

# When the Kids Conquered the Kitchen: Danish Taste Education and the New Nordic Kitchen

**Abstract:** The New Nordic Kitchen has conquered the world, Agern and the Nordic Food Hall at Grand Central Station in New York City and Noma in Copenhagen serving as notable examples. Normally this development is perceived as something that came out of nowhere, or as the result of the initiatives of specific individuals such as René Redzepi, chef at Noma. In this article, we will argue that it is part of a much broader cultural movement replacing precision, nutrition, and hygiene with pleasure,

taste, and creativity as the center of kitchen culture, food education, and child upbringing. We support this argument by focusing on children's cookbooks published in Denmark during the period 1971–2016.

**Keywords:** taste education, New Nordic Kitchen, children's cookbooks, kitchen perceptions, cooking competencies

THE COMMON MEDIA PERCEPTION, NOT least in self-celebrating Danish newspapers, is that the New Nordic Kitchen came out of nowhere—similar to how medieval astronomers perceived the appearance of comets. For example, as Jonatan Leer has documented in his article about the New Nordic Cuisine (Leer 2016), it is regarded as the result of the initiatives of specific individuals such as René Redzepi. Redzepi came to Denmark as the son of a poor immigrant, and from this background miraculously in 2003 founded Noma, which according to *Restaurant Magazine* was the best restaurant in the world in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014. Claus Meyer, the dynamic co-founder of Noma and owner of Agern and the Nordic Food Hall at Grand Central Station in New York City, represents a similar background: after having grown up in a dysfunctional family, as a teenager he came to France, where he discovered the secrets of gastronomy (personal communication). In many ways, these narratives are taken from the popular Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale of the ugly duckling changing into a beautiful swan (Andersen 1953). Sometimes an entrepreneurial dimension is added to this perspective, with the development of the New Nordic Kitchen regarded as a process based on entrepreneurs using the “New Nordic” label, which has positive connotations in other domains, inviting other actors and institutions to join the process and orchestrating an organized dissemination process in order to generate excitement over and engagement with the new label (Byrkjeflot et al. 2013).

Even though these perceptions may have a certain validity, our argument is different: That the New Nordic Kitchen represents only one element in a much broader process of social and cultural development, which includes radical changes in Danish food education, and a new perception of the kitchen, the child, and upbringing and education in general. The common denominator for the emerging trend is taste: food education has changed from focusing on nutrition, precision, and hygiene to focusing on taste, creativity, and authenticity. The kitchen has become a place of pleasure and experimentation rather than a dangerous place with sharp knives, boiling water, and strict recipes that must be observed to the letter. The child is seen as a competent person in his or her own right—competent because the child's taste is as good as the adult's—rather than being an insecure individual needing the protection of adults (Leer and Wistoft 2018). All of these developments reflect the same elements that characterize the New Nordic Kitchen: authenticity, creativity, and taste.

In order to support this argument, we have read every single children's cookbook published in Denmark during the period 1971–2016: not 10, not 100, but an astonishing total of 435 cookbooks, including books by Danish authors and books translated from other languages, but not reprints. Here we can see the changes in the perception of children, kitchens, upbringing, and food education, and we can see that gradually nutrition has been replaced by taste, precision by creativity, and hygiene by authenticity. It is not only the large number of cookbooks that

