Setting the Table for Julia Child

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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Strauss, David and David Strauss.
Setting the Table for Julia Child: Gourmet Dining in America, 1934–1961.

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It is a measure of Julia Child’s impact on the American public that food writers, biographers, and historians began exploring her life and work while she was still alive. In addition to book reviews and articles, Julia has already been the subject of a full-scale biography and a biographical essay. These studies present a convincing portrait of a committed culinary artist and writer, who was also an exceptional human being. They illuminate the special mix of professional competence, exuberance, and generosity that deeply affected her readers and television spectators. Indeed, based on the evidence in the biographies, it is clear that Julia’s cookbooks and television shows lured thousands of readers and viewers into the kitchen to prepare her French recipes.

Despite the thorough treatment of Julia’s life and work, there is more to learn about her collaboration with Simca Beck on the first volume of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*; that publication, which triggered her television shows, did more than any other event in the last half century to reshape the gourmet dining scene. In the cookbook, Julia and Simca worked out an approach to French cooking that enabled many Americans to prepare French dishes for the first time. To better understand the profound impact of their work on the gourmet movement, I will highlight four key issues that biographers have treated in passing or not at all: Julia’s close ties to the existing gourmet movement; her careful attention to the size, class, and gender of her audience; the impact of wartime and postwar internationalism on the spread of gourmet dining; and the use of a collaborative approach in compiling the cookbook.

The partners’ close connection to the gourmet movement was manifest in the preparation of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Julia came of age professionally in 1951, more than a decade after the rise of the dining societies and *Gourmet* magazine. By that time, all three international gourmet societies were expanding across the United States. Meanwhile, with some fifty thousand subscribers, among them both Julia and Simca, *Gourmet* magazine was presenting
French recipes on a monthly basis, which augmented the recipe collections already published in more than a dozen French cookbooks.

The two women adopted without hesitation the movement’s goal of advancing the pleasures of the table. Indeed, the correspondence between Julia and Simca almost always treated the taste of the dishes they cooked rather than vitamins, calories, and minerals that were the focus of recipes in the women’s magazines. And while the women’s magazines sought to liberate their readers from long hours toiling over the stove, Julia and Simca urged theirs to invest more time, as they saw it, in the noble and challenging art of cooking.¹

As Julia came to realize, however, Gourmet and various cookbooks often presented recipes that were better suited to the needs of an audience comprised of middle-class French women with servants, a knowledge of French cooking processes, and access to markets with fresh produce. To address the novice American cook, Julia and Simca would have to rethink and rewrite French recipes with special attention to the social situation of their readers, most of whom were affluent, well educated, and familiar in varying degrees with France and French cuisine. In this way, the two authors learned from the failures, as well as the successes, of their predecessors in the gourmet movement.²

The unprecedented postwar Euro-American collaboration that brought Julia to Paris as the spouse of a United States Information Service (USIS) official and positioned her to meet Simca through a Marshall Plan official also shaped Mastering the Art of French Cooking. While the partners toiled together in one another’s kitchens, American tourists flooded the continent; growing numbers of American scholars, soldiers, businessmen, and diplomats participated in a variety of projects with their European counterparts; and the American government promoted cultural exchanges through Fulbright scholarships and the funding of American libraries, lectures, and exhibitions in Europe. Such exchanges brought about greater contact between citizens of the two countries, but they were often accompanied by expressions of anti-Americanism from Communists and conservative Europeans who bristled at the perceived subordination of Europe to American ways.³

The collaboration of Julia and Simca was one of many cultural counterparts of the diplomatic and military alliance between the two countries and served, in a small way, to right the balance of power by promoting the spread of French culture to the United States. As France was joining the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Alliance at the behest of the American government, Julia and Simca were teaching American home cooks French culinary practices and processes, and thus expanding their cultural horizons. They were also expanding the
informal French culinary empire in America that Thomas Jefferson had helped to launch over a century and a half earlier.

Finally, the experience of collaboration shaped the cookbook in important ways. Julia and Simca worked out a division of labor in which both women selected and tested the recipes, while Julia, keeping in mind the special needs of novice American cooks, wrote them up. In this way, the partners took advantage of each others’ strengths, while testing each recipe to make sure that it would satisfy their high standards. In evaluating this experience, however, Julia’s biographers have given too much weight to her version of the story. My own account considers Julia’s position as well as Simca’s serious and legitimate reservations about certain facets of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*; as such, it validates both authors’ perspectives and views their conflict as a microcosm of Franco-American cultural relations in the early postwar period.

The impact of *Mastering* and the television cooking lessons that followed on the gender balance of the gourmet dining movement was dramatic. After all, dining societies and restaurants in men’s clubs were run by men for men. Published by a man, *Gourmet*, nonetheless, opened the subject of gourmet dining to women. But *Mastering*, far more than *Gourmet*, enabled thousands of American home cooks, mostly women, to become gourmet cooks and thus to persuade their friends and family to become gourmet diners. As a counterpart to this change, hosts increasingly held gourmet occasions in the privacy of their upper-middle-class homes rather than in restaurants and at a much lower cost. In considering the production, as well as the consumption, of their dinners, these converts to French cuisine deepened their knowledge of gourmet dining.

**Building a Partnership**

Well before Julia Child entered the picture, Simca Beck was already collaborating with her friend Louisette Bertholle on a manuscript collection of French recipes intended for the American home cook. The cookbook idea grew out of a 1948 dinner featuring *boeuf à la mode* (beef marinated in white wine, cooked with a calf’s foot, carrots, and onions) that Louisette prepared in the Grosse Point, Michigan, kitchen of her American friend, Lucille Tyree. Impressed with Louisette’s culinary skills, Lucille persuaded her to publish a collection of French recipes for American home cooks. Louisette then invited Simca Beck, who was a fellow member of Le Cercle des Gourmettes, the only women’s gourmet dining society in France, to become a partner in the project. Once the two women completed the manuscript, Louisette used family connections to obtain a book contract with Ives Washburn.
Ten years later, the lineal descendant of this manuscript, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, appeared to great acclaim, but only after Julia Child and Simca Beck thoroughly transformed it. As World War II broke out, Julia McWilliams was totally unprepared for the cookbook project she would undertake ten years later. With the exception of her years at Smith College and a brief stay in New York City, she had lived a protected life in the Pasadena, California, home of her affluent parents. Eager for adventure in the post– Pearl Harbor world, she landed a job as a clerk in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Washington, D.C. In 1944, based on her excellent work in the OSS, Julia's bosses sent her briefly to India and then for a longer stay in Ceylon, where she worked with an intellectually vibrant community of officers. Among them was a mapmaker-artist named Paul Child, a worldly man who had lived in Paris in the 1920s and spoke fluent French. Following their assignment to Kunming, China, Paul and Julia often dined together in Chinese restaurants, where their discussions of the cuisine provided a segue for Paul's reflections on the French cuisine that he had grown to love. It was under Paul's tutelage that Julia developed her cosmopolitan aspirations.

