

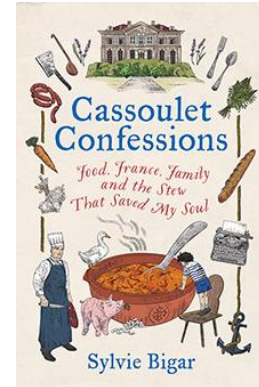
Hardie Grant

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CASSOULET CONFESSIONS

Food, France, Family and the Stew
That Saved My Soul
By Sylvie Bigar



Advance praise for CASSOULET CONFESSIONS:

“This bittersweet guide is as soulful as it is satisfying.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Sylvie Bigar tripped my trigger. As a lover of food, travel, family relationships and unique memoir I loved the journey Sylvie takes us on. Throw a log on the fire and get out your favorite *cassoulet* recipe!” —**Andrew Zimmern, chef & author**

“Deliciously weaving her story and memories into one of the most classic and unforgettable dishes in French cuisine, Sylvie’s book feeds the mind, spirit, and stomach.”—**Dominique Ansel, chef/owner, Dominique Ansel Bakery**

“Sylvie is an eloquent writer who fervently weaves her culinary adventures with tasty moments of her life.”—**Daniel Boulud, chef & restaurateur**

“A surprising gift of a book. Is it about food, and the true ways of making one of the great dishes of the South of France? Is it about the secrets of family? Or love and appetite? Or everything? A great read. You will never think of a cassoulet in the same way.”—**Bill Buford, bestselling author of *Heat and Dirt***

“Like its eponymous dish, *Cassoulet Confessions* is a delicious slow-simmered concoction. Sylvie Bigar blends personal memoir with culinary research, history, and lore, and the result is a heartfelt ode to terroir, family, and all the places we call home.”—**Ann Mah, bestselling author of *The Lost Vintage* and *Mastering the Art of French Eating***

“Fabulous...A wonderful read.” —*Sydney Morning Herald*

“Beguiling . . . Bigar revels in convivial, collegial cooking. She also interweaves her own family stories, focused around her notion of home, her father’s secrets and her Judaism. The cassoulet,

though, rather than the author, is the hero of this book. Anyone who could write that ‘each ingredient sang its own gustative melody’ knows true love.” –*The Advertiser (Australia)*

In 2008, award-winning food and travel writer **Sylvie Bigar** accepted an assignment to write about cassoulet, France’s ancestral bean and meat stew. She never imagined that this seemingly anodyne story would send her down a rabbit hole many miles from her upper-crust childhood in Switzerland, and force her to reckon with her identity and her own dramatic family history.

CASSOULET CONFESSIONS: Food, France, Family and the Stew That Saved My Soul (Hardie Grant; September 13, 2022; \$24.99), a poignant gourmand memoir, traces Bigar’s journey through the stunning French countryside near Carcassonne as she learns the deeper meaning of authentic cassoulet from her culinary guru, Eric Garcia, founder of L’Académie Universelle du Cassoulet. As the book vacillates between generational family drama and Bigar’s gastronomic training, the reader is engulfed in the simmering smells of the French kitchen, then suddenly thrown in the front seat of the family car, the author’s jealous sister at the wheel.

Bigar’s memoir is a sensual experience extolling the pain of hunger for home and authentic, sumptuous food against the dramatic backdrop of a Jewish family. The author’s poetic and deceptively simple prose offers an immersive experience, delicious and terrifying at the same time.

A literary feast in the tradition of *The Language of Baklava*, by Diana Abu Jaber, Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love*, Gabrielle Hamilton’s *Blood, Bones & Butter*, and the memoirs of Ruth Reichl,

CASSOULET CONFESSIONS reminds us of the magical power of taste. From her first spoonful of cassoulet, Bigar is transported back to the gilded mansion of her childhood in Geneva and to the dysfunctional childhood she’s spent decades trying to forget.

About the Author:



Award-winning food and travel writer **Sylvie Bigar** was born in Geneva, Switzerland, and is based in New York City. Her writing has appeared widely, including in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Food & Wine*, *Forbes.com*, *Saveur*, *Bon Appétit*, *Edible*, *Departures*, *Travel + Leisure*, and *National Geographic Traveler*. In French, Sylvie has contributed to *Le Figaro*, *Histoire Magazine*, *Le Temps*, and *FrenchMorning.com*.

In 2020, her [Washington Post](#) piece on returning to the area in France where her uncle had died 75 years earlier won a New York Press Club Journalism Award

for Travel Writing in the newspaper category. Two years prior, “[Hunting Gooseneck Barnacles on Vancouver Island](#),” in *Departures* magazine, won the bronze award from the Society of American Travel Writers Foundation for Best Culinary-Related Travel journalism. And in 2016, her *Washington Post* piece “French Cassoulet: An Obsession Boils Over” won a gold Travelers’ Tales Solas Award for Best Travel Writing in the food and travel category.

Bigar co-authored chef Daniel Boulud’s definitive *Daniel: My French Cuisine*, as well as *Living Art: Style Your Home with Flowers*, with floral artist and designer Olivier Giugni. Her *New York Times* essay about Aimé Césaire, “Beneath Martinique’s Beauty, Guided by a Poet,” was published in *Footsteps*, a curated collection of *New York Times* travel columns. For more information visit www.sbigar.com.



Cassoulet Confessions: Food, France, Family and the Stew That Saved My Soul

Sylvie Bigar. Hardie Grant, \$24.99 (154p)

“A few days of solo travel through France with a delicious purpose” occasions self-discovery in this enticing debut from Swiss French travel writer Bigar. Despite her privileged Swiss upbringing in the 1970s, dysfunctional family dinners in their Geneva home loomed large, served by a Spanish butler in a dining room that, Bigar recalls, “felt as convivial as a pretty morgue.” By the time she had two children of her own in the 2000s, Bigar longed for an escape from her life in New York City to write about the “unsung cooks, forgotten spices, and secret culinary traditions” she’d reported on over the years. That desire manifested in a writing assignment in 2008 that took Bigar to the Southern French region of Occitanie, home of the cassoulet, a “slow-cooked carnivorous orgy of pork, lamb, duck, beans, and herbs.” As Bigar recalls the details of her trip in mouthwatering descriptions, she writes of having lunch with the “Pope of Cassoulet,” French chef Eric Garcia—who teaches her his secrets to making the dish from scratch (the recipe for which is included)—while steeping readers in a rich history of the stew alongside a personal investigation into her fraught family history and love affair with food. **This bittersweet guide is as satisfying as it is soulful.** (Sept.)