clean surface.

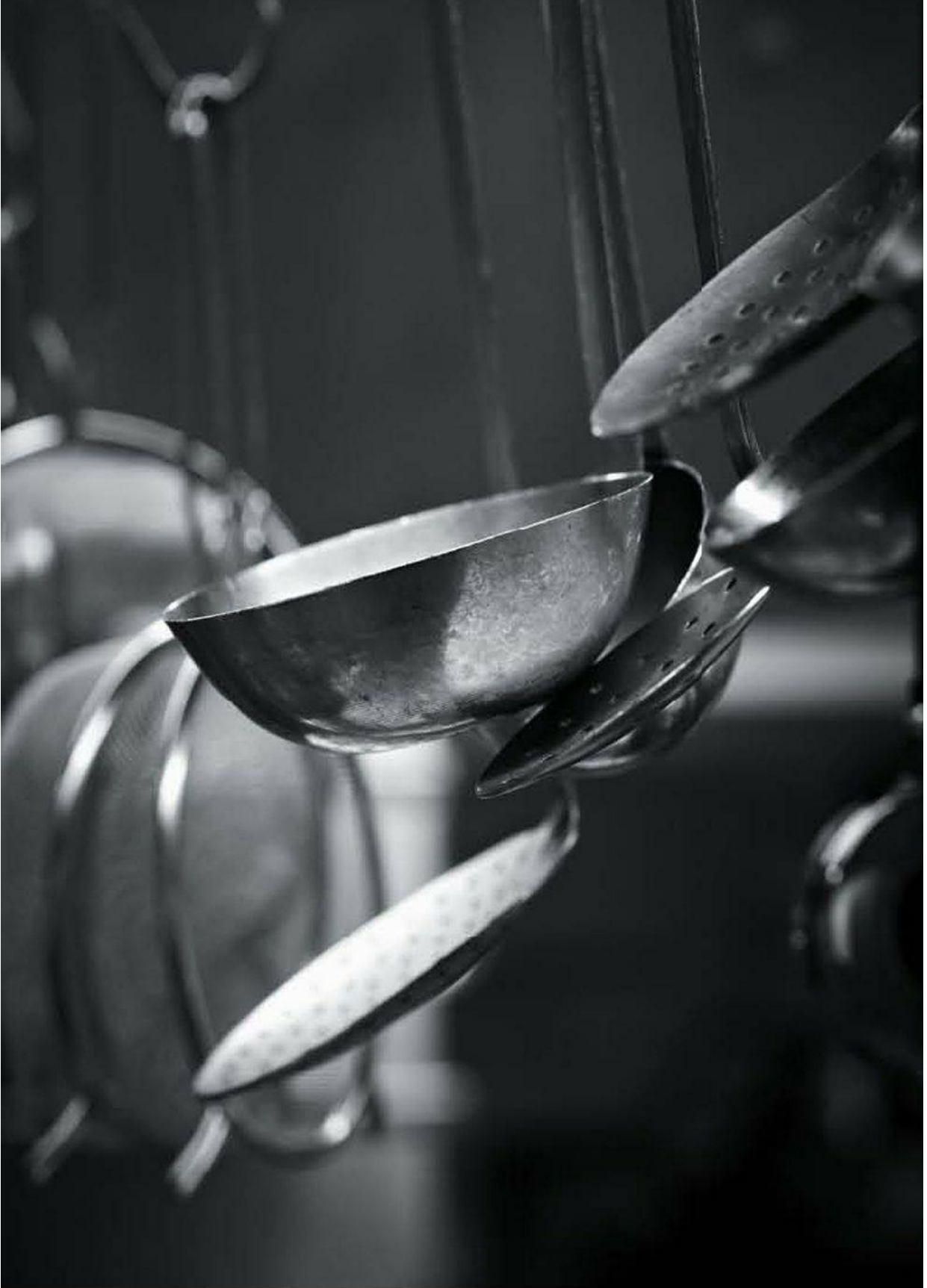
Make sure the board is steady (placing it on a damp dishcloth will prevent it from slipping)

and press whatever you are cutting down firmly to hold it steady. Always cut forward, letting the weight of the knife do the work. If your knife is sharp enough, you shouldn't hear a loud chopping noise as the blade hits the board. You should be using more of a rocking motion, with the point of the knife staying largely in contact with the cutting board.

PANS

Again, buy the best you can afford. Good-quality construction is key; not only will the pans last longer, but the heavier they are, the more evenly they'll conduct heat, preventing hot spots from scorching your food. Look for a

weighty pan with a copper or aluminium base, and a stainless steel inner lining for ease of cleaning. Most chefs prefer copper because it not only heats up quickly but also cools fast, meaning you have more control. It does need more looking after, though. Long, heatproof handles should be securely riveted, so check the fixings.



