

Museum on Main Street
Filmography
Key Ingredients: America by Food

There are hundreds of films that depict American food traditions. Below is a list of films that are readily available in VHS and/or DVD format and that, in conjunction with the Key Ingredients exhibition, could be suggested for private viewing or easily adapted for public programming. A more comprehensive listing of food films is available at www.yumfood.net.

The Age of Innocence (1993)

Martin Scorsese's adaptation of Edith Wharton's novel about manners and morals in New York society in the 1870s. At the center of the tale is Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis), a somewhat diffident young man engaged to marry the very respectable May Welland (Winona Ryder). But Archer is distracted by May's cousin, the Countess Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), recently returned from Europe. As a married woman seeking a divorce, the countess is an embarrassment to all of New York society. But Archer is fascinated by her quick intelligence and worldly ways. Scorsese closely observes the tiny details of this world and this impossible situation; this is a movie in which the shift of someone's eyes can be as significant as the firing of a gun. 133 minutes; rated PG.

American Adobo (2001)

Directed by Laurice Guillen. A delightful testament to the power and healing spirit of friendship. Chronicling the lives of five Filipino Americans in New York who share laughs, secrets, recipes, and lovers, the movie brings to life an intricate narration of hopes and goals embedded in the fragile idea of the American dream. Running time not available; rating not available.

Autumn Moon (Quiye) (Hong Kong/Japan, 1992)

Tokio, a young Japanese tourist, visits Hong Kong in a search for good cuisine. He does all the regular touristy things, but is, at first, disappointed with the food. By chance, he meets 15-year-old Pui Wai. She's been left behind with her eighty-year-old Granny while her parents work through immigration problems in Canada. Tokio and Granny manage to transcend culture, language and age when they discover their common love for delicious food. He discovers the secret to Granny's fantastic Chinese cooking as well as another Granny secret.

Avalon (1990)

Written and directed by Barry Levinson. A compelling, amusing tale about an extended family that came to America one by one, each earning enough to bring the next sibling. The new, American-born generation, see a future in that mysterious machine known as the television, even as the older generation finds its traditions shattering or being put aside. Funny, tragic, and telling, it's a terrific, multifaceted film that ultimately details the breakdown of the oral tradition in the wake of television's burgeoning popularity. 126 minutes; rated PG.

Babette's Feast (1987)

Directed by Gabriel Axel. In 1871 Babette flees Paris to care for two aging sisters in a remote Danish village. For fourteen years she quietly tends to the sister's needs, cooking awful daily meals of reconstituted dried fish and a gruel made from bread and ale. Then, one day, she receives a letter from France announcing that she has won the lottery. Babette goes for broke, using the winnings to cook a feast. In this masterpiece of a meal, Babette confronts the uneducated palate, awakening interest, creating excitement and bringing the villagers together, color in their cheeks, for the first time. In Danish with English subtitles. 102 minutes.

Big Night (1996)

Directed by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci. Two brothers immigrate to New Jersey in the 1950s and open an authentic Italian restaurant. 109 minutes; rated R.

The Bread, My Sweet (2002)

In Italian, a good man is "a piece of bread"— plain, simple, and always welcome. Dom Pyzola is a second generation Italian-American who has parallel lives. In one life, he's a ruthless corporate raider; in his other life, he runs his own biscotti company. Set in the Italian section of Pittsburgh's Strip District, *The Bread, My Sweet* is a love story about what happens when Dominic's worlds collide. Running time not available; not rated.

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover (UK, 1989)

A disgusting gangster spends his evenings stuffing his fat nasty self at a fancy restaurant with his trophy wife. She hooks up with a bookworm she meets at the restaurant. Bad things happen. Peter Greenaway's notorious orgy of food, sex, violence, art and politics is full of food scenes ranging from appetite-inducing to absolutely appalling. Many people abhor this film, but those who like dark, insane, stylish films will love it.