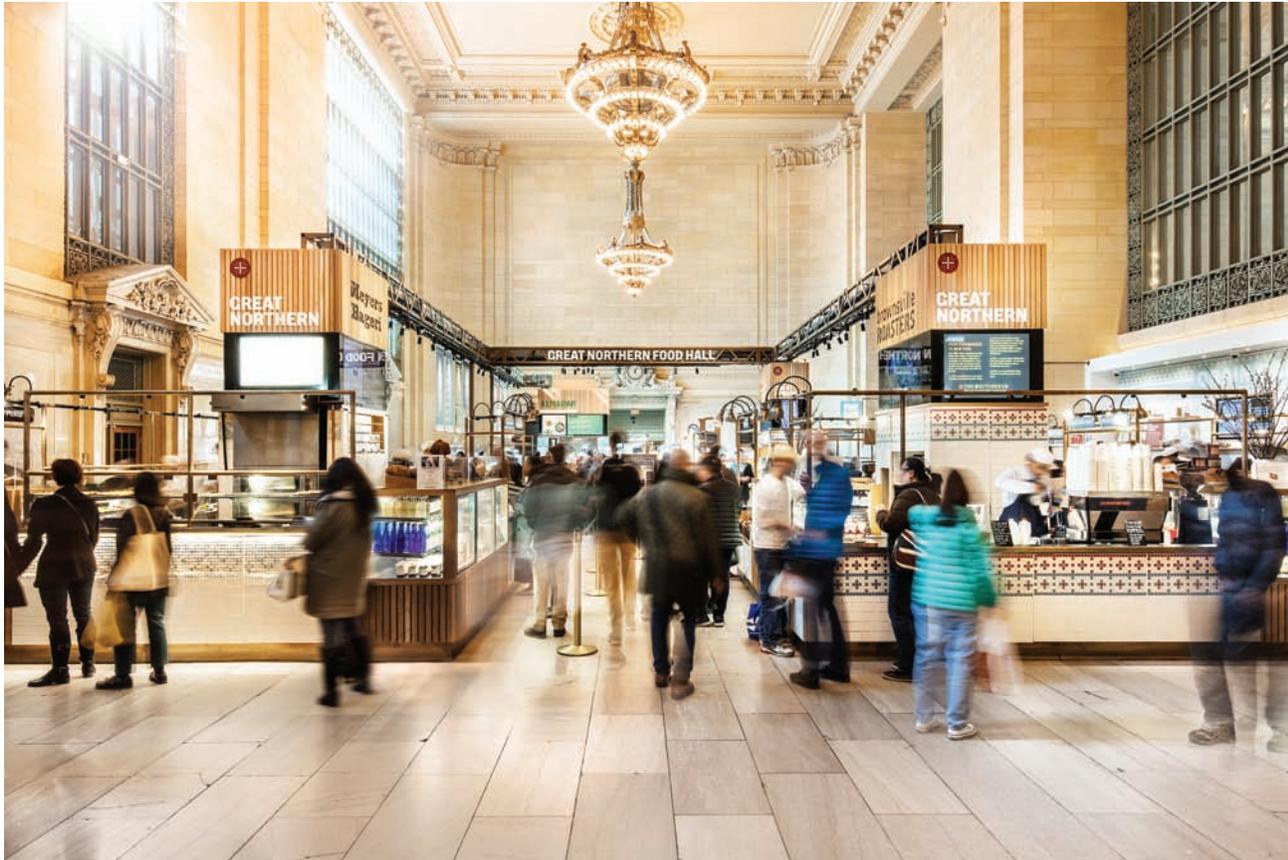


FIGURE 1: *The New Nordic Kitchen in New York.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLIE BENNET, WWW.CHARLIEBENNET.COM, COURTESY OF MEYERS USA

comes as a surprise. Even more surprising is the fact that this material shows that our perception of what a child is has changed over the course of this period of less than fifty years. In the 1970s, the kitchen was seen as a dangerous place to which defenseless and helpless children were only allowed access under supervision subject to an array of warnings about the potential dangers of sharp knives and red-hot stoves, as well as various rules concerning hygiene. Today, by contrast, according to the cookbooks children should have free access to the kitchen; and when the kids are cooking, parents are expected to wait patiently for the tempting results of their children's efforts to be presented and served.

Furthermore, cooking and kitchens are political arenas: the period since 1970 has witnessed several revolutions, beginning with the celebration of nutritional foods produced efficiently by the farming industry. Then came the health concepts linked to the green revolution, later followed by the sustainability revolution favoring organic farming and animal welfare. This was followed by globalization and the multiethnic kitchen.

In order to demonstrate the connections between education and gastronomy, it is important to emphasize that Claus

Meyer (for instance) is not just the co-founder of Noma and the protagonist behind the *Nordic Kitchen Manifesto* from 2004 (Nordic Co-operation 2004; Leer 2016). He is also the co-author of one of the most influential children's cookbooks in Denmark, *Meyer's Kitchen Kids* (in Danish: *Meyers køkkenbørn*) (Meyer and Poulsen 2000). Here, the focus changed radically from nutrition and precision to taste and pleasure. In 2013 the *Nordic Kitchen Manifesto* was supplemented by the *Children's Nordic Kitchen Manifesto*, emphasizing that "Every child in the Nordic countries has the right to learn to cook healthy and tasty food" and that "every child has the right to his or her own taste and to positive food experiences" (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014). In this broad context, the emergence of the New Nordic Kitchen is primarily an integrated symbolic element, although some of the founding individuals played important roles, and although at the global stage it has received more enthusiastic attention than the modest task of teaching taste to the kids.

Thus, the basic assertion of this article is that the New Nordic Kitchen did not arrive from out of nowhere, nor is it the result of the initiatives of one or two brilliant individuals

or an orchestrated dissemination process. Although these factors may all be involved, it is important to understand the emergence of the New Nordic Kitchen as an integrated element within a social and cultural change process (Hermansen 2012), with a focus on food education and upbringing, not only at schools but in a broader social context. In order to demonstrate this, we invite the reader on a journey through Danish cookbooks for children from 1971 to 2016. The view of the child, the kitchen, and upbringing and education in general changed radically during this period, with the invention and development of the New Nordic Kitchen being just one integrated (albeit spectacular) element.

