



Copperware caper

Be wary of tinny imitations; heft is everything

By Chef Larry Janes
special writer

THINKING about investing in some copper cookware? Even with today's high-tech assortment of anodized aluminum and megabuck stainless steel, copper cookware is still the choice for the professional cook who demands the precision heating and distribution it offers.

Ah, but precision cooking does come with a price. Copper cookware and bowls, even if purchased separately, will surely make a dent in any cook's wallet. Fortunately, however, good copper cookware will far outlast its price, especially when a quality copper product is chosen.

Copper in its pure form or in such alloys as brass and bronze was the most treasured metal for the cooking

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vessels of the ancients, and this has not changed much: copper pots are still the discriminating cook's first choice.

This is because copper is almost unsurpassed. Only silver is better at conducting heat, which copper accepts and distributes evenly, without hot spots to cause sticking or burning. Ok, so it's not for everyone — my kids' oatmeal and chicken soup would taste equally as good in Farberware — but I'm talking good food here.

I LOVE COPPER because when you're done cooking, it loses its heat promptly, preventing disasters such as overcooking delicate sauces. Although the metal itself is tough, it does dent, but all dents can be removed. Above all, I love it because it's beautiful. My copper pots and saucepans hang from wallhooks with that warm glow possessed by no other metal.

Now there are copper pans and there are copper pans. Experts advise that copper pots be judged by their weight, not their beauty alone. Avoid thin, tinny pans; although their looks might catch your eye, these overheat easily. Buy as heavy a pot as you can handle comfortably. It is also suggested that you look for good balance when checking out copper.

If a pan has a long handle, test the piece by setting it on a table and press-

ing the tip of the handle. A good balanced pot will right itself immediately and hardly wobble.

Look for a pan to be well-made and well-finished, with good balance, a well-shaped handle of solid metal firmly fastened to the pot and a hand-tinned lining. Some of the best copperware still hails from France by way of importers such as C.F. Lamalle and B.I.A. Cordon Bleu. Some very good copper is made in the states, but be wary of imitations.

Because copper conducts heat so exceptionally, remember to use low heat when cooking with copper. Tin linings will melt at 449 degrees, so it's dicey to attempt high-temperature frying, roasting or broiling, especially the making of preserves or confections that use very hot sugar.

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