

Why hi-tech is a RECIPE FOR CHANGE

For generations, cookbooks have been the only show in town as far as recipes are concerned. Not any more, says Lauren Cope.

Tucked away in the corner of my nan's kitchen, next to a faded family photo with some questionable 90s partings, is a box of recipe cards. From bakes to cakes, the unassuming box is home to her most prized recipes, tweaked and fine tuned over the years, a handwritten record of a life spent cooking both at home and work. Years ago, it wouldn't have been anything special. Recipe files were a common kitchen sight, packed with three-by-fives passed down from generation to generation.

While they documented the methods and secrets of familiar family dishes, it was their nostalgia that guaranteed their place at the heart of the kitchen. Worn edges, floury fingerprints, sauce stains - you knew the steps by heart, but still rummaged through the yellowing cards every time.

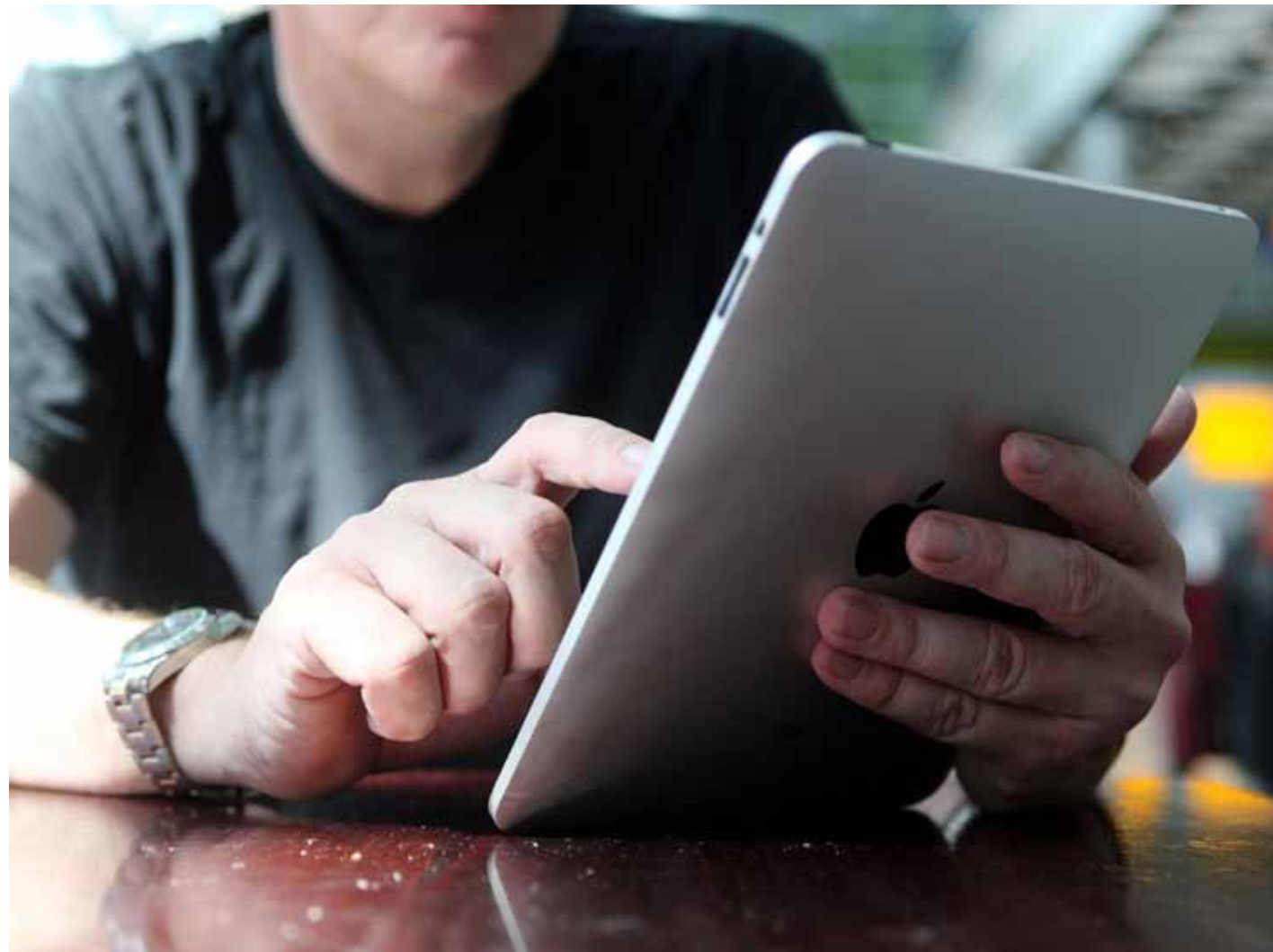
It's probably fair to say today's versions - often stored behind a screen, saved in an app or clipped from a website - are less charming (even the apps with ruled backgrounds and 'holepunches' for, obviously, authenticity).