Three sizes—2-quart, 3- to 4-quart, and 6- to 8-quart, all with snugly fitting lids—should see you right for most jobs. One other pan worth considering is a saucier, which has sloping sides, making it ideal for reducing stocks because the liquid evaporates more easily. It's also good for making risotto or anything else that needs constant stirring. A large, cast-iron lidded casserole that can transfer from the stovetop to the oven is also invaluable, especially for slow braises and winter stews.

You'll also need a couple of frying pans: an 8-inch pan for omelettes and a 12-inch one for

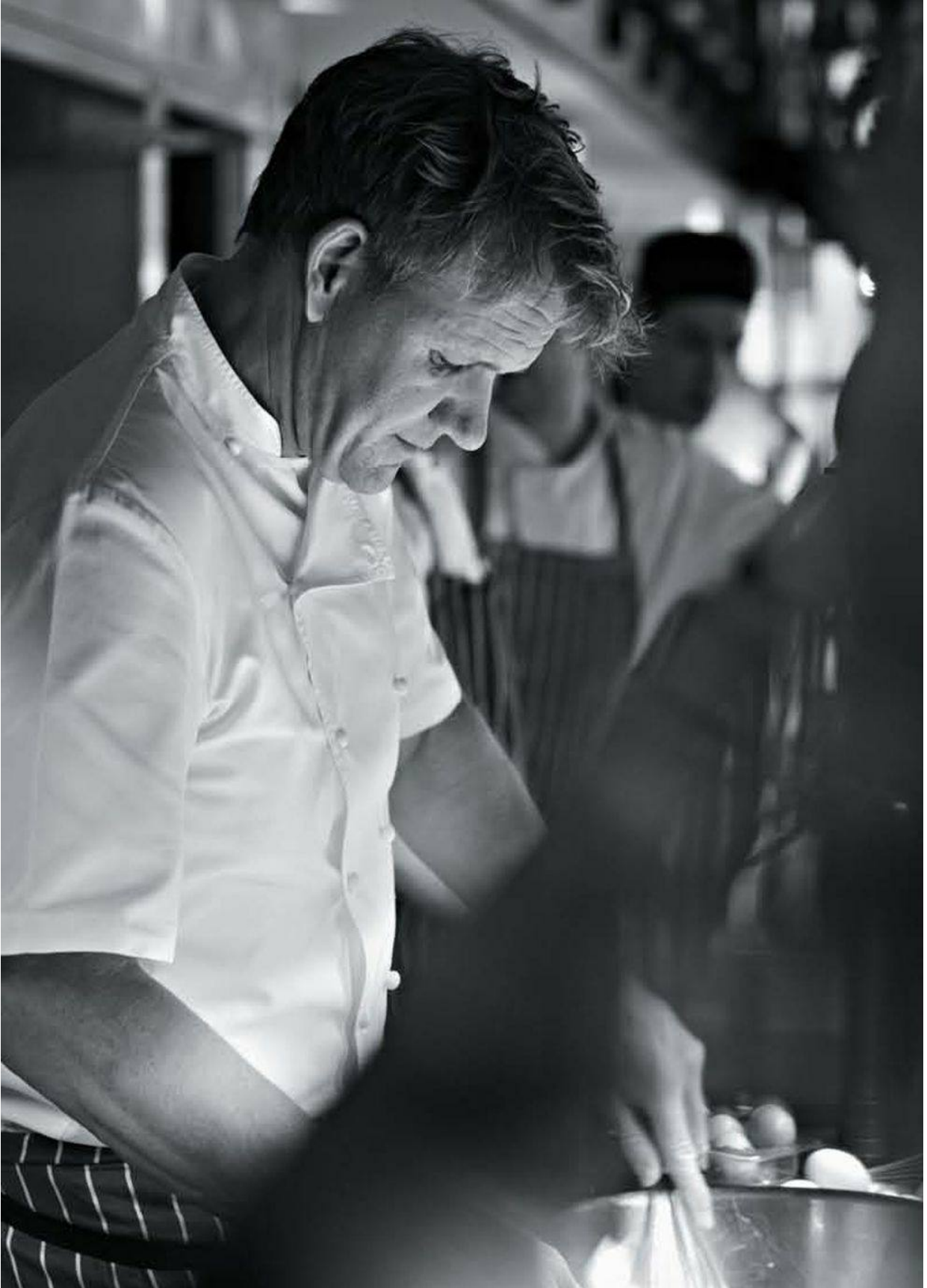
general frying. These should be ovenproof up to 400°F so that you can start cooking something on the stovetop and then finish it in the oven—a rack of lamb, say, or a tarte tatin.

