



Christopher Hirsheimer (left) and Melissa Hamilton in the kitchen at the Canal House. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: a nearby stone barn is often used by the pair to host dinners; the watermelon is sourced fresh from a local farm; the Canal House is on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, with Pennsylvania on the other; fresh ripe tomatoes for one of their most popular dishes (overleaf); another nearby barn; melon water, made with fresh watermelon juice, ice cubes and Bacardi rum.

PALATE



*changing*  
**COURSE**

FAR AWAY FROM THE GLARE OF NEW YORK'S TEST KITCHENS, TWO WOMEN GO BACK TO BASICS.

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*They are content to create meals they want to eat, no matter how basic or classic*

FROM FAR LEFT: melon water; barbecued peppered beef fillet, served with a salad of mixed leaves spiked with mashed anchovies; tomatoes all dressed up for summer, which can be accompanied by toast or served on top of it.

## PALATE

Every morning, on their drive to work, Melissa Hamilton and Christopher Hirsheimer, the founders of studio/test kitchen-cum-publishing house Canal House Cooking, scan the roadside farm stands. It is the middle of summer and an array of produce lies in wait. From among the abundance they choose a watermelon and, once at their destination, a tap with the blunt side of a knife is all it takes for the melon to burst open into perfect halves.

Named after their charming brick headquarters on a canal next to the Delaware River, Canal House Cooking was born of a deep friendship and collaboration from the headier days of food magazine publishing in New York. Hirsheimer, a food/travel photographer and one of the founding editors of *Saveur* magazine, and Hamilton, a recipe writer and stylist, quit the magazine world for a simpler life and more control over their work.

“Many people in print think we’re husband and wife!” says Hirsheimer with a laugh, referring to her unconventional first name. “We feel like we’re married... a marriage of skills, styles and ideas. It’s a very happy marriage in that sense.” Adds Hamilton: “I trust her decisions implicitly and she trusts mine.”

Canal House Cooking celebrates simple, seasonally driven cooking. Shot beautifully in a realistic setting with minimal props, the food has integrity without being intimidating. With the white noise of food trends cancelled by the thick woods that separate them from the rest of New Jersey — and, 110 kilometres away, New York — they are content to create meals that they want to eat, no matter how basic or classic. “Being here and without any interference or outside influence has allowed us to develop our own taste,” says Hirsheimer.

Now onto self-publishing their ninth cookbook, the pair has a style that resonates with legions of fans. Many visit their website every day to be inspired by ‘Canal House Cooks Lunch’, a record of what the ladies are eating and drinking that moves elegantly through the seasons and demonstrates their good humour and grace. It is the antithesis of mainstream food culture — a window into a calm and sophisticated style of New American cooking.

“With the first few books, we sat here wrapping each one and mailing it with a thank-you note to the people who supported us,” recalls Hamilton. “We’re amazed at how it has grown and the freedom both self-publishing and reaching people digitally has given us.”

*Canal House Cooking, 6 Coryell Street, Lambertville, NJ, USA; thecanalhouse.com.*

### Cold white corn soup with lobster & avocado

*In mid-summer, corn cobs are so large that you may need to use fewer ears of corn.*

SERVES 6

8 white, yellow or polka dot corn cobs, husks and silk removed  
6 cups milk  
½ teaspoon dried chilli flakes  
2 avocados, halved, stones removed, peeled, chopped  
2 cooked lobsters, halved, meat removed  
2 tablespoons chopped chives  
1 lime, cut into wedges, to serve

Using a sharp knife, cut down length of each corn cob, close to core, to remove kernels.

Place corn kernels, milk and chilli in a large heavy-based saucepan over a medium heat. Season. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to very low. Cover and simmer, stirring often, for 30 minutes or until kernels are tender. Set aside for 5 minutes to cool slightly.

Using a stick blender or food processor, process corn mixture until smooth.

Strain the mixture through a sieve into a large airtight container. Season to taste. Place in the refrigerator for 4–6 hours or until chilled.

Ladle soup among 6 chilled serving bowls. Top with avocado and lobster. Sprinkle with chopped chives. Serve with a squeeze of lime. *NOTE: For extra flavour, cut corn cob cores into 2–3 pieces and add to milk mixture with kernels. Remove and discard before pureeing.*

### Melon water

*Consider the melon: a big juicy orb of sweet, perfumed rainwater. Cookbook author Niloufer Ichaporia King turned us on to yellow watermelon but any variety will do. Work over a bowl to catch every drop.*

MAKES ABOUT 6 CUPS

3kg ripe seedless watermelon, rind removed, coarsely chopped  
sugar syrup, to taste (optional)\*  
2 cups ice cubes, to serve  
½ cup mint leaves  
1 lemon, cut into wedges  
Bacardi rum, to serve (optional)

Puree watermelon, in batches, in a blender or food processor until smooth. Strain through a sieve into a large jug, pushing juice through with a rubber spatula. Discard pulp.

Taste watermelon juice and sweeten with sugar syrup, if desired. Add ice and mint leaves. Place a lemon wedge in each serving glass. Pour over 30ml of Bacardi, if desired. Top with watermelon mixture to serve.