We paw at our screens during cooking, scroll to the next step, open conversions in a new tab and discover substitute ingredients in seconds.

It's quick, free and allows us to more easily experiment. I suspect, though, the hundreds of digital directories out there won't span the generations.

But as our own recipe collections move online, the cookbook market stands firm.

The industry says it is making more money than ever, despite top chefs, including our own Delia, accepting the audience is



moving online. She last year ruled out a new book any time soon.

The average Brit, apparently, owns between six and 10 cookbooks (my total is 15) - though apparently 10pc of us never use them (*raises hand*). One survey said just over half of us never buy or use cookbooks - a surprising figure considering the fanfare and inevitable bestseller spots that accompany a new release.

But while we still seem happy to buy - and particularly gift, I would guess - cookbooks, as online recipes reign, publishers will surely soon follow suit.

It is a good time to love food. And the omnipresence of social media has made that impossible to miss. A global community of food-lovers, home cooks and amateur photographers have turned the networks - Instagram, in particular - into a breeding ground for #foodporn.

Scroll through any app and I give you five seconds before you stumble on a picture of someone's sausage and mash (it may well be mine).

ABOVE:
We are turning to our tablets more and more to find recipes, Lauren Cope says.

Picture: Steve Parsons/PA Wire

LEFT:
Lauren Cope.
Picture: DENISE BRADLEYr

Accounts set up solely to post - frankly mouthwatering - shots of food attract hundreds of thousands of followers, rivalling their mainstream counterparts.

And while food documentaries and cooking shows are nothing new, the explosion of online food video has been enormous.

Many are of one variety.

Shot from above, captioned, set to a peppy soundtrack and with no presenter, creators are amassing hundreds of thousands of followers - and book deals - from sped-up videos of their dinner.

A minute or two long each, they're easily digestible, can be watched without sound and are the easiest way to lose two hours of your evening.

And they've certainly got their merits. Some play up the fast food angle - cheeseburger-stuffed onion rings was a step too far in my books - but there's a huge variety out there, including healthy options, global cuisines, meal prep and family-friendly cooking.

Where the experience of chefs and complexities of their recipes may have alienated viewers, these are

simple. They're easy to follow, ingredients are generally familiar to find and methods straightforward.

As food video popularity grows, creators jostle to find their niche. Binging with Babish focuses on meals you've seen in films, Cooking with Dog has a poodle narrator and The Victorian Way focuses on 19th-century meals. There really is something for everyone (including people cooking drunk. It's a thing).

It's a far cry from handwritten recipe cards, with words scribbled out and quantities rewritten for the perfect balance. To lose that attention to detail, that personal connection to a recipe, would be a real shame.

But, today, in just seconds you can find 12 recipes for a dish from the other side of the world, with variations for likes, dislikes, budget and time. A community of cooks will add their own tweaks. Someone will show you the method on camera. There is so much more to explore. Surely that can only be a good thing?