

## Features

### Decade by Decade: The '60s

<http://www.epicurious.com/gourmet/features/the60s>



## The '60s

Race riots, antiwar protests, assassinations, the summer of love, bra burnings, the Beatles. If any of these spasms registered in Earle MacAusland's *Gourmet*, it was as the lightest of flutters. Yet the magazine was experiencing its own, more decorous transformations during that epoch. Across the American culinary landscape as reflected in the magazine, the once exotic was starting to seem attainable, and the once familiar was disappearing. Not many people who had really grown up with American food like clam pie or chicken dumplings would now have been found reading (or writing for) *Gourmet*. On the other hand, it was not at all hard to find people who made yogurt at home, or who considered soy sauce and monosodium glutamate all-purpose, all-American seasonings. (MSG enjoyed quite a vogue during the '60s.) *Spécialités de la Maison* took note of the Viet Nam Restaurant (1962) and a Korean newcomer, the Arirang House (1964). The magazine published recipes for Mexican tortillas and tamales based on masa harina rather than cornmeal in 1961, an article on the pleasures of nonbowdlerized West African food in 1962, and a handful of Thai recipes in 1963.

Many regular departments were also shaken up. *Gourmet's Menus*, introduced in 1964, now involved a grandly laid-out bill of fare with a choice of several menus, including wine suggestions; lavishly styled color photographs of the food; and six or seven columns' worth of recipes. It served notice that the magazine's pages would be increasingly occupied with new kinds of graphic and photographic displays that had little to do with the old order at *Gourmet*.

And while Joseph Wechsberg began writing frequent, marvelously urbane reminiscences and surveys of anything from resourceful hotel concierges to the lore of bouillabaisse, the magazine's chief workhorses would be the writers assigned to travel beats. Their golden age was just dawning.

In 1965, Naomi Barry's *Paris à Table* joined the list of regular features. This was gastronomic travel writing that made Paris restaurants seem as accessible and important a part of a reader's world as New York restaurants. And in 1968, *Gourmet Holidays*, the most ambitious and attention-grabbing innovation, was inaugurated. From then on, nearly every month would take readers to a new destination, abundantly photographed (usually by Ronny Jaques, the chief travel photographer) and described with as much emphasis on service information as on local color. In the future, more and more money and talent would be poured into travel expenses and location shooting.

It was a decisive shift away from values that had once seemed central to the magazine. When MacAusland founded *Gourmet*, and for many years thereafter, a larger-than-life pre-Prohibition, pre-World War I past was still gloriously real to him and millions of other people. A chef's reminiscences of cooking for Edwardian royalty was seen as honest fodder for 20th-century connoisseurs of "good living."

But after the first *Gourmet* Holiday, never again would the magazine revolve around the same romantic glorification of the past. The major sign of the shift was visual — a color photograph, say, of miniskirted girls chatting in the 1960s here and now outside a London pub rather than a timeless-looking, unpopulated engraving or sketch of a Norman château or an English village high street. Between 1960 and 1965, the dramatic growth of commercial jet travel between continents had made the world into an American consumer's oyster, and *Gourmet* would advertise the fact in a way that idealized the present more directly than it did the past.

An irreversible change in readership was also under way. The loyal correspondents of 10 or 20 years earlier had found more to say to each other and to the magazine, and had often glowed with simple pride in a treasured communion. Their contributions had been learned, original, and funny. Of course they had also always sent in favorite recipes — but by the end of the '60s it seemed that they were doing very little else. Perhaps their sense of culinary adventure was now satisfied more by the magazine's travel advice and alluring photographs than by rambling, allusive writing about the romance of cooking.

One of the best new signs of the times was that people were approaching all kinds of familiar and unfamiliar subjects without naïve prattle and with a greater respect for facts. Not only did the editors ride herd on the writers with a savvy unknown in a more innocent era, but the magazine was starting to assemble a stable of contributors — the Latin American-based Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz was an early example — who brought special expertise and discipline to subjects that might once have been handed over to people with pretty airy credentials. In its own way, *Gourmet* had managed several quiet cultural revolutions during the shock of the '60s.

Read more about the *Gourmet* contributors from the '60s included in our special 60th Anniversary issue.

— *Adapted from an article by Anne Mendelson, Gourmet*