Two years after their 1946 marriage, the USIS, in an effort to convince a skeptical European public that Americans possessed the essential elements of a civilized society, sent Paul to Paris to curate exhibits of American art. With Paul's support, Julia decided to brush up her high school and college French (three courses at Smith College starting at the intermediate level) by taking lessons at Berlitz, where she “acquired a certain fluency.” Already, a lunch in Rouen (*portugaises* [oysters], *sole meunière* [in a butter sauce], *salade*) on her first day in France had kindled a love affair with French food. To pursue her developing passion for French cuisine, she then enrolled in the professional track of the Cordon Bleu cooking school in 1949 with American GIs who were training to be chefs. Studying primarily under Max Bugnard, an Escoffier disciple, Julia developed skills that would qualify her to cook for a French family of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

Julia’s future partner, Simca, also grew up in privileged circumstances in Tocqueville en Caux, Normandy, where her family owned the Benedictine liqueur business. While she identified herself by her maiden name, Beck, on various cookbooks, in daily life she used Fischbacher, her second husband’s name. In place of her given name, Simone, Jean Fischbacher had dubbed her Simca, after the small French car she drove despite her five-foot-eight-inch frame.
Simca’s father, Maurice Beck, learned the English language as a child from his English mother and arranged to have his children tutored in the language from an early age. He also entertained American business associates in his home, one of whom hosted Simca during her first trip to the United States. When Simca married Jean Fischbacher, who was himself fluent in English, she further solidified her connection to the Anglo-Saxon world. As early as 1933, moreover, Simca manifested her own interest in cooking by enrolling in the amateur track of the Cordon Bleu, after which she took lessons from one of France’s greatest “chef-teachers,” Henri-Paul Pellaprat. That activity qualified Simca to join the Cercle des Gourmettes, where she was among the most active members.8

Late in 1950, a Russian-born Marshall Plan official, George Artamanoff, who knew the Childs and friends of Simca, arranged their first meeting. Simca, in turn, introduced Julia to her friend Louisette, and the two French women arranged for Julia to join the Cercle des Gourmettes in February of 1951. Thus began an important chapter in Julia’s culinary education, as well as an opportunity to bond with her future partners. She not only enjoyed the Gourmettes’ specially prepared meals twice a month but, along with Simca and Louisette, bolstered her skills by assisting various chefs in selecting menus and doing the prep work for the dinners. This experience Julia considered “the real beginning of French gastronomical life for me.”9

Shortly after joining the Gourmettes, she and Paul cemented the relationship with the Fischbachers and Bertholles by inviting them to their Paris apartment for a lunch that Julia prepared with her teacher, Max Bugnard (crabe à la bretonne [cream sauce with leeks, mushrooms, and celery], poulet en waterzoië [chicken and vegetables in cream], crêpes suzettes). As the collaboration with Julia developed, Simca also manifested a growing interest in American life. She welcomed Julia’s help in understanding American culture and read books “to give me the feel of American life which I find exciting.”10

With their partnership flourishing, Julia, Simca, and Louisette launched a cooking school called L’École des Trois Gourmandes. Julia preferred the name to “gourmet,” which suggested an excessive refinement and snobbery in gastronomical matters. By contrast, gourmand, used interchangeably in France with gourmet, identified diners who recognized good food and drink but also possessed strong appetites. The three partners divided the teaching chores and instructed their students—mostly American women living in Paris—in the basic methods of French cooking. In their lessons, held in the Childs’ Paris apartment,
the three cooks used American measurements and ingredients as much as possible, thus setting the stage for a cookbook written from the perspective of the American home cook. The teaching experience strengthened the partnership and confirmed the accessibility of French cooking to Americans once their teachers explained basic processes.11

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1952, the Simca Beck–Louisette Bertholle cookbook project was at a standstill. Instead of revising the manuscript, submitted a year earlier, Herman Ripperger, the editor assigned to the task, wrote a short cookbook entitled What’s Cooking in France (New York: Ives Washburn, 1952), based loosely on the recipes from the larger manuscript. Sales of the book were poor, largely because the publisher did little to promote it. Meanwhile, Ives Washburn sought to replace Ripperger as editor of the original manuscript, now entitled French Home Cooking, with an American editor who understood the situation of American home cooks. Quite naturally, the authors turned to Julia Child, who helped them to obtain a new contract with Houghton Mifflin.12

While Louisette was responsible for launching the cookbook project, she participated only sporadically in the revisions of French Home Cooking. Despite her great charm and excellent skills as a cook and host—Julia called her “everyone’s dream of the perfect French woman”—her life was complicated. Unlike her partners, who were married but had no children, Louisette not only was preoccupied with her two daughters but cared for her elderly mother. Moreover, she was not cut out for the rigorous testing of the hundreds of recipes considered for inclusion in Mastering. Accordingly, the partners twice renegotiated their book contract and reduced Louisette’s share of the royalties from one-third to one-fifth and eventually to 10 percent.13

The Cookbook Project

Taking account of Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s critique of French Home Cooking, Julia and Simca sought to rewrite the recipes in a home-cook-friendly fashion. The revised book they regarded as a cooking school between covers that would provide instruction in basic cooking techniques and persuade the American woman, accustomed to efficient meal preparation, to work through some relatively complicated recipes. By “Americanizing” the home cook’s labor through the use of familiar kitchen aids and some processed ingredients, the authors intended to make this extensive meal preparation more palatable without diminishing the French flavor of the dishes.14
Unlike Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Julia Child believed that the time was ripe for American women to become converts to the more challenging cooking experience that she and Simca advocated. In recent years, there had been a “great upsurge in ‘doing it yourself,’” indicating that Americans often preferred to make things from scratch rather than buying them from a store. As a result, hobbies like carpentry and cooking were flourishing. These trends augured well for a cookbook that would require Americans to learn cooking skills and spend time in the kitchen using them.\(^{15}\)

Julia and Simca’s antagonism to the women’s magazines’ approach to cooking shaped their vision of the project. Julia bridled at the way the magazines protected the busy “housewife” from kitchen chores that might divert her from other household tasks, especially child care. Driven by an obsession with efficiency, she felt, the magazines sought to reduce the time required to prepare meals no matter how the reduction might affect the taste of the food. In response, Julia sought to revive the idea of the woman as a home cook, who was dedicated to producing tasty dinners as a labor of love. On weekends, moreover, the home cook would become “the cook/hostess,” who prepared dinner parties without help from servants or the draconian shortcuts recommended by the magazines.\(^ {16}\)

To persuade publishers that their proposed book would serve the needs of the potential audience better than its competitors, Julia and Simca carefully reviewed French cookbooks to clarify the distinctiveness of their own. In their opinion, none of the books currently on the market—or published over the nine-year period during which they worked on the new cookbook—addressed the needs of the American home cook to master basic cooking processes. The “tragedy” was that “young brides will try out the recipes,” with their inadequate instructions, and “conclude that only a genius can cook.”\(^ {17}\)

Published just as the three partners were launching their project, Samuel Chamberlain’s *Bouquet de France* (1952) was a perfect illustration of this problem. On the one hand, it was a “wonderful and beautiful book,” combining information on travel in France with beautiful illustrations. However, the recipes were useless for the “novice.” When Julia asked the Chamberlains, who were her friends and her competitors, where “they got all those wonderful recipes,” they admitted to borrowing most of them from French cookbooks, sometimes without a trial run. As Julia perused the recipes, she discovered inaccuracies and a lack of clarity in the instructions that would confuse and discourage the home cook. As an example, she noted that the five-pound chicken recommended for
poulet à la Niçoise (chicken in olives, garlic, anchovies, tomatoes, and green beans) should have been cooked for more than the one hour prescribed in the recipe. “I am being very mean about this book, but I think they are big competition for us, and I want ours to be way ahead of everything in accuracy and depth and perfection.”