*\*For a quick sugar syrup, combine 1 cup caster sugar and ½ cup water in a small saucepan over a medium heat and stir until the sugar dissolves. Simmer for 3 minutes or until the syrup thickens slightly. Cool.*

### Tomatoes all dressed up for summer

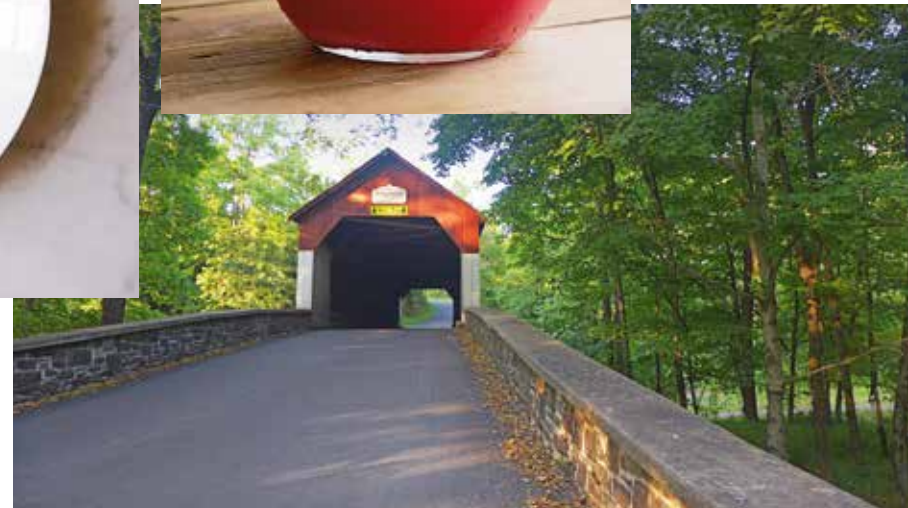
*The private pleasure of eating a tomato sandwich over the sink, juices dripping through your fingers and down your chin, is one of our constant summer rituals.*

SERVES 6

12 slices crusty bread, toasted  
1 garlic clove, peeled  
½ cup extra virgin olive oil  
6 tomatoes, thickly sliced  
½ cup whole-egg mayonnaise or aioli  
2 tablespoons chopped chives  
2 tablespoons roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley

Rub the warm toast with garlic and drizzle with half the oil. Sprinkle with sea salt flakes.

‘Butter’ half of the tomato slices with mayonnaise. Arrange all tomato slices on a serving platter and drizzle with remaining oil. Season. Scatter over chives and parsley. Serve with toast.



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: cold white corn soup with lobster & avocado made using locally grown corn cobs; melon water; fresh strawberries become a delicious topping for strawberry shortcake; the serenity of their surroundings inspires Christopher and Melissa.

### Barbecued peppered beef fillet

*For those of us who enjoy a good piece of chewy, on-the-bone grilled steak, a fillet can seem kind of wimpy — the meat is so lean and mild. But it’s these very qualities and its supreme tenderness that make it the perfect choice for grilling whole and serving either warm or cold.*

SERVES 6

1.5kg piece beef fillet, fat trimmed  
2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper  
6–8 anchovy fillets, finely chopped  
1 lemon, juiced  
4–6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 bunch rocket, trimmed, torn  
1 small butter lettuce, leaves torn  
½ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped  
½ cup celery leaves, chopped  
¼ cup tarragon leaves, chopped

Using kitchen string, tie beef fillet at regular intervals. Using your hands, rub pepper into beef, pressing it into meat. Season with salt.

Preheat a barbecue grill on high. Cook beef, turning often, for 20 minutes for rare or until cooked to your liking (internal temperature should be about 52°C for rare and 55–60°C for medium-rare). Cover with foil and set aside for 10 minutes to rest.

Meanwhile, place anchovies in a serving bowl. Season. Using a fork, mash anchovies until smooth. Add lemon juice and whisk to combine. Gradually whisk in olive oil to taste. Add rocket, lettuce, parsley, celery leaves and tarragon, and gently toss until combined.

Thickly slice beef and arrange on a serving platter. Serve with salad.

### Strawberry shortcake

*We also use this dough to make little baking powder biscuits — they’re the tenderest we’ve ever eaten. Cut into rounds or squares, they will bake in 15 minutes at 220°C.*

SERVES 6

3 x 250g punnets small strawberries, hulled, halved  
¼ cup white sugar  
1 cup thickened cream, lightly whipped  
FOR THE SHORTCAKE  
1 cup plain flour  
1 cup biscuit, pastry & cake plain flour  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
2 teaspoons white sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
1½ cups chilled thickened cream  
30g butter, melted  
extra 2 teaspoons white sugar  
extra 30g butter, at room temperature

Place strawberries in a large glass bowl. Sprinkle with sugar and toss to combine. Using back of a fork, lightly crush strawberries. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside for 45 minutes or until strawberries release juices.

Meanwhile, to make shortcake, preheat oven to 220°C. Line a baking tray or pizza tray with baking paper. Place flours, baking powder, sugar and salt in a large bowl and stir to combine. Add cream and use your hands to gently mix until just combined. Turn dough onto a lightly floured work surface and gently knead until dough just comes together. Pat dough into a 20cm round (take care not to overwork dough or it will become tough). Slide dough onto prepared tray. Brush top and side with melted butter and sprinkle with extra sugar. Bake for 15 minutes or until light golden. Reduce oven temperature to 160°C and bake for a further 10 minutes or until cooked through. Remove from oven. Spread shortcake with extra butter. Cool.

Place shortcake on a serving plate. Spoon over lightly crushed strawberries and juices. Top with whipped thickened cream. **VE+T**