Crossing Delancy (1988)

Directed by Joan Miklin Silver. Amy Irving is a single Jewish woman working at an upscale bookstore on the Upper West Side of New York. Irving has her eye on a handsome brooding author, but her grandmother enlists the help of a local matchmaker to fix her up with a quiet Jewish man who runs a neighborhood pickle stand. Soon she must decide what it is she really wants out of life and what love really means to her. 97 minutes; rated PG.

The Deli (1997)

Directed by John A. Gallagher. A New York deli owners owes a debt to a mobster named Tommy Tomatoes and a colorful clientele. 98 minutes; not rated.

Diner (1982)

Directed by Barry Levinson. Set in his Baltimore in 1959, a film about a group of pals who gather at a diner to talk, while coping with post-high school life. Rated R.

Dinner Rush (2000)

Directed by Bob Giraldi. During the course of one frenzied evening, a restaurant owner and bookmaker deals with a potential hostile takeover, a snooty critic, and his attraction to his dead partner's widow. Danny Aiello and John Corbett bring the behind-the-scenes drama of a NYC Italian restaurant to life through an exciting tale of gangsters and gourmet food. 98 minutes; rated R.

Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (1994)

Directed by Ang Lee. Jia-Chen (Chien-Lien Wu) is a crackling, modern Taiwanese woman whose only concession to Chinese tradition is to show up at her father's once-a-week family dinners. She's smart, she's ambitious, she understands how to live in a fast-paced, Westernized Taiwan where she is a high-power corporate airline executive. Her forays into casual sex complete her divorce from the China of her ancestors. You could cut her impatience--with her father's claustrophobic little family soirees--with a knife. She's champing to reform her virginal old-maid sister (Kuei-Mei-Yang), eager to light the fire of corporate ambition under her directionless kid sister (Yu-Wen Wang). And she's still resentful that her father--a famous chef--didn't teach her to cook. Jia-Chen is clearly meant to be the psychological compass of this film which was crafted with a bi-hemisphere audience in mind. Her rejection of tradition, her success, and her ambivalence toward her father and sisters all make her the pivotal character--especially for the western viewer.

Eating (1990)

Offbeat, low-budget talk-fest featuring neurotic women discussing the role of food and men in their lives and the eerie parallels. An amusing and truthful look at why we love to eat. 110 minutes; not rated.

Fast Food, Fast Women (2001)

Written and directed by Amos Kollek. Bella is an overworked Manhattan coffee shop waitress about to turn 35. Unlucky in love, Bella decides to find a relationship that will not end as badly as her previous ones. Through observing customers at her shop, Bella realizes that she is not alone in the quest for true romance. Running time not available; rating not available.

Fried Green Tomatoes (1991)

Directed by Jon Avnet. Kathy Bates stars as an unhappy wife trying to get her husband's attention in this screen adaptation of Fannie Flagg's novel "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe". She befriends a lonely old woman who tells her the story of a lifelong friendship between two women who once ran a cafe in town against many odds. The tale inspires Bates to take control of her life. The fact that this film is in the "Women Bonding" section at the Reel video store in Berkeley, CA just about says it all. But just because there's lesbian love in it doesn't mean it isn't a great all-around movie for everyone (non-women too). And the Whistle Stop Cafe serves up some other weird stuff besides the tasty-looking fried green tomatoes. Not meat pies, exactly, but... Rated PG-13.

Garlic is as Good as Ten Mothers (1980)

Directed by Les Blank. A light, humorous documentary in praise of garlic. The history, consumption, cultivation and culinary/curative powers of the “stinking rose” features chef Alice Waters of Chez Panisse and other San Francisco Bay area garlic fanatics. 51 minutes; not rated.

Home for the Holidays (1995)

Directed by Jodie Foster. Holly Hunter plays a Chicago-based single mom who has to fly to Baltimore to join her fractious family for another difficult Thanksgiving. Robert Downey Jr. is terrifically charming as her prankish, gay brother, and Anne Bancroft and Charles Durning show plenty of comic resilience during the predictably interesting Thanksgiving dinner scene. 103 minutes; rated PG13.