Julia rendered similar verdicts on other competitors. She thought The Gourmet Cookbook, the first volume of which had appeared in 1950, “beautiful” but lacking in clarity: “I don’t know what they are talking about in many instances.” She dismissed Dione Lucas’ Cordon Bleu for similar reasons, and when Lucas’ more specialized Meat and Poultry Cook Book appeared in 1955, Julia announced, “Hers is ‘Lucas cooking,’ ours is classical French. Hers is a collection of recipes; ours is an attempt to teach the reader what in H. is going on and why.” As an example of the inadequacy of the recipes, Julia noted that for the chicken galantine, Lucas never specified the type of chicken or sausage to be used. Hence, she concluded that, even though “the old Girl” is a “public drawing card,” their own collaborative effort would produce a better book “if we live long enuf!”

But the principal competition for the new cookbook came from monthly articles in Gourmet, which Julia and Simca followed with great interest and considerable anxiety. They had been unimpressed with the many recipes originally published in the magazine and republished in The Gourmet Cookbook and Bouquet de France. However, the Gourmet chef’s series on soups and sauces by Louis Diat was an important exception, because Diat offered careful instruction in basic processes, much like Julia and Simca. Moreover, Diat and Helen Ridley were exploiting precisely the same partnership idea as Julia and Simca and, in so doing, confirmed the validity of that idea, while threatening their rivals’ cooking project. Two years later, however, Julia breathed a sigh of relief: “Luckily for us, Diat just died the other day. (Horrid thing to say, though.)”

After learning from the mistakes of their rivals how to properly construct recipes, Julia and Simca were confident that their cookbook would meet the needs of their readers. In revising the original Beck-Bertholle manuscript, they intended to simplify the learning process by making the steps in any given recipe so transparent that even a novice cook would be able to follow them from start to finish. In the cookbook, their master recipes presented explanations of necessary processes and ingredients, which were followed by variations on these recipes with references back to the ingredients and processes in the master recipe. The cookbook also included instructions on how to use American products and kitchen aids that shortened the cooking process, as well as definitions of French terms and a chart converting metric measurements to the English
system. Happily, home cooks could apply the techniques they were learning to the preparation of dishes from other ethnic cuisines. A home-cook-centered approach required the authors to consider the social changes that had reshaped the world of the American cook-hostess over the previous twenty-five years. The new obligations of the mother to her children, as part of the “parent-chauffeur-den-mother syndrome,” complicated the already-difficult task of cooking and entertaining at the same time. Of course, most American women had kept house and taken care of their children without the benefit of servants, but since World War II, as Julia noted, the “upper-middle-brow and upper-brow” classes were experiencing, for the first time, this servant-less world. Moreover, they were now purchasing their food at supermarkets. For that reason, Julia suggested “French Cooking from the American Supermarket” as a subtitle for Mastering.

Given these changes, Julia identified the readers she and Simca hoped to reach as a “literate” audience that “likes to cook and wants to learn” in spite of the time constraints. In addition, among these upper-middle-brow women, the book would appeal especially to Americans who had traveled in France and experienced the joys of French cuisine. A select audience of this kind might not buy many books but could afford to pay more to cover the additional costs of high-quality paper and printing. Julia had nothing but contempt, however, for that part of the audience she dubbed “the fancy crowd.” Nonetheless, she and her Houghton Mifflin editor, Dorothy de Santillana, agreed that this group, who regarded “gourmetude” as “only for the upper classes,” might be useful in talking up the book. “Probably snob appeal helps. I am sure it pulls in the Gourmet, wine and food society crowd. And they do buy cookbooks.” Even so, de Santillana expressed the hope that “we can push this book way past them into the hands of the housewife.”

Despite her misgivings, Julia took steps to appeal to this upper-crust crowd. As she explained to de Santillana, her contacts “in big-time gastronomy” through her French collaborators and the Cercle des Gourmettes were excellent. Indeed, in November of 1953, the three partners approached Paul Émile Cadilhac, a “respected” French wine writer, to gain entrée into the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin. Membership in this group would impress potential American buyers of their cookbook, who might not have heard of the authors, with their expertise in French cooking.

Even so, Julia expressed a certain disdain for the “very commercial” aspect of the “TaddyVangs,” as she and Paul referred to the Tastevin. “Someone who knows someone has gotten you in,” although “the ordinary person in the U.S.
wouldn’t know these sordid details.” Indeed, Cadhilac, on their behalf, had approached Camille Rodier, one of the founders of the Tastevin, to secure their invitations to join the Society. Its reputation notwithstanding, Julia protested that the food and wine served at the induction ceremony were quite ordinary, although the ritual and the “fine old Cistercian hall” created a “Romantic” ambiance.26

As the publishing date for their cookbook approached, however, Julia sought to reach other social groups. Of course, she cultivated periodicals with a stylish readership, including *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*; after all, “the American Vogue [sic] is always interested in elegant cooking recipes.” In addition, she hoped to publish articles in *Woman’s Day*, which she identified as a magazine for “lower income families,” to appeal to its readers as potential buyers of the book. Earlier, she had spoken optimistically of reaching a “mass market” through Louisette’s contacts with the American Federation of Women’s Clubs. After reflecting on this idea, however, Julia changed her mind: “French cooking is not for the TV dinner and cake-mix set.” Rather than approach mass-circulation magazines where “the majority of [the] readers would consider the French preoccupation with detail a frank waste of time if not a form of insanity,” she would find “a more sophisticated medium whose clientele has done some traveling about and knows about eating.” Julia had in mind *House and Garden*, *House Beautiful*, and *Holiday*. In effect, the prime targets of the book would be the Julia Childs of America—the growing population of college-educated, upper- and upper-middle-class women who had traveled to France and experienced the delights of French cooking.27

Julia’s strong commitment to the scientific ethos, for which Simca had less enthusiasm and Louisette none at all, nonetheless shaped the collaborative cookbook project. Julia took Louisette to task for espousing the Romantic idea of “born talent” that subverted the underlying assumption of the cookbook and penalized readers by failing to lay out the steps required to produce a particular dish. Once possessed of clear instructions, any cook, willing to work hard, would be able to prepare the recipes. A scientific approach was, thus, Julia’s antidote to the conventional wisdom that French cooking was a mystery and good cooks were born, not made. In this respect, the partners were fortunate that Louisette had only a marginal role in writing the cookbook, whereas Julia and Simca, both “straight chef-type cooks,” were perfectly suited to the project.28

In describing the scientific approach, Julia’s rhetoric was reminiscent of mainstream nutritionists, although she emphatically rejected the latter’s call for measuring diners’ caloric and vitamin intake. Both Julia and the nutritionists
hoped to disarm the preconceptions of male food authorities by presenting themselves as “scientific.” And for Julia, this was more than posturing. She took genuine pride in the “laboratory” work she and Simca performed that set them apart from other French cookbook writers: “we are not merely three little old housewives who just love to cook; we are professionals . . . all the recipes and methods in the book are our own, worked out in our kitchen laboratories.”

