

# The Good Teacher



**W**HEN JACQUES PÉPIN stopped by the *SAVEUR* offices to show us how to make some of the dishes he wrote about in his memoir and cookbook *The Apprentice* (Houghton Mifflin, 2003; see page 39), we were eager to join him in the kitchen. Here was one of the most influential chefs of the past half century—a collaborator of Julia Child's, an alumnus of the legendary New York City restaurant Le Pavillon, and the author of *La Technique* (Simon & Schuster, 1976), one of the best culinary textbooks ever put into print. We knew we'd glean all sorts of useful lessons from him.

Within minutes of arriving, the chef was rifling through our fridge for ingredients and sharing some of his favorite tips. He showed us how to chop herbs without bruising them, by rocking the blade of a chef's knife forward

and back. When cracking an egg, he hit it on a flat surface, rather

than the rim of a bowl, to keep the egg free of shell fragments and to prevent the yolk from breaking. Instead of scoring and blanching tomatoes to peel them, he simply used a paring knife, a faster method that also yields skins for flavoring stock. And he demonstrated, as shown on the facing page, the wisest approach we've seen yet to cutting up a chicken.

These are the kinds of smart strategies we've always learned from Pépin, but to observe his

actions up close—such as when he made a last-minute, pitch-perfect adjustment to his mother's apple tart—was to understand that there's more to his expertise than flawless technique. The chef was always tasting, smelling, touching, looking, and then adapting to the situation at hand. When the tart (see a recipe below) came out of the oven, Pépin decided it needed more color, so he glazed it with a few spoonfuls of apricot jam, even though the original recipe didn't call for it. Of course, it looked—and tasted—divine. —Dana Bowen

## MAMAN'S APPLE TART

SERVES 6-8

This dessert (shown at left) comes from the chef Jacques Pépin, who learned how to make it from his mother. To form the crust, Pépin covers the dough with plastic wrap to press it neatly into the pan.

**1 1/4** cups flour  
**3** tbsp. sugar  
**1** tsp. baking powder  
**1/4** tsp. kosher salt  
**5** tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into  $1/2$ " cubes and chilled  
**3** tbsp. vegetable shortening  
**2** tbsp. milk  
**1** egg, lightly beaten  
**2** large Golden Delicious, Empire, or Cortland apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 8-12 wedges  
**2** tbsp. apricot preserves or jam

① Heat oven to 375°. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, 1 tbsp. sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add 3 tbsp. butter and the shortening and, using your fingers, rub into flour mixture to form coarse pea-size pieces. Add milk and egg and stir with a wooden spoon until just combined. Bring dough together with your hands. Transfer dough to a 9" glass pie plate and, using lightly floured fingers, press dough into bottom and sides; refrigerate for 30 minutes.

② Arrange apple wedges side by side on bottom of pie plate like the spokes of a wheel, pushing gently into the dough as you go. Halve remaining apples and put in middle of tart. Sprinkle apples with remaining sugar and dot with the remaining chilled butter. Bake until the crust is golden, about 45 minutes. Using a pastry brush, brush apricot preserves over the tart and bake for 10 minutes more. Let cool for at least 15 minutes before serving.

• Photos of Jacques Pépin demonstrating more cooking techniques at *SAVEUR*.COM/ISSUE126