

BOOK REVIEWS

Angela Clutton: *The Vinegar Cupboard*: Bloomsbury Absolute, 2019: 288 pp., hardback, £26.00.

When the great Ken Hom declares a book contains ‘everything you ever needed to know about this vital ingredient,’ then you know you are on to a good thing. Vinegar is an ingredient that all cooks will be familiar with, most likely using it in salad dressings or to sprinkle over their chips. In *The Vinegar Cupboard* Clutton aims to open readers’ eyes to the myriad of vinegars available and their uses in the kitchen, which extend way beyond a simple condiment. The book takes you on a world tour of vinegars across the ages, touching on culinary and medical uses but also providing innovative recipes for use in the twenty-first-century kitchen. For keen cooks who like to explore new ways to use ‘everyday’ ingredients but who also thirst for a different approach to cooking this is the perfect cookbook. It’s not that any of the recipes are especially quirky but more that they provide an inspired insight into how vinegar can be used to its best advantage. The *Vinegar Cupboard* is an eclectic mix of sweet and savoury dishes taking inspiration from around the globe. You’ll find enticing recipes like Baked Apples with Balsamic to Nanbanzuke Fish (which uses Japanese brown rice vinegar). The top-notch photography from Polly Webster makes the recipes all the more alluring. Granted, if you’re the sort of person who abhors anything too acidic it would be easy to dismiss this book based on the title alone. That would be a great shame because, for the most part, the quantities of vinegar used in each recipe are small and designed to enhance the dish rather than engulf it. Some authors have a knack of creating a familiar feel to their writing. Jane Grigson did it very well and so too does Clutton (it seems particularly fitting that she won the Jane Grigson Trust Award in 2018 for this book). Given the topic could veer towards geekery, Clutton deals with it in a down-to-earth fashion making the book a delight to read. At no point do you get a sense of superiority (although she is clearly incredibly knowledgeable on the subject). The scientific elements are explained logically with sufficient detail to inform but not to drown the reader in facts (the wonderful illustrations help communicate the workings of vinegar too). Of course, you could by-pass the detail and skip on to the recipes alone but you would be missing out. The history and uses for this ingredient are genuinely fascinating. *The Vinegar Cupboard* should certainly inspire its readers to make a wider use of this ingredient in the future. Angela Clutton is a food writer and food historian. She hosts the hugely popular Borough Market Cookbook Club, has appeared on BBC TV’s *Rip Off Britain*, *Food* and has written for publications like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Country Life*.

SAM BILTON