This scientific process was laborious in the extreme. It required careful inquiry into the ingredients of each of the recipes, especially when Julia and Simca substituted American for French ingredients. For example, Julia checked with government authorities in both France and America to clarify the differences between American and French species of fish so that the cookbook would provide accurate information on how to cook them. One of Julia’s guinea pig readers, who understood this scientific approach, insisted that there are “so many cookbooks on the market. None, however, that give the facts or the organization, and the science behind [sic] like yours.”

Consistent with the scientific method and with American practice, the partners insisted on accurate measurements for the ingredients of each recipe, as well as precise oven temperatures. French cookbooks, even Auguste Escoffier’s, usually did not include such measurements, while, in the absence of thermostats in French ovens, temperatures were useless. For novice American cooks, the additional information could make the difference between success and failure in following a recipe. Thus, because Simca was not precise in her measurements, Julia worked out most of them, which required “a minute checking.”

Designating the book a scientific tome had clear implications for its style and tone. Julia had utter disdain for what she called the “charm school” of cookbook writing epitomized by Bouquet de France, with its nostalgia for traditional life in the French provinces and imprecise instructions for cooking the recipes. As a model for style and tone, she preferred The Joy of Cooking: “I adore it and always have . . . Somehow, old Mrs. Joy’s [Rombauer] personality shines through her recipes too.” What Julia strove for was the “comfortable and sensible note” of “wise and friendly advice from one cook to another” that Rombauer conveyed. This no-nonsense approach would also apply to illustrations and type. In place of the “sweetly sticky and girlish” images in many contemporary cookbooks, Julia preferred practical illustrations that would show the reader important techniques like how to cut with a knife. The book type would highlight methods and recipe titles.

To preserve classical French cuisine, Simca and Julia systematically searched sources for recipes from the canon of French traditional cooking. They examined
the standard cookbooks used by French housewives, including Escoffier, *Larousse Gastronomique*, Alibab, St. Ange, and Curnonski, along with recipes from such private sources as Simca’s mother, Le Cercle des Gourmettes, and chefs they knew. The French cookbooks became the source of classical French recipes, also borrowed by their competitors; a distinguishing feature of their own volume were “good new recipes, always very French,” drawn from family and friends.33

Once the partners decided that they should consider a particular dish for the cookbook, they checked at least three different versions of the recipe to determine which one they could present most clearly to American readers. In this process, it was Julia’s task to determine the availability and cost of the ingredients in the United States, the preparation time, and then to write up the recipe. In Julia’s words, Simca “feeds the recipes and I get them into shape.” She was, in this sense, Simca’s “American digestive tract.”34

For the most part, the authors designed a testing process that would enable them to introduce traditional French cooking to Americans in an uncompromising fashion. However, recognizing the realities of the American culinary environment, Julia adjusted the recipes, the cooking process, and the menus to reduce the preparation time for housewives who had no servants. She advocated using the most advanced kitchen technology, including blenders, mixers, and automatic beaters, provided that they did not compromise the quality of the dish: “if something is not a French taste . . . we shall say so.” To carry out their plan, the partners agreed to use some modern kitchen aids in preparing one of the three recipes they tested for inclusion in the cookbook. As she reflected on their absence from other French cookbooks then available to American housewives, Julia’s enthusiasm for kitchen aids grew. “This whole field is wide open, that of using the electric aids for a lot of fancy French stuff . . . and we’ll be presenting something entirely new. No sacred cows for us.” However, if word got out, other cookbook writers might scoop them; accordingly, Julia wrote Simca as follows: “I think we must be careful not to mention our Waring mixer experiments to anyone . . . it would be a shame for some one else to beat us to it.” In addition, she worried about having “any of this stuff stolen by Gourmet [magazine].”35

Among time-saving devices that Julia and Simca tried out, the pressure cooker yielded mixed results and received from her a guarded endorsement, while she successfully used the electric eggbeater for “experiments on yeast bread.” With the Waring mixer, however, it was possible to prepare *mirepoix* (a mixture of diced vegetables used to enhance the flavor of meat), as well as *quenelles* (dumplings with spiced meat or fish forcemeat), more easily and with a great saving of time. When French guests praised the *quenelles* without realizing
how they had been prepared, Julia considered this a true victory for the Waring mixer. As for the Waring blender, she and Simca used it to make shellfish butter that was superior to the version published in *Gourmet* (February 1956).  

Essential, but controversial, was the partners’ willingness to substitute for French ingredients that were unavailable, too expensive at the American supermarket, or too time-consuming to cook. In principle, these substitutions were acceptable only when they maintained the French flavor of a dish, but the partners could not always abide by this rule, if they wanted American housewives to cook their recipes. The breadth of this problem was evident in a “List of Things to Investigate in the USA” that Julia sent to Simca shortly before she returned to America in 1954; a section of the list read as follows: “Flour (types of hard wheat, availability of soft wheat. What the whole grain, unprocessed wheat is like.) . . . Wild game. How much available, how important our game chapter should be. French *foie gras* available?”

In considering the differences between French and American flour, butter, spices, and cooking oil, Julia and Simca encountered serious problems. Especially tricky was finding an equivalent for standard French flour made from soft wheat. For certain purposes, they could substitute American cake flour, the same density as French soft-wheat flour, for American hard wheat. Despite the fact that French butter was unsalted and had an “almost nutty flavor” quite different from its American counterpart, Julia insisted that for all cooking processes except cake frostings and some desserts, cooks should use salted American butter “interchangeably with the French.” However, on the grounds that the French have a greater tolerance for butter than Americans, Simca suggested that Americans dilute butter with oil when preparing casserole roasted chicken. Meanwhile, Julia agreed to margarine as a substitute for olive oil, which was scarce. Other replacements included leeks or onions for shallots and spices from Spice Island.

To avoid “scaring off” readers with modest food budgets, Julia limited the number of recipes that required foie gras and truffles or suggested options to them. Even though she acknowledged that canned truffles and foie gras were inferior to fresh, she condoned their use to reduce the cost, while suggesting the addition of Madeira to enhance the flavor of canned truffles. In fact, *Mastering* contained only four recipes incorporating foie gras and nine calling for truffles, and in several cases the authors listed these ingredients as optional.