### The Empirical Basis: Children's Cookbooks 1970–2016

The empirical basis of this article is children's cookbooks published in Danish during the period between 1970 and 2016. Although these cookbooks were ostensibly written for children, many of them addressed parents as the intended readers. The books were initially identified on the basis of their titles via the Danish Royal Library, and were subsequently borrowed and read. The selection criteria were as follows: in order to qualify as a book, publications had to be at least sixteen pages (in accordance with the definition used by Radio Denmark); in order to qualify as a cookbook, they had to contain recipes; and in order to be a children's cookbook, they had to contain recipes for children. The specific interest was in publications aimed at involving children in cooking.

A total of 509 cookbooks were identified, 435 of which contained recipes for children. Among the 74 not chosen were books about food aimed at children and/or families, but written for parents, scout leaders, teaching assistants, or others. Some textbooks, teachers' manuals, and reprints were also omitted. The children's cookbooks were categorized, and a data record was produced containing photos of all book covers and notes on the educational values and descriptions of taste in the books. This data record served as a reference work in the subsequent analysis. In the present article, book titles are translated into English; the original Danish titles can be found in the reference list.

#### DANISH COOKBOOKS FOR CHILDREN

The first Danish cookbook for children was published long before the period investigated. In 1847, the pseudonymous Madam Mangor self-published *Cookbook for Little Girls, Published by a Grandmother*. Such little girls were brought

up to become skilled and proper mothers and to possess specific virtues that did not leave visitors in any doubt: "It is absolutely essential that the little girl not only maintains the hygiene but also makes sure that it shows in the food" (quoted in Nyvang (2017)). However, for many years, cookbooks for children were mainly intended to provide entertainment. They were used by the children of the upper classes when they played with toy cookers and dollhouses. It was the mother who reigned in the kitchen, and other members of the family were expected to stand back, at least until the girls were old enough to be allowed access. And when they were, it was in order to be trained in the virtues and responsibilities of the housewife (Nyvang 2017).

Things did not really take off before World War II, and, as is the case in many other areas, it was probably women's entry into the labor market that made the difference. Suddenly, access to the kitchen was no longer an age and gender privilege: men and children were allowed in because women had work to do outside the home. A close study of each of the 435 Danish cookbooks for children published in the period 1971–2016 reveals a revolution in adults' views on children: from the small, noncompetent children in the 1970s, who needed to be warned about the perils of kitchen life, to the competent children of our time who order their parents out of the kitchen, pay no heed if the food burns, and only call for their parents when it is time to eat. Reading cookbooks for children is like looking at the world of children through a magnifying glass: viewed through one side of the lens, we can zoom in on the small, helpless children in the kitchen; through the other, the adults are kicked out of the kitchen by children who are more creative and independent than their parents.

Two comments should be added. First, most cookbooks for children are written by adults. So what they demonstrate is not necessarily that the behavior of children changes, but that adult views on and ideals concerning children change. Second, cookbooks for children are one basic element in a broader process. These cookbooks mirror changes in how the child, education and upbringing, and ideals of food preparation and kitchen work are viewed. Thus, changes in child upbringing and food education parallel changes in Danish food, kitchen, and restaurant culture, which in the 1970s was still very traditional, but which experienced a radical change in the 2000s that can be linked to similar changes in children's food education. Only at a later point was it possible to identify indirect causal relations: when new generations with a new food education background become adults, they enter the world of gastronomy with new skills, competences, and expectations.



FIGURE 2: *Children in the school kitchen kneading dough.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNE BECH © 2018

#### 1970–2016, BY THE DECADE

At the risk of oversimplification, the period from the 1970s until nearly the present day can be divided into ten-year phases:

*In the 1970s, the child was seen as an apprentice chef.* The child was granted access to the dangerous universe of the kitchen under guidance and supervision. Most of the children's cookbooks from this period contain an introduction or a foreword addressed to adults in an admonishing tone: "In order to avoid accidents in the kitchen, it is important that children are thoroughly informed about the use of ... sharp knives, tin openers, etc.," write Åke Söderqvist and Lasse Åberg (1971: 6) in *The Children's Cookbook*. Kirsten Brenøe's *The Children's Illustrated Cookbook* begins and ends with chapters named "Beware!" (Brenøe 1974), which provide vivid descriptions of both cutting and scalding accidents. As stated in the adults' foreword, adults need to look after the children

"because the kitchen is a very dangerous place to work" (2). The overall expectations of what children can manage are not very high: the point of departure is that the child is not competent. Herluf Petersen, in *We Are Cooking*, sets the bar so low that no one can be disappointed: "Even if we can't cook as well as mum, it's still fun to try" (Petersen 1973: 7).