If your pan doesn't already have a nonstick coating, you can season it by sprinkling it with salt

and heating it to a high temperature on the stovetop. Then you throw away the salt and rub the pan with a thin layer of peanut or vegetable oil. This will give it a protective layer and prevent things from sticking. Once you've finished using it, simply wipe it out while it's still hot with oiled paper towels. Don't wash it in detergent or you will need to season it again.

I also use a grill pan for searing steaks. Pressing the meat down onto the ridged surface not

only creates a professional-looking finish (especially if you give your steak a quarter turn halfway through cooking to give a cross-hatched pattern), but also gives some of the char-grilled flavor you'll get from a professional grill.



Well, that's the essentials out of the way. But there are some other good kitchen standbys you may find useful.

BLOWTORCH

We chefs love a blowtorch. It's great not just for caramelizing sugar—on top of a crème brûlée, for example—but for unmolding frozen desserts.

DIGITAL SCALE

The great thing about a digital scale is not just that you can weigh things down to the last ounce, but that you can weigh everything into the same bowl, setting the scale to zero between each addition, which saves both time and washing up.

FOOD PROCESSOR

For making pasta dough, pastry, and crumble toppings. Choose a processor that has a low starting speed as some are too powerful and will blow your flour and confectioners' sugar around the room when you switch them on.

ICE CREAM MAKER

You can make ice cream without a machine, but it will never be as smooth. There are two types: ones with built-in coolers, which are much bulkier and more expensive, and those where you have to freeze the bowl ahead of using it. What you buy depends on how much you think you'll use it.

IMMERSION OR STICK BLENDER

For puréeing soups and sauces, making smoothies, or quickly blending a batter.

MANDOLINE

No matter how good you get with a knife, you'll always be able to slice vegetables more finely and more quickly on a mandoline (a metal, wood, or plastic board with a sharp metal blade built in). Choose one with a good guard to protect your fingers.

MICROPLANE ZESTER

Not just for zesting oranges and lemons, but also for puréeing garlic or fresh ginger.

MORTAR AND PESTLE

Invaluable for crushing and grinding herbs and spices. It gives a coarser, more earthy texture than using an electric blender, which is ideal for Asian cooking. It's also great for pounding garlic to a paste. Choose a mortar with a large bowl and a heavy-weight pestle.

POTATO RICER

A bit like a giant garlic press, a ricer is essential if you want to make silky-smooth mashed potatoes. Boiled potatoes are pushed through to make thin strands, which can then be beaten with butter, milk, or cream. You can get a similar result with a mouli (a hand-operated stainless steel grinder that pushes cooked vegetables through perforated discs).

PROBE THERMOMETER

A handy device that takes the guesswork out of cooking meat. There are two types: instant-read thermometers for a one-shot reading, or alarm thermometers that will tell you when the temperature reaches a preset level. This is very useful if you are roasting meat, for example, and want to be sure it is cooked at the center.

SIEVE

Essential for straining stocks and sauces or for draining vegetables. Choose one with a long handle and a balancing hook so that you can rest it over a deep bowl or pan. Conical-shaped sieves, known as chinois, are particularly

useful when you want to purée something, as you can push down with the back of a ladle and exert considerable force.