Simca and Julia both endorsed the discriminate use of canned and frozen ingredients. For Simca, it was important to combine these ingredients with others “treated in a French manner.” Following an experiment using canned
consommé to make a *gelée* (jelly) that her invited French guests found “succulent,” Simca remarked, “An American dinner, but I was the only one to know it.” Julia, in turn, endorsed the use of canned bouillon in *boeuf à la mode* and willingly used some frozen vegetables, but reported that a recent dinner prepared from frozen vegetables and frozen fish left her in despair: “It ain’t French, it ain’t good, and the hell with it.” She was, moreover, adamantly opposed to frozen chicken, which she found “awful and tasteless and stringy.” By contrast, certain American processed foods, including Minute Rice, pie crust mix, and powdered potatoes, were quite to her liking.40

In order to satisfy the needs of the chef/hostess, Julia and Simca flagged recipes that readers could cook in advance by placing an asterisk (*) in front of the last step to be completed before the company arrived. As Julia promised, there were “‘make ahead’ notes for everything,” including such popular dishes as Burgundy beef and veal stew with onions and mushrooms. Julia also praised the “*poulet poêlé*” (braised chicken) and “covered roasting” methods as particularly well suited to cooking in advance. Even so, she acknowledged that dishes prepared before the guests arrived were rarely as tasty as those brought to the table directly from the oven. “But in modern life, one must adapt oneself . . . and if it is sometimes impossible to cook and eat, then one must cook ahead.”41

The partners deliberately selected recipes for the cookbook that featured relatively quick preparations. Julia distinguished, for example, between the “quick method” and the “fancier method” for making *oeufs en gelée* (poached eggs in aspic). And she recommended using frozen *mirepoix* for pea soup because it would save thirty-three minutes of preparation time. In addition, she excluded recipes requiring lengthy preparations, as, for example, *mousseline de brochet dijonnaise* (pike mousse in mustard sauce), which appeared in *Bouquet de France*, on the grounds that American cooks would not have time to prepare them. Even in cases where the dishes were part of the French canon, Simca opted for simplification. “I am in complete agreement with getting rid of complicated recipes and perhaps to give more explanation to basic recipes.”42

Even bolder was Julia’s insistence that home cooks follow the American model of serving a single main course to include meat and sauce, potato and vegetable rather than presenting the latter as a separate course. Accordingly, *Mastering* suggested the appropriate vegetables to accompany each meat, fish, or fowl recipe. In discussing “quantities” in the foreword, Julia informed readers that the recipes in the book were designed “to serve six people with reasonably good appetites in an American-style menu of three courses.” (Salad and dessert were the other two courses.) She contrasted that model with the French menu “comprising hors
d’oeuvre, soup, main course [with garnishes], salad, cheese and dessert.” Julia even encouraged the home cook to serve any vegetables and potatoes that harmonized with the meat dish, whether or not they were served in France. Broccoli was a case in point. “We have to remain French . . . but we should also indicate where something would be good as an accompaniment, although it is not a French practice to serve it.”

In short, Julia and Simca strove to duplicate French flavors in their recipes but deviated from this practice when, as in the case of cream, butter, and wheat, it was impossible for Americans to obtain the ingredients. In eliminating the hors d’oeuvre, soup, and cheese courses from the menu, however, the two women radically diminished the range of flavors that were basic to many French meals in order to enable the American housewife to more easily prepare the other three courses.

Squabbling Partners

In the wake of Louisette Bertholle’s virtual withdrawal from the partnership, the success of the cookbook depended on the establishment of an effective working relationship between Julia Child and Simca Beck. The two women needed each other. Without Julia, Simca would have struggled to understand the perspective of the American home cook and to adapt the recipes accordingly. Without Simca, Julia would have had difficulty testing all the recipes and risked losing credibility with her American audience, as Paul Child acknowledged. The cookbook, he insisted, “must be by (or seem to be by)” French authors or Americans will not buy it.

In the relationship between these two strong-minded women, cooperation was the dominant motif, although inevitably, in a nine-year partnership, conflicts developed. While Julia and Simca agreed, in principle, that they should adapt French recipes to the needs of American housewives, Simca could not shake her conviction that French dishes prepared from American ingredients would not have a true French flavor. Differences in personal style, shaped to some degree by the partners’ respective French and American backgrounds, also figured in their conflicts. While both partners were hard workers, Julia’s systematic approach to culinary matters clashed with Simca’s intuitive bent. By virtue of her self-confidence and superior formal training in French cooking, Julia emerged as the dominant partner and was thus able to impose her views whenever disputes on important issues arose. Although Simca was stubborn, she was also at times deferential, as is evident in the following plaintive question,
which she put to Julia after conducting a cooking lesson for NATO officers’ wives: “Would my Julie be proud of me?”

Just eighteen months into the revisions of the manuscript for *French Home Cooking*, an encounter in Marseilles clarified the dynamics of their working relationship. Following Paul’s transfer to the USIS office there, Simca visited the Childs’ new home for a weekend of testing various recipes. After Simca returned to Paris, Julia fired off a “harsh” (Julia’s word) letter accusing Simca of failure to uphold the authenticity of the recipes for their book and then laying down four commandments designed to change her partner’s behavior. Acknowledging that “on the whole . . . we work well together,” Julia protested that Simca was “too modest, or too ‘obéissante.’” Of particular concern was a recipe for “la fameuse sauce à la rouille” (garlic, pimiento, olive oil, and chili pepper), which was traditionally served with *bouillabaisse*; Simca referred to the version they had prepared as a “Rouille Julia.” This “shocking remark,” according to Julia, suggested that Simca would allow recipes that did not taste “French” to be misrepresented to American readers. By not confronting Julia directly and clarifying the problem, Simca had, in effect, abdicated her responsibility for monitoring all recipes to assure that they did not “depart from the French tradition to cater to American tastes.” (Although details are lacking, it is likely that Simca objected to the substitution of American ingredients in the *rouille* such as Tabasco sauce for chili pepper and canned for fresh pimiento, the options listed in *Mastering*.)

To remedy this problem in the future, Julia insisted that Simca assert herself “even if this is not in the tradition française.” Only if Simca expressed her views “as an equal partner in this enterprise” could they succeed in writing an authentic French cookbook. Julia also implored Simca to follow the “scientific method,” which required thorough testing of all recipes, and to learn professional knife techniques. Somewhat prophetically, she added, “Who knows, we may end up on television.” Julia completed her list of complaints by noting Simca’s failure to clean the knives regularly and keep a clean work surface.