Although gender roles had not changed much, there was a realization in the 1970s that cooking was not only for girls: "It is a fact that many grown men cook, for instance if their wife is at work" (ibid.). However, apparently it is still women who have a knack for cooking, so if help is required the reader is advised to seek "the guidance of mum or possibly granny" (ibid.). Petersen also indicates that the green revolution had not reached Denmark: "Of course we can make everything easier by using tinned goods" (ibid.: 10). The same is noted by Söderqvist and Åberg (1971: 6): "In order to make our work easier, we have mainly used tinned and frozen goods."

Also of note is the rhetoric concerning taste and the concept of taste. In this period, it is characteristic that the food is either not seasoned at all or only seasoned with a little salt. As apprentice chefs, the children should learn to cook, but the taste of the dishes is either irrelevant or a mechanical result of following a recipe—preferably to the letter. And as such, taste is not part of the cooking repertoire.

In the broader social arena, as long ago as 1962 a number of teenage milk bars, serving milk shakes with different flavors to young people, were established in Danish cities by the National Association of Danish Dairies. This was one of the first examples of a specific focus on young people's and children's taste. In 1972 the dairy association published its first national cookbook, which was followed during the period 1980–2001 by eight cookbooks (*Karolines Køkken 1–8* [*Caroline's Kitchen 1–8*]), one published every third year and distributed to all Danish households. In retrospect this was an ambitious adult educational project, focusing in the early years on using milk, cream, butter, and cheese, but also gradually introducing taste, globalization, and creativity (Carlsen et al. 2008). There are two important elements in the process: the recognition of the child as an independent culinary actor, and the idea of educating people with a focus on their approach to food and cooking. A third element—and a prerequisite for the New Nordic Kitchen—was a recognition of gastronomy. In Denmark during the postwar period the focus had been on health and nutrition, not on taste and pleasure. This also changed in the 1970s. In 1969 the old Danish inn Faldsled Kro [Faldsled Inn] was bought by food entrepreneurs Sven and Lene Grønlykke. They invited the respected French chef Jean-Louis Liefroy to Denmark, creating the very first gastronomic revolution in Denmark. In 1976 they founded Kong Hans Kælder [King Hans' Basement] in Copenhagen. In 1983 this was the first Danish restaurant to receive a Michelin star. But in general, Danish food culture was still oriented toward traditional values, with taste being regarded as an upper-class cultural phenomenon (Bourdieu 1979) supported by avant-garde artists.

*In the 1980s, the child was promoted to kitchen assistant.* There is evidence of this promotion in *The Children's Cooking and Baking Book* from 1983: "You may think it's fun to help, but believe me, it's even more fun to do most stuff on your own" (Thomsen and Dørge 1983: 5). However, the children cannot be left completely in charge: "Have a chat with your mum about what you'd like to cook so she can explain how" (ibid.). The first edition of the book was published in 1969, and with its approximately 200 instructive recipes it is far more comprehensive than its counterparts on the market. The kitchen remains a place for girls: 68 of the many twee

vignettes depict girls, whereas only 22 depict boys. Only in the section on cooking over open fire are the genders evenly represented.

There are plenty of examples of children moving up in the kitchen hierarchy. In *Easy and Fun: Food for Youngsters*, Lene Hannestad (1982) notes that being able to cook makes a person less helpless and more independent. Similarly, teachers' manuals for home economics also emphasize that students need to acquire the tools to live independent lives (Pedersen and Birkum 1982).

This period also saw experiments with new forms of communication: it became standard to address the child directly, rather than through the adult. In Lena Anderson and Christina Björk's *Linus Cooks* (1981), the authors address the reader at his or her level through the boy Linus. In this way, they also manage to sneak in the first political messages: Linus feels sorry for the industry chickens and hopes the phenomenon is made illegal, thus presenting political messages to the reader through the main character. This strategy of communicating directly to children is also used in a different—and much more effective—manner in Walt Disney's *Donald Duck's Cookbook* from 1986, which contains the duck family's favorite dishes (Disney 1986). From a historical perspective, the book is in fact progressive because it focuses on good taste and completely avoids lecturing, preferring to address children on their own terms. A year later came *Mickey's Cookbook* (Disney 1987).

The green wave really took off in the 1980s. In 1984, Edel Broeng published *Green Food: Healthy & Happy*. The author goes directly to the recipes, only emphasizing that "the knives have to be sharp" (Broeng 1984: inside cover) because the vegetables will then be easier to cut. In 1986, Anne Vincents Nielsen and Kari Sønsthagen published *The Children's Green Cookbook*—another celebration of vegetarian food, which the children need to learn how to cook, both on weekdays and for festive occasions. The children should know which vegetables are in season, and the book is bursting with useful green knowledge. The famous healthy eating pyramid is replaced with a vegetarian version, and the green knowledge is supplemented with knowledge about battery hens so the children learn to distance themselves from the phenomenon (Nielsen and Sønsthagen 1986). In terms of taste, the green children's cookbooks do not provide specific taste descriptions. Anything green basically tastes good.

