

Paper will never be erased in my kitchen



As we're always being told, the future (and the present, for that matter) is digital. For food writer Jacob Smith, though, you can't beat the magic of cookbooks

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you cook from your devices or do you prefer to prop up a cookbook (or *delicious*!)? Tell us at info@deliciousmagazine.co.uk

Digital technology has brought a world of good into my kitchen – mainly in the form of inspiration. Whether I'm looking for Arkansas barbecue or Korean fried chicken, I can summon pages of recipes (with life stories attached) in seconds. Of course, it's not perfect. The marriage between gastronomy and digital tech has also birthed its share of nonsense. My life has never felt poorer for lack of a bluetooth enabled toaster.

It's easy to scoff, but recent advances have proved more difficult to swallow. If you read the papers you'll know ChatGPT is after my job. Now, Artificial Intelligence-generated recipes are encroaching on the most hallowed part of my kitchen: the bookshelf. Though these developments may trigger the odd existential squeak, I'm convinced of one thing: no technology will ever replace my cookbook and magazine collection.

This isn't about nostalgia but practicality. Paper is suited to the rigours of the kitchen. Open a book at your favourite recipe and you'll see what I mean. Food spattered across instructions. Pages warped from spills. Corners bent and torn. Cookbooks and magazines wear all this with pride, like medals.

Yet these same hardships would spell the end for our electronic devices. A toppled glass or splash of sauce on a book is a nuisance, but when a laptop or phone is in play – well, I've used a lot of rice. Even if our electronics survive unscathed, they limp away from the kitchen, embarrassed by the smears all over the screen.

But what else can you do when the display begins to darken? Paper never times out.

Magazines and cookbooks inspire limitless browsing. I might even whip out a pen and jot some notes in the margin – feedback for my future self. These scribbles could easily reach another person; mags like to be shared, and even used cookbooks make a handsome gift.

Paper can also morph from useful tool into cherished heirloom. Passed from one generation to the next, it becomes a record, not just of meals, but of lifetimes spent eating together. Such food memories are important. Aside from their symbolic power, rooting you, your family and your culture in the past, these inheritances can often hold practical pearls. In one such notebook I rediscovered my late grandma's fabulous Dundee cake recipe, years after it was last made.

Our screens seem embarrassed by the smears all over them. But what else can you do when the display begins to darken? Paper never times out

I wouldn't find that on the internet – treasures that precious only come bound and covered.

These aren't the Luddite views of a digital illiterate, by the way. As a 26-year-old I know tech intimately; we came of age together. I've learned it's neither feasible nor advisable to shirk digital technology and its ability to coolly decipher the meaning of a million zeros and ones in a second.

And yet... We mustn't abandon the tactile, slower pleasures of cookbooks and magazines. We are but flesh and blood with emotions and fading memories

of the past. The indecipherable smudges, splashes and squiggles may not mean much to everyone, but to me they mean the world. 