Jamon, Jamon (Spain, 1993)

Erotic black comedy/melodrama about food and sex. Sexy Penelope Cruz runs a truck stop with her mother alongside the highway. Cruz is in love with, and pregnant by, a wealthy man. His mother hires a hunky jamon delivery man (whose regular consumption of the cured hams he distributes for a living has enhanced his sexual prowess) to distract Cruz. Spanish tortillas (i.e., potato omelets) also feature prominently.

The Joy Luck Club (1993)

Directed by Wayne Wang. The 1993 film adaptation of Amy Tan's bestselling novel is both a delight and a moving experience, an anthology of stories wrapped in one Chinese-American woman's journey to understand her roots. 136 minutes; rated R.

Like Water for Chocolate (Como Agua Para Chocolate) (Mexico, 1992)

Celebrated film about a young woman's magical dishes, based on Laura Esquivel's wonderful novel (which includes the recipes mentioned in the story). Tita grows up in the kitchen and finds that her emotions can be transmitted to others through the dishes she cooks.

Moonstruck (1987)

Directed by Norman Jewison. A wonderful, gently satirical tale of an Italian-American family dealing with repression and dissatisfaction against a backdrop of cultural expectations. Loretta Casterini (Cher) is a widow who feels she should marry an older fellow (Danny Aiello), but then falls for his black-sheep brother (Nicolas Cage), a local baker. 102 minutes; rated PG.

My Dinner With Andre (1981)

Art-house cult favorite about two friends meeting for dinner in Manhattan. They talk about life and philosophy for two hours over dinner. Keep your eye peeled for the quail.

Mystic Pizza (1988)

Portuguese sisters Kat, Daisy and Jojo at a pizza parlor in Mystic, Connecticut. Kat, who will be leaving soon for Yale, finds herself drawn to a local architect she is baby-

sitting for, while her sister starts dating a rich guy. Jojo gets cold feet and leaves her man at the altar. Meanwhile the mystical pizza grows famous.

Off the Menu: The Last Days of Chasen's (1997)

Directed by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini. In 1936, Chasen's, the legendary Hollywood restaurant first opened its doors. In its heyday, every night was like a premiere and every table was filled with stars. In more recent years, however, Chasen's was shunned by contemporary Hollywood who preferred trendier and hipper eateries. Finally, after more than six decades, it was sold to a strip-mall developer and, in April 1995, was slated to close. Suddenly, Chasen's was the hottest reservation in town. *Off the Menu: The Last Days of Chasen's* chronicles in glorious archival footage and with interviews the glamorous history and bittersweet demise of one of the last bastions of a bygone era. The restaurant's frantic and tumultuous final weeks play out against the backdrop of poignant reminiscences of loyal patrons and the venerable staff. 91 minutes; not rated.

The Road to Wellville (1994)

Comedy, based on a book, about the eccentric corn flake magnate John Harvey Kellogg and his health spa. Apparently his spa treatments had a lot to do with bowel health, so this film is full of bathroom jokes for scatological humor fans.

Scotland, PA (2002)

Written and directed by Billie Morrissette. *ER's* Maura Tierney and indie stalwart James LeGros star in this comedy as Pat and Mac McBeth, a married pair of Pennsylvanian schemers, circa 1973, who plot to escape their thankless jobs at Duncan's burger joint. They dispatch Duncan in a sizzling accident and inherit the diner from Duncan's stoner son, hoping to prove to Detective McDuff that their newfound happiness is entirely legal. Running time not available; rating not available.

Soul Food (1997)

Directed by George Tillman. Drama about a large African-American family in Chicago. Through the weekly Sunday dinners cooked with love by Big Mama, we witness marital bliss and distress, infidelity, failure and success. But when Big Mama falls into a diabetic coma the family begins to fall apart without their traditional Sunday meal. 114 minutes; rated R.