The decade is brimming with green cookbooks and books on fruit, and as early as 1983 a leaflet was published for home economics teaching called *Food and Wild Plants* (Stenkjær and Eskildsen 1983). Those who believe that foraging for dandelions, wild garlic, and buckthorn is a trend from the 2010s are mistaken.



FIGURE 3: Children in the school kitchen chopping vegetables.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNE BECH © 2018

In the New Nordic Kitchen context, the 1980s provided two new elements. First, food is policy, not in a narrow but in a broad sense: following one's taste is part of a liberation process, and cooking is a political activity. Second, one should resist the use of industrial products and turn instead to organic or vegetarian products or both. The New Nordic Kitchen could not have been realized without such an expanding awareness.

*The next leap in the kitchen hierarchy took place in the 1990s, when the child became an equal kitchen partner.* One of the most influential children's cookbooks from the period was Helle Brønnum Carlsen's *Yum: Love until the Last Bite*, which was published in 1998 and was in reality a cookbook for adults containing children's recipes. Now it is the adult, rather than the child, who is being admonished: a child's fussiness is a sign of common sense that the adult needs to respect (Carlsen 1998). A child's sense of taste must be taken seriously, discussed with the child and developed. In short: children are regarded as having taste competence, and meals are not just about nutrition and hygiene but also (equally important) about love and responsiveness. But children's taste also needs to be respected. In 1993, Kirsten Høeg-Larsen published *Lasse and Lærke Cook* and *Lasse and Lærke Bake*, in which the children have become kitchen experts: "When there is pasta on the menu, Lasse and Lærke really look forward to it, because they have almost become experts at cooking pasta" (Høeg-Larsen 1993a: 9). There are no adults to be seen in the many pictures of *Lasse and Lærke*: the children

reign, competent and self-assured. In 1994, the first book was published in which the recipes were developed by children for children and adults: Jytte Jensen's *Fantasy Bread: The Children's Best Baking Book* (Danmarks 4H 1994).

Furthermore, the role of the politics and moral implications of taste became increasingly evident in the 1990s. In 1990, one of Denmark's first celebrity chefs, Søren Gericke, published his *Children's Cookbook*, richly illustrated by the Danish artist Martin Bigum. In the book, the author addresses the children directly with clear, moral messages: "Be conscious" (Gericke 1990: 3). Food is not just something you wolf down. "Your choice could influence nature" (ibid.). Readers are expected to protect nature rather than devour it, and are encouraged to ask shops: "Where do these radishes come from? Have they been sprayed?" Because, as one heading points out: "You are what you eat" (ibid.). Camilla Plum strikes the same note with her book *Itsy, Bitsy Meatball*, in which she blows the whistle on "functional food, alienation and anorexia" (Plum 1997: 7). In fact, her book is not a children's cookbook but a book for parents about cooking with children. Nevertheless, the message to the parents is that they should listen to their kids, because children are competent individuals in their own right: "Try and listen to what they want to cook themselves; their wishes usually reveal what they are able to manage" (ibid.: 11).

This tendency is even more obvious when comparing Danish-language books to those translated from English in the same period. The view on children in Denmark was clearly different from that of the English-speaking world. Two

cookbooks from 1991, translated from English, Angela Wilkes's *My First Cookbook* and *My First Party Book*, are full of warnings about the perils of the kitchen: Be careful with knives and ovens; remember to wash your hands. The love of decoration that is apparent in these books is an obvious contrast to the Danish celebration of authenticity and naturalness: decorate the ice cream to look like a bumblebee, they say, and use potato chips and vegetables to make the dip look like a clown. The Danish cookbook authors of this period did not write anything quite like this.

Finally, sweets and sugar were included in the list of positives—possibly because in the middle of the 1980s scientific evidence suggested that sugar was not fattening. In 1993, Jørn Ussing Larsen published *Sweets for Little Sweet Teeth, Made from Pure Raw Goods*, which was followed by numerous children's cookbooks containing recipes for candy, desserts, puddings, cakes, etc. As long as the children remembered to brush their teeth, sweets were both allowed and a hit (Larsen 1993).

