

Serendipity: A History of Accidental Culinary Discoveries

Oscar Farinetti

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"We make a lot of mistakes, and often we take the wrong path," writes Oscar Farinetti in *Serendipity*, a whirlwind book of forty-eight essays that tour some of the best culinary mistakes to grace humanity's palate, from Barolo wine to yogurt.

Each essay is long and considered enough to properly tell the story of the connected discovery, but short enough to be read while drinking a cup of coffee (a serendipitous drink covered here). And the excitement of discovery runs throughout. Whether he's writing about an abbey in the Chartreuse Mountains where herbs are gathered to make the famous liqueur, or about the city of Worcestershire trying to replicate a sauce made in India that's not available in the West, Farinetti imbues a sense of wonderment and adventure into each entry.

No doubt, not everything touched upon is by definition a serendipitous discovery. For example, the grissino—that thin, crispy bread stick seen in Italian restaurants and grocery stores—was really an ingenious solution to a problem. And one entry covers Arthur Guinness's eponymous Irish beer, which Farinetti admits may not be a proper matter of serendipity, either. But that is not the point of the book, which encourages the audience throughout to keep their eyes open, because there are magnificent mistakes and accidental discoveries all around, waiting to be stumbled upon and enrich people's lives.

The last essay, "Humankind," contains a reminder that human beings are the most important case of serendipity—creatures of accidents and mistakes who have the ability to make something great out of ourselves and the world around us. *Serendipity* is a book for those who love history and food, and who are adventurous in spirit. Its essays travel to the far reaches of the world to partake in its culinary accidents.

ERIC PATTERSON (November / December 2022)

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