Super Size Me (2004)

Director Morgan Spurlock boldly assesses McDonald's claim that their food can be good for you. A healthy 33 year old, Spurlock eats nothing but McDonald's food for thirty days, and as a result gains thirty pounds, loses his sex drive and faces liver failure. Astounding revelations about fast-food culture and America's obesity epidemic highlight this successful indie documentary. Runtime: 96 min

Tampopo (Japan, 1986)

This is one of my favorite movies of all time, hands-down. In this hilarious "Ramen Western", a Japanese cowboy/truck driver coaches a woman named Tampopo

(Dandelion) in her quest to make the best ramen noodles in Japan to serve in her small roadside shop. Intertwined with their story are random comic vignettes featuring other Japanese citizens who also have obsessive relationships with food, including: a couple who seem unable to have sex without food involved, a class of girls trying to learn the proper way to eat noodles, Western style, and a wife/mother who is loyal that she prepares dinner for her family while on her deathbed.

Tortilla Soup (2001)

Directed by Maria Ripoll. Inspired by Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the story has been moved from Taipei to Los Angeles and the ethnic cuisine switched to Mexican. A chef, Martin Naranjo (Hector Elizondo), who has lost his ability to taste and smell, lives with his three grown daughters, school teacher Leticia (Elizabeth Peña), young executive Carmen (Jacqueline Obradors) and soon-to-be college student Maribel (Tamara Mello). The center of their life is the dinner table at which eating is regularly interrupted by one of them saying, "I have an announcement." This inevitably sets off another sweet squabble. 92 minutes; rated PG.

Vatel (France, 2000)

A beautiful Roland Joffe film about 17th-century French chef, Francois Vatel, famous in the time of Louis XIV. Mme. Marie de Sévigné, in her letters, speaks of him as the chef of the prince of Condé and says that on a Friday, when the king was coming to dinner and the fish failed to arrive in time, Vatel committed suicide. These events are recounted in the film.

The Wedding Banquet (1993)

Directed by Ang Lee. In Mandarin and English with English subtitles. A funny and poignant story of a gay, Taiwanese-American man who goes to some lengths to fool his visiting family that he's actually straight. To deter the suspicions of his parents, he suggests a marriage of convenience between an immigrant in need of a green card. When his parents come to America for the wedding, they insist upon an elaborate banquet, resulting in several complications. 106 minutes; rate R.

What's Cooking? (2000)

Directed by Gurinder Chadha. This tasty cinematic Thanksgiving celebration gently interweaves the tension and turmoil of four different Los Angeles families as they prepare turkey, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie for the traditional dinner - along with tamales, spring rolls, kugel, macaroni & cheese. There's also sex, politics and prejudice on the menu, along with philandering husbands, stressed-out wives, prodigal sons, rebellious daughters, meddling grandparents, plus estranged and just plain strange relatives. These surprisingly interconnected Jewish, African-American, Latino and Vietnamese families relish their diversity while acknowledging their buoyant, bonding similarities and generational conflicts. 109 minutes; rated PG-13.

Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (1971)

Directed by Mel Stuart. This charming musical, based on Roald Dahl's classic children's novel, tells the story of Charlie Bucket who, along with four other kids, wins a

coveted golden ticket to enter the fantastic realm of Willy Wonka's mysterious confectionery. After the other kids have proven themselves to be irresponsible brats, it is Charlie who wins a reward beyond his wildest dreams. The tour of Wonka's factory provides a dazzling parade of delights, colorful carnival-like splendor, and with Gene Wilder giving a brilliant performance as the eccentric candy man; the film gains an edge of menace and madness that nicely counterbalances the movie's sentimental sweetness. The film's willingness to risk a darker tone--to show that even a wonderland like Wonka's can be a weird and dangerous place if you're a bad kid--that makes this an enduring family classic. 100 minutes; rated G.

Woman on Top (2000)

Directed by Fina Torres. Romantic comedy starring Penelope Cruz as Isabella Oliveira, a sultry Brazilian chef. She decides to leave her marriage and the kitchen of her husband's restaurant in Brazil and heads for San Francisco to pursue her culinary career. There she meets a television producer, who sets her up with her own cooking show. 93 minutes; rated R.

Yum, yum, yum! (1990)

Director Les Blank marries his passion for spicy, down home food and his love for Cajuns and Creoles in this mouthwatering, exploration of the cooking and other enthusiasms of French-speaking Louisiana. Features tangy music, Marc Savoy, Paul Prudhomme, and other great cooks. Running time not available; not rated.