This change in the way children in the kitchen were perceived in the 1990s was due to a radical change in the view of children and child upbringing. The popular pedagogical milestone of the decade was a Danish bestseller on child upbringing published in 1995, written for parents and entitled *Your Competent Child* (Juul 1995). "Children who are treated with respect respond with respect" was the motto, and creating equality among the generations was a central ambition. This was also obvious in the kitchen. It was not possible to maintain the asymmetric distribution of roles between adults and children. On the contrary, the motto was that we are all competent, although in different ways, and that taste is the gateway to equality among different ages. Taste is an equalizer, because everybody (including children) has a taste that must be respected by others. Thus, taste is perceived as a competence that cannot be transferred from one human being to another. In order to develop taste competences, the child must be supported by a stimulating environment, such as in a creative kitchen.

This was also the case at the gastronomic stage: by the mid-1990s it was almost ten years since Kong Hans Kælder had received its first Michelin star. The achievement of a Michelin star was no longer a revolutionary event—it had become part of the gastronomic tradition. But during the 1990s a realization arose that taste and tradition are not necessarily interconnected: good taste is not only old taste but may be "new"; good taste is not only French or Italian taste but may be "Nordic." The stage was set for the New Nordic Kitchen and a young generation of gastronomic entrepreneurs.

*In the 2000s, the child assumed the position of kitchen manager.* This took place almost immediately at the beginning of

the decade, when Claus Meyer and Ole Poulsen published *Meyer's Kitchen Kids* in 2000. The book opens with a genuine declaration of trust:

We do not believe in the instructive qualities of even the most organic, purpose-driven meal situations. Nor do we believe in unconscious menu plans, devised with the dietician's clear sense of optimal nutritional concentration. We believe that in the long run, the joy of cooking and eating together is best developed when children experience that food is something that is prepared with a certain measure of gastronomic enthusiasm—for the pleasure of oneself and others. We believe in the significance of challenging—from the very beginning—children's taste buds and stimulating their desire to explore the possibilities and mysteries of cooking. (Meyer and Poulsen 2000: 4)

The trick was to wrest the kitchen from the grasp of the adults' knowledge domains (organic farming, dietetics, menu planning, etc.). What counted instead were the possibilities and mysteries of cooking, which were closely related to taste and the exploration of taste—an area where everyone is equal: no one tastes more "correctly" than others, and children are no less experts of taste than adults. In brief: taste creates enthusiasm and mental ownership. It is almost certainly not an exaggeration to claim that this book and its insights were instrumental in changing the subject known as "home economics" into "food knowledge" in the Danish 2014 school reform, considering that the new subject prioritized food awareness, taste, and food and meal culture at the expense of nutrition, domestic skills, hygiene, and risk management. Among other things, food knowledge is a subject that focuses on taste; and anyone who can taste, argue for their taste, and understand the different taste positions of other people meets all the requirements of the modern, reflective citizen.

The tendency to view taste as an essential factor triggered a new wave of children's cookbooks. Whereas about 35 children's cookbooks were published in the 1970s, almost 180 were published in the 2000s—many of them with a focus on taste and pleasure. *Heiberg's Children's Dessert Circus*, made from plastic laminate, allows children to taste, sense, and experiment. "It is okay if you get egg on the book and butter on the pages ... and it is okay if the worktop becomes a bit greasy" (Heiberg 2006: 9). One of the pieces of advice in the book (on chocolate icing): "Remember to lick the bowl well before putting it in the dishwasher" (ibid.: 13). Annette Sjøby, Ida-Marie Sjøby, and Ester Larsen (2006) indicated with *Yippe, It's My Cooking Day* that cooking was not an obligation anymore but a right and a celebration. The climax came with Katrine Klinken's *Cookbook for Princesses* (2008). In this book the democracy of food as well as taste and gender equality has developed to such an extent that it is okay (thirty-plus years after the start of the period under discussion) to write a book aimed especially at girls: "Have fun



FIGURE 4: *Children tasting their own dishes in an outdoor kitchen.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY UFFE FRANDBEN, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ABSALON, DENMARK. 10PM.DK

with everything dreamlike, delicate and lovely—and enjoy every single bit of the good stuff” (Heiberg 2006: 5). The underlying tendency was that we should no longer be inhibited by the political correctness of the 1980s—especially because everything is about pleasure anyway.

With respect to cooking, taste, and gastronomy, the 2000s is the period of revolution in which the tendencies from the previous three decades converged into a single expansive trend, combining the recognition of kids and teenagers from the 1970s; the understanding that taste, food, and cooking are politics, and that it is important to use organic and vegetarian products, from the 1980s; and the celebration of innovation and localism from the 1990s. The effect was significant. In 2000, Claus Meyer and Ole Poulsen published *Meyer’s Kitchen Kids*, Restaurant Noma opened in November 2003, the *Nordic Kitchen Manifesto* was published in 2004, and as mentioned above the number of children’s cookbooks published exploded, from 35 in the 1970s to almost 180 in the 2000s.

