

NOTES FROM MY LAND
OF PLENTY

A couple of years ago, I moved from Paris to a modern house in a village in Provence. I had always been passionate about food, but freed from the culinary distractions of big-city living, I felt my cooking was taking root for the first time. Before settling here, I had traveled the world, unknowingly collecting the intuitions that would turn this new house into a home, this new kitchen into my own.

I wasn't born in this corner of Provence, yet moving here felt like a return to my origins and the fulfilling of an old dream, one that had preceded me. I had spent many summer holidays around here and grew up listening to the tales of my parents, whose minds always seemed to wander back to this promised land. Our family photo albums are filled with holiday pictures of me gorging on pears half the size of my head, sweet juice rolling down my blissed-out face. We used to visit friends of my family who happened to be fruit producers. I remember the old farm as a southern wonderland, with mountains of peach crates stacked in the courtyard, icy glasses of almond syrup, and piles of cantaloupes on the lunch table.

When the desire to leave the city became insistent, it was the obvious choice to build here, in the southern part of the Drôme region. It is a place that manages to be both intense and mellow, enchanting and rough, one that seems to have inspired the expression "land of plenty." Eating local is almost too easy here and, contrary to when I lived in Paris, it makes absolute sense. Good local products abound and the idea of buying something that doesn't grow here quickly felt incongruous. Don't misread me—the land is generous but still maintains a tension between scarcity and abundance, one I came to realize makes everything all the more precious. Not everything is available, and certainly not all the time, but I've come to appreciate these little quirks. They make me feel like I live in a very specific place instead of numbing myself with the illusion that you can have anything if you pay the price.

As I settled in here, it surprised me how taken I was with observing the cyclical changes in nature, and syncing myself and my cooking with them brought me no small dose of happiness. Following these ever-renewing cycles solves a large part of the dilemma of craving newness in your meals. You come to realize that one ingredient or recipe has its often-short moment; it is available, and therefore feels right, at a particular time before disappearing for months. During the time it's gone, I can either crave it or forget it altogether, but in both cases, meeting again is a renaissance of sorts. I finally understood that the food fatigue I used to feel while living in Paris stemmed from constant access to everything. It dulled my