In response, Simca wrote no less than three letters to Julia in the next week, one of them addressed to *ma chère déesse de la cuisine* (my dear kitchen goddess). While the salutation has a sarcastic ring, the text of each letter conveyed Simca’s genuine respect for her partner’s prowess in the kitchen and commitment to the project, as well as a certain remorse for her own behavior. “As for your commandments,” Simca agreed, “I will try to follow them as much as my conscience permits.” Regarding Julia’s complaint that she was too modest and obedient, Simca confessed to the latter, but not to the former. Julia, she pointed out, was more competent than she in culinary matters as evidenced by differences in
their training at the Cordon Bleu. (Although she said nothing, Simca must have known that Julia had earned a B.A., while she had never attended a university.) Not only was Julia better trained, but she also launched her refutations with “so many persuasive words that my personal conviction is shaken.” Indeed, as a hard worker with a “certain practical intelligence,” who was not an “intellectual,” she found Julia’s knowledge “intimidating.” It was thus difficult for Simca to stand her ground. In any case, she promised never to repeat the “shocking remark”
about “la Rouille Julia,” although she did not retract her allegation that the rouille failed to measure up to the standard of “goût français.” No doubt, as she suggested above, her “conscience” would not “permit” it.⁴⁸

Regarding other commandments, Simca agreed that following the scientific method was essential to the completion of a “masterpiece,” which was the partners’ goal. Somewhat more sheepishly, she confessed to poor kitchen habits that she would try to remedy. However, there would be a price to pay for using proper knife techniques; the juice from sliced onions would leave “a detestable, strong odor” on her fingers.⁴⁹

Both women then sought to mend the breech in their relationship. Simca denied that Julia’s letter had been “harsh” and encouraged her partner’s “direct way of exposing things” to handle future problems. Julia, in turn, provided a remedy for onion odors on the fingers and praise for the partnership: “We have both worked like dogs and who knows better than I, the recipient of all your work, what a remarkable girl you are!”⁵⁰

While their confrontation arose over a disagreement about the substitution of American for French ingredients in French recipes, it was exacerbated by differences in cultural styles. The greater tendency in France to use irony or sarcasm in arguing a point contributed to turning the disagreement into an angry confrontation. Simca surely intended “La Rouille Julia” as an insult, and Julia took it that way. Julia’s strong response, in turn, brought to the surface Simca’s insecurity about playing her role as guardian of French taste in the recipes. In suggesting that the tradition française made it difficult for even a strong woman like Simca to confront someone who had been educated to a higher level, Julia was likely on the mark. Her insistence that she and Simca had a partnership of equals, however, was a case of protesting too much. Indeed, Simca could do no more than promise to try to overcome her sense of inferiority and speak up in the future for authentic French taste.

Arising early in their collaboration, the conflict between the two partners clarified their roles. Without question, Julia Child had taken the initiative by challenging Simca to defend the standards of classical French cuisine. Simca, in turn, applauded Julia’s willingness to address problems directly and acknowledged her superior authority about kitchen matters. Simca clearly recognized her subordinate role in the project. The absence of similar confrontations during the next six years suggests that the problems in the working relationship had been put aside, but not necessarily resolved. Indeed, the collaboration was strained once again as the book neared publication in 1961.
Proofreading the final draft and reviewing the proofs, coinciding as they did with the publication of Trois Gourmandes recipes in *Cuisines et Vins de France* (CVF), the French Gourmet, reopened old wounds. Then, a testy exchange between Julia and Simca regarding the French generals’ putsch that was intended to overturn the de Gaulle regime in April of 1961 exacerbated their differences.

In an April 24, 1961, letter to Avis DeVoto, their unpaid literary agent and friend, Julia issued a “long W*A*I*L from the far northland” (Oslo), where the USIS had sent Paul to head the office. At the last minute, Simca wished to correct certain recipes in the proofs, to which she and Julia had agreed in the final typed version of the manuscript, because they perpetrated a “goût américain.” She thus appeared to be playing her role as monitor of “goût français,” although the timing was rather delicate. Among other things, Simca denied that bread rounds in soup should be sprinkled with beef drippings and insisted that cassoulet must be made with goose, although not all French culinary authorities agreed. The two women also quarreled about the spelling of Chateau d’Yquem. Most frustrating to Julia, however, was Simca’s insistence on eliminating the slice of bread from pistou soup, which had originally been “her suggestion, god dammit.” She added, parenthetically: “My god, I pity J.F. Kennedy trying to make any headway with de Gaulle. He’s even worse than Simca, from all I’ve heard.”

Time constraints drove the resolution of these issues. The partners had a deadline to meet, so Julia once again wrote an insistent, somewhat patronizing letter to Simca (“as though to a child”) clarifying the limited changes that the authors could make in the proofs. They could not, however, revisit matters that Simca had already approved “définitivement” in the final typescript. “If you now do not agree with what you formerly said, it is just—malheureusement (unfortunately)—too bad.” After refuting point by point Simca’s claims that errors had been made or that the version in the final manuscript had been changed in the galleys, Julia insisted that the book represented “gout simca and there is no doubt about it. The only thing is that you have forgotten what your gout used to be!”

In order to conclusively squash Simca’s claim that the recipes introduced a “goût américain,” Julia rehearsed once again the procedure they had adopted to assure that all recipes would adhere to the standards of classical French cuisine, including consideration of recipes from “the great classic chefs” and then experiments to find the best recipe for each dish. This argument was no doubt persuasive, but Julia’s concluding exhortation, assuming that authority derived as much from experience as from academic credentials, must have struck Simca as a foreign concept: “And you must not forget, either, that you, also, are
an authority. You have had years of experience and training, you have read reams of authorities, and you know your business. Just try to remember that.”

Simca Beck experienced the conflict over the final stages of the book production from a different perspective and articulated her feelings in a less direct manner. While Simca’s posture appears irrational as Julia described it, there were telltale signs that her resistance expressed a last-minute reluctance to put her name to a book that brought substantial changes, initiated by an American, to many of the traditional recipes in French classical cooking. From Julia’s perspective as an American home cook, altering the recipes was essential to making the book accessible to the target audience. Simca, by contrast, periodically viewed these shifts as a violation of the French culinary tradition. To be sure, she had accepted many of these changes, sometimes with enthusiasm, as the partners prepared the final manuscript; however, at various points her conviction that French recipes must be made with French ingredients in order to have a French taste overcame her fear of facing Julia’s forceful arguments. One of those points was the interval between the submission of the manuscript and the arrival of the proofs.

There is evidence to indicate that a crisis was building for a year before the proofs arrived. Simca was increasingly unhappy with Julia’s behavior. In a spring 1960 letter to Avis DeVoto, with whom she had established a friendship, Simca praised Avis’ “tenacious confidence” in the face of Houghton Mifflin’s rejection of the cookbook manuscript. Far less worthy in Simca’s eyes was “Julia’s bitterness, which showed through her letters.” Of course, Julia’s mood since Knopf’s agreement to publish the manuscript was “radiant.”

As for the cookbook itself, Simca never understood the importance that Julia placed on proofreading the final manuscript. For her, it was an essentially routine and repetitive task. “JJ [Judith Jones, the editor of Mastering at Knopf] has sent the corrected manuscript to the corrector and the latter will judge if this manuscript should be sent to be re-re-re corrected again.” She was also disenchanted with the book title, which sounded pretentious in French. She would have preferred something more “personal and original,” such as “La Cuisine des 3 gourmandes for American people.”