Since 2010, the child has become an independent kitchen creator. Not only have children become the bosses in their own kitchen, they are also creative forces because they are in close contact with their own taste and their own unique dishes. *The Girlfriends’ Cookbook* by Line Østergaard and Patrick Bachmann is a “declaration of love for your girlfriends and their cooking” (2016: 5). Instead of strict step-by-step recipes with detailed instructions, it is a tool for the reader to create her “own unique recipes.” Pasta should be cooked until it “is as soft as you like it,” and even though the book recommends that the reader use five tablespoons of pesto, this is immediately modified: it “depends how much pesto taste you want” (14). It is important to use one’s creative talents and create one’s own recipes. At the same time,

it is important to keep up appearances: “Use waterproof mascara when you dice onions, because they can easily make you cry” (11). Taste and pleasure are not only about food and cooking, but also about expressing the entire girls’ universe.

The overall tendency toward independence and creativity is summarized in *MY Cookery* from 2014, published by the Danish Committee for Health Information with chef Søren Ejlersen as the lead author. A distinct feature of this children’s cookbook is that the dishes have been selected by children from all over the country, after which eight celebrity chefs have developed the recipes. *MY Cookery* begins with five tips on how children can get their parents to leave the kitchen: (1) Tell them how good you are; (2) Start simple; (3) Send them to the shops; (4) Sing—especially if the food is burning; (5) Offer to clear up afterwards (Danish Committee for Health Information 2014: 10). The child has become an independent, creative kitchen manager.

As we emphasized in the introduction, from our study of children’s cookbooks we have learned that over the decades the ways in which adults view children have changed. However, we do not know whether this has actually affected children’s food practice. Are children’s cookbooks just another instance of the wishful thinking of adults?

At least a little is known concerning the effects of one of the most influential cookbooks for children. As mentioned above, *MY Cookery* was published in 2014. In 2014–16 more than 200,000 copies were distributed free of charge to children in Denmark. In its second period (2016–19), it is expected that the same number of copies will be distributed, bringing the total number of copies distributed to more than 400,000. The Danish Committee for Health Education,

