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Chefs choose their favorite non-cookbook food books

By Staff Reports | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The culinary literati gathered to celebrate the year's best cookbooks at the recent 2010 James Beard Book Awards ceremony in New York City. We asked some of the chefs and authors present about their favorite noncookbook food books. Here are some of their picks: Chef Thomas Keller: "Blue Trout and Black Truffles: The Peregrinations of an Epicure," by Joseph Wechsberg. "It takes you to another place and time with its great stories. It's just very nostalgic and a terrific read."

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Restaurateur Lidia Bastianich: "The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village," by Pierre-Jakez Helias. "I love it because it depicts food scenes in the early 1900s and how their whole system of life was about producing and eating, not about making money. I also love its description of the seasons and the animals and the synergy and harmony between animal husbandry, water and food."

Author Jeffrey Steingarten: "Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris," by A.J. Liebling. "I love all of A.J. Liebling's writings that he did in the '60s about eating in Paris."

Chef Paul Kahan: "Giving Good Weight," by John McPhee. "This is a collection of short stories that was given to me by a friend. . . . The title story is taken from the standpoint of this organic market in New York, and it was just super meaningful to me."

Author James Peterson: "The Art of Eating," by M.F.K. Fisher. "I love it because it's very personal and intimate and revealing, but in a very subtle and discreet way."

Author Colman Andrews: "The Food of Italy" and "The Food of France," by Waverley Root. "I've been reading them for a cookbook I'm working on. They are huge books that take you through region by region of the respective countries. Now they are a little out of date and not entirely accurate, but they are amazing books that really give you a feeling of the countries."

Chef David Chang: "The Perfectionist: Life and Death in Haute Cuisine," by Rudolph Chelminski. "It teaches you the history and pressures of cooking surrounding Bernard L'Oiseau, the famous three-star French chef who committed suicide. It teaches you about everything from nouvelle cuisine to the present day. And it shows how hard-core cooking was back in the day, 30 years ago."

Author Ted Lee of the food writing team the Lee Brothers: "The Gumbo Tales," by Sara Roahen. "For guys like us

who grew up in the Low Country, that is our frame of reference for Southern food. But this is about a woman from the Midwest who goes to New Orleans and discovers the city through the food. She's not inclined to love it because she is a vegetarian, but it's just a miracle work, and you see New Orleans in a whole new way."

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