However, the event that precipitated Simca’s efforts to revise the proofs was the commentary of her friends from the Cercle des Gourmettes on the publication of selected Trois Gourmandes recipes in Cuisines et vins de France. In publishing their recipes in a prestigious French cooking magazine, Julia and Simca expected to establish their credentials with the future buyers of their cookbook in the United States. However, they wrote the recipes in CVF, unlike those in
their cookbook, in French for the French woman who was cooking overseas, especially in America. The recipes assumed a knowledge of French culinary methods on the reader’s part, while explaining how she could find substitutes for French ingredients that were unavailable abroad.56

After reading the CVF recipes, Simca’s friends protested that they would produce a “goût américain,” no doubt because they would be made with some American ingredients. The timing of these “petits réflexions” and a “réflexion désagréable” was critical. Simca relayed news of the Gourmettes’ response to Julia just one week before writing the letter proposing the various changes in the proofs of Mastering. Meanwhile, based on her friends’ comments, which she clearly endorsed, Simca recommended to Julia that they carefully monitor future recipes submitted to CVF to assure that there was no hint of “goût américain.” Only after CVF launched an edition for Americans, which was supposedly in the planning stages, would recipes with a “goût américain” be acceptable.57

It is telling that so late in the project Simca and Julia understood the meaning of “goût américain” in quite different ways. Simca’s view, which reflected her friends’ approach, assumed that the use of American ingredients in a French recipe was bound to produce an American taste. Julia, by contrast, sought to determine through tasting whether the dish with the substitute ingredients actually had an American flavor. During the earlier testing of recipes, it is true that Simca often put aside her underlying conviction to prepare French recipes using American ingredients and serve them to French dinner guests without arousing their suspicions. However, Simca could never dismiss altogether the idea that American ingredients would alter the taste of a French recipe.

The comments of her Gourmenttes friends about the recipes in CVF emboldened Simca to make a last stand for “goût français” in Mastering. In doing so, she revealed her frustration over the final manuscript version of recipes that she had supposedly accepted. On various occasions, Simca recounted, she had struggled to change her partner’s mind about a recipe, but Julia would not budge. Exhausted in the face of Julia’s counterarguments, Simca simply capitulated. No wonder, then, that when the final manuscript arrived after years of Julia’s imposing her version of various recipes, Simca made no further effort to defend her point of view.58

Following Simca’s last stand for “goût français” and Julia’s defense of the recipes in the proofs as authentically French, Simca apologized for offending Julia (“Je vous ai choqué”) by expressing herself in “too vehement” a manner. The problem, Simca acknowledged, was that she was “too quick to react, rotten with defects” and “obstinate”; however, while admitting these character flaws, she refused to retract
her claim that several recipes in the proofs yielded a “goût américain.” Instead, she deferred to Julia’s insistence that they get on with the project and so put off changes in the offending recipes for a new edition of *Mastering*.\(^{59}\)

In the midst of this crisis, Julia made things worse. As the two women were arguing over the proofs of *Mastering*, French generals in Algeria attempted a putsch against the de Gaulle regime in order to block the movement toward Algerian independence. On April 24, 1961, Julia wrote to express her regrets about the emotional turmoil that Simca and others were experiencing; two days later, she commented casually, “I can’t remember whether you would be for the Gen. Challe group (the rebels) or de Gaulle!” She added gratuitously, “We are for peace and calm!” Considering that the Fischbachers and the Childs had been close friends for eight years and had discussed current issues in French politics, Julia’s remark was insensitive, as was evident in Simca’s impatient response: “My political perspective is contrary to that of the Algerian rebels. I have been a Gaullist for twenty-one years.” Julia never apologized, but agreed to a “moratorium on politics.”\(^{60}\)

The heated rhetoric subsided quickly, as time constraints drove the partners to complete their review of the proofs. Julia, in particular, had a strong incentive to heal the breech. With great insight, she wrote Avis DeVoto to express her concern that Simca and Jean “are going to trot around Paris” bad-mouthing the new book as “full of errors . . . I have had nothing at all to do with it; it’s American taste.” Such behavior on Simca’s part would expose Julia and the book to criticism in America for not being authoritative and authentically French. That fear no doubt pushed her toward some compromises.\(^{61}\)

As for Simca, she realized the impossibility of making substantial changes at the proof stage and focused on smaller revisions of great importance to her and her family. Among them was the prominent reference in the introductory section of the book to *soufflé au Grand Marnier* as a kind of classic French dish. With this recipe, Julia intended to appeal to her American audience, for whom the *soufflé* was a favorite in a collection of otherwise unfamiliar dishes. As owners of the Benedictine liqueur business, however, Simca’s family regarded the reference to Grand Marnier so early in the book as free advertising for a competitor of the family enterprise. If the authors did not delete that reference, Simca was certain that the Benedictine salesmen would withdraw their pledge to promote the new cookbook. Even worse, Simca’s mother would condemn (“réprobation absolue”) her for disloyalty to the family.\(^{62}\)

To address this issue, Julia agreed to substitute in the introduction “*soufflé à la liqueur*” for “*soufflé au Grand Marnier*,” while, in the dessert section, the
authors listed the recipe as “soufflé à l’orange” with two suggested versions: one using Grand Marnier, the other with Cointreau. So long as they buried these references in the dessert chapter, where neither her mother nor the Benedictine salesmen would notice them, Simca had no objection to naming the two liqueurs. As she remarked to Julia, “My intransigence goes only so far!” And Julia was satisfied that Americans would have a recipe for one of the few French dishes they knew.

The subject of wine also generated controversy. As early as 1954, Julia wrote Simca to report on the vast improvement in California wines, but she agreed that in the cookbook they would recommend only French wines by name. Two years later, however, Julia suggested that, wherever a “great wine is not called for,” they should name both the French choice and a California equivalent, since French wines were often unavailable in smaller American cities. In the face of Simca’s protests, no doubt driven by her eagerness to avoid any hint of “goût américain,” Julia agreed to mention only French wines by name.63

Even as she was criticizing Simca and the French, Julia praised both her partner’s role in the project and certain character traits of the French. Of Simca’s contribution, Julia said, “without her, this book would be nothing at all, as she has had the major suggestions for recipes, and the real French touch, and she works like a Trojan.” Despite the imperious tone of her April 28, 1961, letter to Simca, Julia also understood that Simca’s criticism of the final proofs reflected not only substantive issues but her personal situation. “Simca does too much, gets tired, is not in awfully good health, and is instinctive anyway.” In light of their decade-long friendship, Julia could forget the frustrations of the moment. Indeed, she was determined that “there shall not be a break between us, as I am far too fond of the old goat, but it will take some delicate maneuvering to try and make her realize some of the truths of publishing.” As for the French, they were “fun, gay, [and] affectionate.”64

However, they were also “dogmatic.” Indeed, the crisis over the proofs brought to the surface a long-standing emotional issue for Julia Child. Simca’s reaction to the recipes in the proofs was yet another example, Julia believed, of the “tremendous dogmatism” that characterized her partner and many of her compatriots. The term seemed to account for the way Frenchmen adhered too strictly to techniques and recipes in the culinary repertoire. Eight years earlier, Julia had objected to the fact that “the real ways of doing things” had become “sacred cows.” Particularly irritating to her was an incident involving Curnonski, who insisted that very few cooks were capable of making “white butter sauce” (beurre blanc) because they could only properly prepare it with “white shallots from
Lorraine and over a wood fire.” She added, “but that is so damned typical . . . making a damned mystery out of perfectly simple things just to puff themselves up.” Accordingly, she denounced Curnonski as a “dogmatic meatball.”65