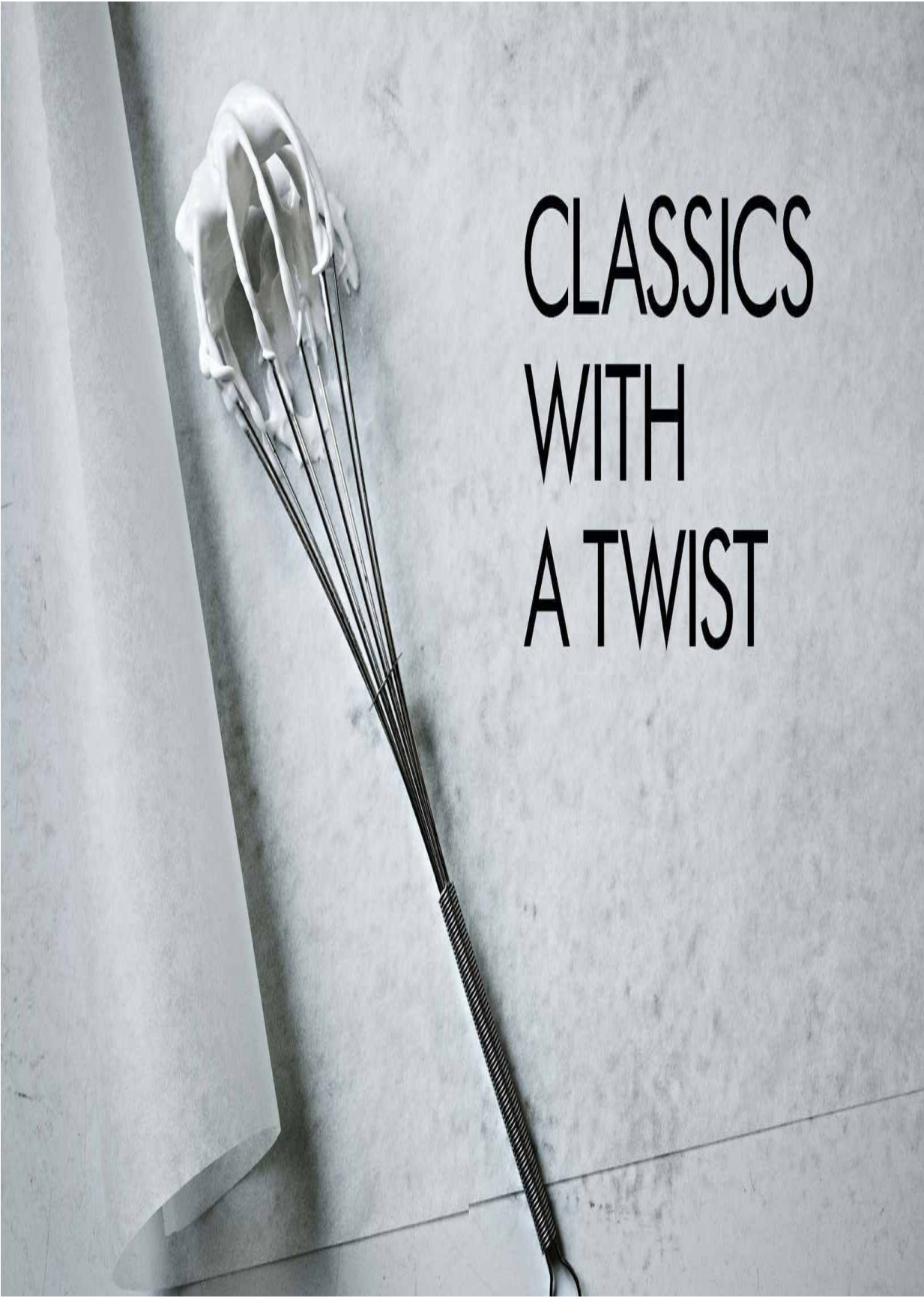
VEGETABLE PEELER

The swivel types make peeling so much less of a chore, although to be honest, I'll often leave vegetable skins on if I'm cooking at home. It's where so many of the vitamins and nutrients, and a lot of the flavor, are to be found, so why waste them?

WHISKS

Electric mixers are useful for meringues and sponges, but a balloon whisk gives you much more control and makes it less likely you'll overwhip cream.

So having started by saying you don't need much equipment, I realize I've gone on to mention rather a lot. I suppose the best advice is to buy things as and when you need them, rather than in one big preemptive shop. That way at least you know everything will be used at least once. But please, no egg separators or garlic peelers. That's what hands and fingers are for.

A black and white photograph of a wire whisk. The head of the whisk is coated with a thick, white, creamy substance, possibly whipped cream or frosting, which is dripping slightly. The whisk is positioned diagonally across the frame. To the left of the whisk, there is a rolled-up piece of light-colored paper or parchment. The background is a light, textured surface.

CLASSICS WITH A TWIST

ONCE UPON A TIME, WE TOOK COMFORT IN OUR ROUTINES.

People found it reassuring to follow the kind of weekly diet you could tell the day of the week by. As long as there was steak on Wednesdays, fish on Fridays, and a roast on Sundays, all was well with the world. And woe betide anyone who tried to change the way these things were cooked. You really could get by with just a handful of old faithful recipes.

In a way, there was a lot to be said for that.

It was proper home cooking, and the meals you did cook you became absolutely expert at. There's no substitute for repetition when you want to master a dish, and the old ways certainly allowed for plenty of that. But the world's moved on. It's a faster place now, and we're spoiled for choice in everything we do, from going to the movies to buying a car. Going out to eat, you'll find that even the smallest town will offer plenty of choices, from the usual Italian, Chinese, or Mexican to Indian, Thai, or even Vietnamese. We've grown accustomed to new flavors and food that excites us. And yet back at home how many of us are guilty of getting stuck in a rut, of always doing the same old dishes the same old way? Let's be honest, how many of us see cooking as a chore?

That's what I want to change in this chapter. I want to show you that cooking can be fun and

exciting. I want to encourage you to look afresh at some familiar ingredients, and to throw in a few new ones too. Because the more you cook, the more confident you become, and the more confident you become, the more you'll enjoy spending time in the kitchen.