



## Patricia Wells

**The Provence Cookbook**  
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**Q:** Although you've lived in France for more than two decades, you make frequent visits to the U.S. It's by now accepted wisdom that the French eat better than we do, but are there any American foods or dining experiences that you look forward to when you visit, and miss when in France?

**Patricia Wells:** We don't have soft shell crabs in France, and I love them! When I lived in Washington, D.C. in the 1970s I cooked them all the time and looked forward to the season. I also love the opportunity to taste wines from other countries, since in France we mostly drink French. I confess, I also love cottage cheese!

**Q:** How did you discover your calling as a foodie — and an expert in French food?

**Patricia Wells:** I grew up eating good, simple, fresh food and cooking was always a passion. Although I trained to be an art critic I found that boring and once I gave that up and moved from The Washington Post to The New York Times in 1976, it was just a natural progression to move into the food world. I have not regretted it for a millisecond.

**Q:** Among your many hats (restaurant reviewer, journalist, cookbook author, winery-owner), you are also a cooking teacher, at your home in Provence as well as in Paris. What are some of the most common misconceptions about French food that your students arrive with?

**Patricia Wells:** They assume that it is heavy, that it uses a lot of sauces, that there is a lot of butter. My food is French based but light and very healthy.

**Q:** You are an exceedingly busy person, but you manage to maintain a very healthy lifestyle. What are some of your secrets for keeping trim and well fed when work takes up so much of your time?

**Patricia Wells:** I am lucky to have great natural discipline and motivation. I work out six days a week, either running outdoors or on the treadmill. I have many different routines to fit the day. If I only have thirty minutes I do a very aggressive workout on the treadmill. If I have some leisure time, I run outdoors. For me, it is not a question of whether or not I will exercise, it is when. On the food front, I have to remain quite disciplined. I can't eat absolutely everything I want to, but I mostly do! I never eat junk and try to travel with some dried fruits or buy a banana at the airport.

**Q:** Your new book, *The Provence Cookbook*, is a natural follow-up to your previous book, *The Paris Cookbook*, since you divide your time between those two locales. What is the fundamental difference between the ways people eat in those two places? Do you prefer one to the other?

**Patricia Wells:** I would say that the food of Provence is more ingredients-based. The food of Paris has a lot of history. That doesn't mean you can't eat both kinds of food in both places or that the styles are strictly defined. Obviously, both books reflect my own taste and my passion for simple, wholesome food in season. I can't say I have a preference for one over the other. Good food is good food no matter where you eat it.

*The foregoing interview was conducted and written by Califia Suntree, assistant editor, HarperCollins Publishers.*