At its root, Julia believed, dogmatism was a strategy to reinforce the dominance of French male authorities, most notably chefs and writers. And even though they were amateurs, members of male gastronomical societies played an important role in turning ideas and practices into “sacred cows.” Under these circumstances, the authorities refused to recognize either women or foreigners for their contribution to French cooking. However, Julia felt helpless to address these grievances, so she confined her protest to a letter: “being a foreigner I don’t know anything anyway.” In fact, she claimed to “know more than they do . . . which is so often the case with a foreigner. I suppose, cooking being a French preserve, they become dogmatic.”66

As Julia presciently recognized, the conflict with Simca was more than a personal matter. Cultural differences that affected not only the culinary but also the political sphere shaped their confrontation. As other world powers increasingly eclipsed France, the French were becoming more sensitive to the possible erosion of their cultural traditions, including especially their language and cuisine. (In this regard, Julia’s conflating the inflexibility of Simca and de Gaulle makes sense.) Working in such an environment, Simca must have hesitated to substitute American ingredients for such basic and critical items as cream and butter. And she must have wondered about the effect on “goût français” of reducing the French bourgeois dinner from six to three courses. Of course, Simca hurt her own cause by failing to clarify until the very last minute that she and her friends were attempting to protect the integrity of French cuisine. Had Simca raised the issues in a more timely and articulate fashion, she could have made a better case for resisting the inclusion of American ingredients in Mastering’s recipes.

Julia and Simca’s partnership was an important experiment in bridging the gap between the French approach to cooking and the realities of supermarket foodways. With such an arrangement, the partners could give adequate attention to the two most important components in devising a successful French cookbook for Americans: knowledge of the recipes and cooking processes in the French culinary repertoire, and an understanding of the upper-middle-class, American home cook’s lifestyle and approach to foodways. It was an arrangement, indeed, that Louis Diat and Helen Ridley had anticipated with much less fanfare but similar results a decade before Julia and Simca. Even so, the pairing of French and American nationals would only work if the partners were willing to perse-
vere to assure that the recipes included in the cookbook achieved French taste through methods and ingredients that were accessible to the American cook. While the partnership created a setting for the partners to consider both components of a successful cookbook, it provided no guarantee that they would bridge the cultural gap.

The partnership between Julia and Simca reflected both the collaborative impulses of the postwar Atlantic community and the intensifying cultural conflict between French and American participants engaged in these projects. Overall, the Child-Beck-Bertholle cookbook ranks with other successful Franco-American collaborations in the postwar period and was one of several (for example, academic exchanges) that spread French ways to America. Both the character of the partners and the times in which they lived contributed to the success of these partnerships. Common languages and privileged backgrounds smoothed the path to collaboration for the cookbook authors, as did the favorable diplomatic climate. After all, Julia came to Paris as the wife of a USIS official and met Simca through the auspices of a Marshall Plan official.

Even so, the collaboration revealed areas of conflict that were difficult to negotiate. While Julia expressed her irritation with what she regarded as Simca’s dogmatic approach to French cuisine, Simca must have found Julia’s pragmatism worrisome. The stubbornness on both sides was reminiscent of diplomatic conflicts between the French and American governments over the NATO alliance. All the same, it is remarkable that the partnership, which required marathon cooking sessions and a voluminous correspondence at periodic intervals, should have persisted for ten years and then continued over another seven years, while the partners completed the second volume of their cookbook.

In assessing the impact of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, it is important to note the substantial sales of the book in the first two years, well beyond expectations for a French cookbook; equally interesting, however, was the increase in sales after Julia’s appearance as “The French Chef” beginning in 1963 and on the *Time* magazine cover in 1966. Clearly, her dynamic personality was as important a factor in selling cookbooks as the quality of the product itself. That said, the opportunity to launch her cooking show grew out of the reputation she had established as an authority in culinary matters based on her role as coauthor of *Mastering*. The book, the television programs, and the media attention helped to awaken the upper-middle-class public to the joys of French cooking, while providing accessible instructions for cooking basic French dishes.

As Julia recognized, however, she and Simca succeeded, in part, because of the foundation laid by their predecessors. Asked by Narcisse Chamberlain to
write a blurb for a new edition of her parents’ wartime classic, *Clementine in the Kitchen* (1943), Julia explained that “French cooking for Americans was never the same after Clementine came into our kitchens over 40 years ago . . . She . . . taught us that we, too, could turn out a splendid home-style French meal in our very own American kitchens.” In fact, Julia meant only half of what she said. Her earlier correspondence credited the Chamberlains with generating great enthusiasm for French culture and cuisine, while serving up recipes that were insufficiently instructive for novice home cooks. In both of those respects, Julia and Simca were beneficiaries. Julia learned from studying the Chamberlains’ recipes how to do better, while she and Simca inherited members of the Chamberlains’ audience who were still searching in 1961 for French recipes directed to the inexperienced home cook. In this way, the two authors built on the work of past pioneers to expand an already substantial French culinary empire in America.67

In so doing, they brought about a major shift in the orientation of the gourmet movement. Before *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, a growing number of Americans read about the pleasures of the table in *Gourmet* and learned to enjoy French meals in restaurants at home and abroad. Organizing this restaurant activity was largely a task for men. With the publication of Julia and Simca’s book, however, gourmet dining became increasingly a home-based activity featuring the production, as much as the consumption, of gourmet food. Moreover, most of the leaders and followers of this burgeoning sector of the movement were women.

Meanwhile, as women prepared French meals at home, the separation between the kitchen and the dining room narrowed. The cook, in fact, both presided over the kitchen and dined with her guests, thus bringing together consumers and the producer. That fact, as well as the lower cost of French dinners at home in comparison to restaurant meals, increased their accessibility to the upper-middle class and somewhat diminished their social cachet. Even so, as Harvey Levenstein has suggested, the gourmet movement was one factor in disrupting the relatively uniform diet of Americans across social classes from the Depression to 1960. From that point on, French meals provided an important social marker for members of the upper-middle class, who sought to distinguish themselves from the old middle class; meanwhile, the gap between the upper and upper-middle classes in America narrowed.68

The publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* eight days after the launching of Julia’s *French Chef* on WGBH-TV (February 1963) appeared to create a dilemma for these same home cooks, who were also the audience for *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan, after all, was urging American women to find
meaningful work mostly outside of the home, while Julia proposed creative work in the kitchen. At a deeper level, however, both women, who were Smith College graduates, advocated a more challenging life for women and men. By eliminating assigned sex roles so that members of either sex could seek work that engaged their passion and creativity, whether in the kitchen or in professions outside the home, they hoped to improve the lives of both men and women.\textsuperscript{69}