

Book gives 'foodies' their just desserts

By LIZ LOGAN

GOSSIP FROM the food world, hot off the griddle, knows no bounds. In England, the recently published "Official Foodie Handbook," which romps through the wide world of gastromania with no holds barred, is No. 7 on the London Sunday Times best-seller list.

"The Official Foodie Handbook" by Ann Barr and Paul Levy (Ebury Press, 1984), was published on Oct. 29 in Great Britain, but isn't scheduled for U.S. publication until late 1985, when Arbor House will bring out an American version. This means that, for the time being, imported copies of the irreverent send-up of food worship are prized by Yankee foodies. They are to domestic denizens of the food world what contraband copies of

"Ulysses" were to stateside literati in the 1920s: all the more desirable because of the effort expended in acquisition.

The book may be ordered with MasterCard, Visa or American Express through the Good Book Guide, P.O. Box 400, London SW8 4AU, England. "The Official Foodie Handbook" costs four pounds, 95 pence, plus an airmail postage charge. With an exchange rate of about \$1.12 to the pound at press time, this comes to around \$7.50.

Normal people, of course, will not be rushing off to post their orders for "The Official Foodie Handbook." They will instead be asking the question: What the heck is a "foodie," and why does it need a handbook? The term, referring to "the new sect which elevates all food to a sacrament," first appeared in the August 1982 issue of Harpers &

Queen magazine in an article called "Cuisine Poseur" edited (anonymously) by Paul Levy, food columnist for the Observer.

Contacted by phone in London, Levy said: "We decided to do the book soon after 'Cuisine Poseur' because the response was so huge that we knew we had another 'Sloane Ranger Handbook' (a British best-seller on the order of our 'Preppy Handbook') type of thing. We knew we had touched a raw nerve."

Levy, 43, called himself a "subverted academic." He said: "I was born in Kentucky, and grew up eating Southern food in a very food-conscious family. Then, when I went away to the University of Chicago to study philosophy, I was

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forced to figure out how to feed myself. My first cookbook was Louis Diat's 'Cooking a la Ritz,' which I worked my way through, learning to cook when I should have been reading Plato. After that, I went to University College, London, and to Harvard, where I switched from philosophy to English for a Ph.D., and spent more time tracking down Julia Child's butcher than doing my work properly. Then I went back to England to do research at Oxford. After I began doing some book reviews and journalism, Ann Barr at Harpers & Queen discovered me in 1977. In 1979, I started writing about food for the Observer."

Co-author Ann Barr, a deputy editor at Harpers & Queen and a co-author of "The Sloane Ranger Handbook," responded with horror when asked if, like Levy, she was an unmitigated foodie. "I am not," she said. "My part was to provide the non-foodie perspective." One can hardly blame her desire to distance herself from foodies, given such descriptions as this in the handbook: "Foodies are all palate, with a vestigial person attached. The way you tell a foodie is by listening. The mouth will declare its passion. To hear a foodie talk to another foodie is like overhearing lovers. Lots of little hums, lip-smacking—mmm puh puh puh puh. Cries of 'Yes! Yes!' All that is happening is that they agree on Harrods' cheese department."

Other foodie mysteries are also explained in the handbook:

- Why no two knives are the same in a foodie kitchen: "It is very, very non-F to have a set of matching stainless steel knives with rosewood handles dangling from a rack."

- Why businessmen are scorned by foodies: They are "the dreaded people who like everything flambe."

- Why second-generation foodies are as rare as white truffles: "Most foodies are first generation because 1) it is an upwardly mobile activity, 2) it is an activity of the 1980s."

- Why foodies are so fanatical: "They are converts—with all a convert's zeal."

- Why foodies and grapes (wine enthusiasts) are mutually exclusive: "A grape does not mind what he eats as long as it doesn't interfere with the wine."

The handbook ends with a foodie Who's Who, from Eliza Acton, the 19th-century food writer, to Theodore Zeldin, the contemporary Oxford historian. Levy is particularly proud of the Escoffier entry, because, thanks to "Deep Palate," he was able to read Escoffier's confession in a previously undocumented unpleasant matter: "Unfortunately for Escoffier, in 1898 the directors of the Savoy caught him out at the chef's oldest trick: arranging with his suppliers to be invoiced for more than was actually received, and pocketing a 5% commission. The Savoy forced a very broke Escoffier to sign a confession and pay back 500 pounds of the 8,000 pounds he owed. . . . Escoffier and (Cesar) Ritz, who had been in on the larceny, left the Savoy."

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