

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## The Secret to Happiness, From a French Kitchen

In her Normandy home, cookware doyenne Valérie Gilbert shares entertaining tips, her source for the very best butter and other life lessons (also involving butter)



POT LUCK Ms. Gilbert in her kitchen.

FRANCIS HAMMOND FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



## UPENDING EXPECTATIONS

appears to come naturally to Valérie Gilbert, president of Mauviel, the cookware company her family founded in Normandy in 1830. During her school days, “the nuns tried everything to turn me into a demure and obedient little girl who would grow up to do needlepoint, but it didn’t work,” Ms. Gilbert said. “This is what I decided I wanted to do when I was 12 years old. I’ve always been fascinated by the technical processes of metal working.”

So in 1992, after business school in England and a stint working at Xerox, Ms. Gilbert returned home to France and the family business. She ran it with her brother until 2006, when she became sole proprietor. “When I took over, I opened the gates myself every morning at 4:30 a.m.,” she said. “I worked packing cookware in the factory when I wasn’t busy in my office. I didn’t want to run a hierarchi-

cal business.”

At the end of those very long days, Ms. Gilbert would head to the kitchen of her home in the seaside town of Saint-Pair-sur-Mer and make dinner for her family. “Cooking is how I relax,” she said. “And regularly using the pots, pans and casseroles we make gives me new ideas and keeps me focused on the goal of our business: to make the tools that help people cook better.” She recently welcomed us into that kitchen, where she discussed such passions as pepper and vintage clothing while whipping up a delicious roast tenderloin of pork.

**The kitchen tools I can’t live without are:** a stainless steel sauté pan and a *cocotte* [lidded metal casserole]. I’m obsessed by cooking with cocottes because I love the process of browning a roast—caramelizing the meat and then deglazing before slow braising in the same vessel. This method produces so much flavor, and the meat is always tender, too.





Her favorite sauté pan.

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**My cooking mentors were:** my mother and my grandmother. They were remarkable cooks who made amazing foie gras and elegant dishes like warm oysters in Champagne sauce. From them I learned technique, but most of all how to taste food, to find the harmony in a dish, even a simple one. Cooking is sort of like writing music.

**My pantry is always stocked with:** crème fraîche, Maldon salt—I like its taste and the size of the flakes—eggs, pasta, Parmesan, bacon lardons and ham. Also pepper, butter and good olive oil, like the ones made by Alexis Muñoz in Spain. His oils are like silk. I love the one seasoned with lemon for seafood.

**The ingredient I'm most excited about right now is:** salted butter made from the raw milk of Froment du Léon cows, an ancient breed from the northern coast of Brittany. The

cream from the milk is allowed to mature for a week before it's churned, which makes for a bright-yellow butter with an amazing texture. You can find it at Terroirs d'Avenir in Paris. I'm also a pepper fiend, and my latest discovery is from South Africa—a pepper with a slightly smoky taste. It's great on vegetables.

**On weeknights, I typically cook:** something fast, simple and delicious, like *coquillettes* [elbow macaroni] with chopped ham, crème fraîche, some good butter, salt, pepper and an egg yolk.

**When I entertain, I like to:** serve dishes cooked *en cocotte*, something like a pork loin roasted with onions and figs. I like bringing the copper casserole to the table and serving from it, too. It demystifies cooking by creating a link between the kitchen and the dining room.

**A typical breakfast for me is:** a coffee and a cigarette. I mean, I'm French, right? I also like a good ham or mushroom omelette.





Cocotte with the elements of her roast pork.

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**A food trend I am totally over is:** pretty food. I hate restaurants where the food comes to the table with little dribbles and dots all over the plate, and so many flowers you could make a nosegay for a doll. This décor is silly and adds nothing to the pleasure of eating. Well cooked food is beautiful all on its own, and I think modern food styling has gone overboard.

**My approach to cooking is a lot like my approach to:** life.

Appreciate the simple things, and don't make anything unnecessarily complicated.

Take the time to do a job well, never lose your sense of humor, be generous, observant and adventurous. Most of all, never stop learning.

**In addition to food, I'm obsessed with:** gardens, especially white ones. Did you notice the white agapanthus outside? I love them. When I travel, I always try to find time to visit a favorite garden or discover a

new one. I like the English style more than the French. I'm also a big vintage clothing collector, so I stalk several sites online in search of treasures like the Celine bag I recently found. I love the idea of giving a new life to something someone else has loved, and I believe that quality is the antidote to environmentally destructive consumerism.

**When I get home from a trip abroad, I look forward to:** good salted butter spread on a piece of really great bread. Life is made from little happinesses.





Roast pork tenderloin.

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# Valérie Gilbert's Roast Pork Tenderloin

**TOTAL TIME:** 45 minutes

**SERVES:** 4

3 tablespoons grapeseed or vegetable oil

1 (2-pound) rolled pork tenderloin

1 teaspoon coarse sea salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

2 small white onions, chopped

1 pound white button mushrooms, quartered

3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed

½ cup dry white wine

1 cup beef stock

6 sprigs fresh thyme

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Season pork with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a heavy casserole over medium-high heat. Brown pork all over, then remove and set aside.

2. Add garlic, onions and

sauté over medium-high heat until onions are transparent, 5-6 minutes. Add wine and reduce by half, about 5 minutes, scraping up brown bits on bottom of casserole. Add stock and thyme, and cook 3 minutes. Return pork to casserole, cover and bake in oven until a thermometer inserted in thickest part reads 150 degrees, 20 minutes.

3. Transfer roast to a cutting board and let rest 5 minutes. Slice pork against the grain. Serve pork with vegetables and juices from pan, plus rice, noodles or mashed potatoes.