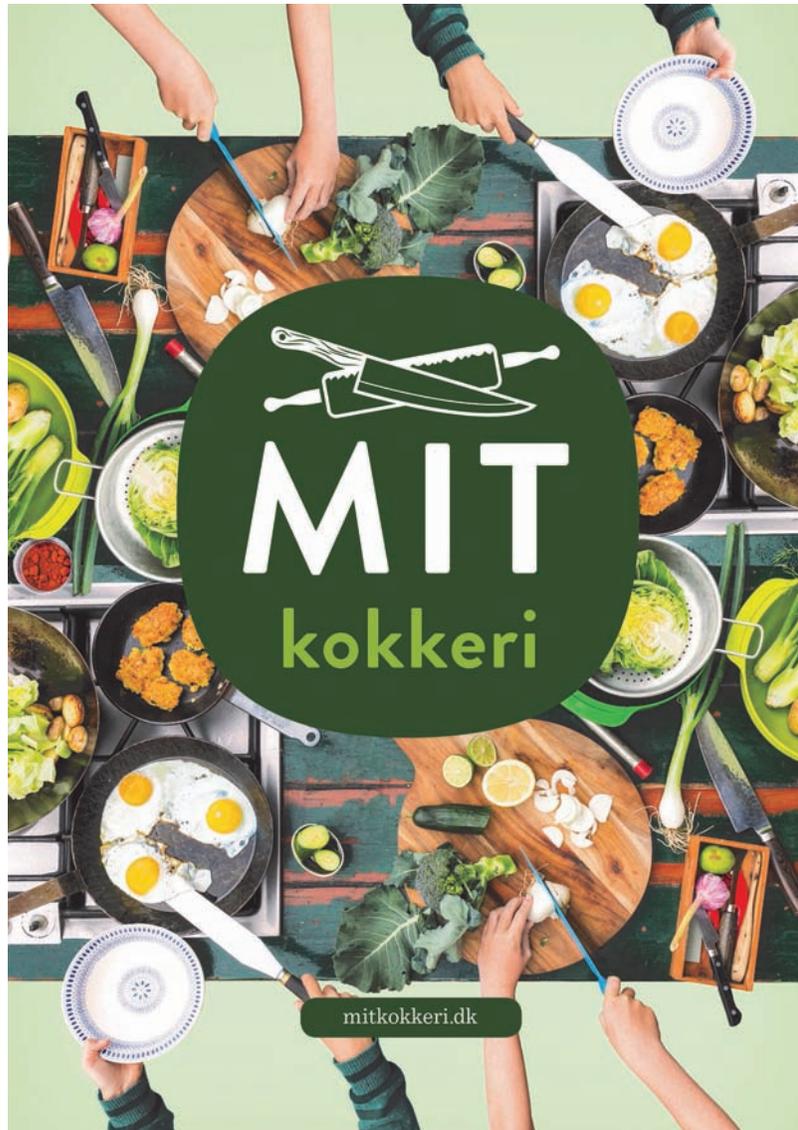


FIGURE 5: Front page of MY Cookery (2014).  
COURTESY OF RISHI, HAPPYLIVING.DK

which is responsible for distribution, has received a lot of feedback from schools, students, and parents. Parents have indicated that *MY Cookery* has made them more aware of their own role in relation to inviting kids to enter the kitchen regions. According to results from a research-based evaluation led by Karen Wistoft (Wistoft et al. 2016), schools and teachers responded that their students have been overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the cookbook, viewing it as a “gift” that they looked forward to taking home, and that the book is regarded as being of high quality, inviting and elegant, and with recipes that are attractive to children and easily accessible.

The evaluation concludes that *MY Cookery* has inspired children and increased the pleasure of cooking for students in the new subject of food knowledge both in schools and at home. The evaluation shows:

- *MY Cookery* has increased kids’ cooking inspiration and pleasure both at school and at home.
- More than 60 percent of the kids responded that they cook more at home than they did before they received the book, and many ask their parents to leave the kitchen while they are cooking.
- They appreciate the visual presentations and the structure of the recipes, which implies that the children are more self-reliant in the kitchen.

- *MY Cookery* is used in food knowledge classes by 92 percent of the teachers who answered the questionnaire (Wistoft et al. 2016).

Consequently, even though only one cookbook for children has been systematically evaluated, there are indications that the view of children's competences and of cooking as a creative and taste-oriented activity mastered by children is not just wishful thinking, but that the book actually influences the kitchen practices of kids.

### The Conquest of the Kitchen: Upbringing, Education, and Gastronomy

There are many potential stories to be written about children in kitchens between 1970 and today — all showing that a striking number of changes have taken place over this short period. For instance, children's cookbooks in Denmark document a development that began by disapproving of sugar and sweets; then celebrating sugar and puddings in the 1990s, because sugar was harmless and almost healthy; then with *The Sugar Sheriff* (Sukkersheriffen) from 2009 (Lund and Fogsgaard 2009) again disapproving of sugar and providing instructions on how it is possible to live a sweet life without sugar. They also document globalization. In *The Children's Cooking and Baking Book* (Thomsen and Dørge 1983), the most exotic

recipes, apart from “tiger cake” and “African milk,” are pizza, spaghetti, and macaroni. In 1987, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation published *The Kazoo Cookbook* (Nilsson 1987) with exciting fruit and vegetables from distant countries, foreign spices, and pictures of children of various non-Caucasian ethnicities. In 2007, the TV host Bubber recommended in *Around the World in Denmark* (Carlsen and Bubber 2007) that we taste the world with an open mind. But it is only in recent years that kitchen globalization has become a reality in the sense that there is no longer a distinction between Danish and foreign dishes: in *MY Cookery*, bread rolls can be found side by side with naan bread, roast pork with avocado-tomato salsa, green bean salad with couscous salad, and open meatball sandwiches with pulled pork burgers.

The 435 children's cookbooks published in Denmark in the period 1971–2016 demonstrate that even though children are basically the same today as they were in the 1970s, our expectations of what they are, and what they should be capable of, have changed. The history of the children's cookbook is the story of the child, and the story of the child is the story of the adults' expectations of what a child is. The basic message, however, is that a revolution has taken place over less than fifty years: children used to be regarded as insecure and noncompetent, needing their parents to guide them



FIGURE 6: Children conquering the outdoor kitchen.

PHOTOGRAPH BY UFFE FRANSEN, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ABSALON, DENMARK. 10PM.DK

through the perils of kitchen life and sharp knives; they are now regarded as independent and competent, wanting their parents to leave them alone in the kitchen. Cookbooks for children used to celebrate science and progress with nutritional instructions and detailed recipes, but now focus on taste, the senses, and creativity. This change has been paralleled by changes in the adult world of gastronomy in Denmark: from restaurants serving traditional dishes with very little innovation, through a phase inspired by French and Italian gastronomy, to today's celebration of innovation, authenticity, and localism—with taste as the important center of the New Nordic Kitchen.

In conclusion, the New Nordic Kitchen did not arrive out of nowhere, and the gastronomical revolution was not launched by one brilliant chef. Both were part of a much broader social movement with a new understanding of kitchens, kids, and creativity. An important, integrated element of this trend was the history of the child from 1971 to 2016, as reflected in children's cookbooks. As a result, not only did kids conquer the kitchen. Inspired by the new ideas of youth, competences, innovation, and authenticity, the New Nordic Kitchen conquered the world. 

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