FREE BOOK | ENZO MANCINI

MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN DRAWER



Six old kitchen rules from Bari and a butcher shop

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Six old kitchen rules from Bari and a butcher shop



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A WORD FROM ENZO

My mother's drawer

Where these rules began

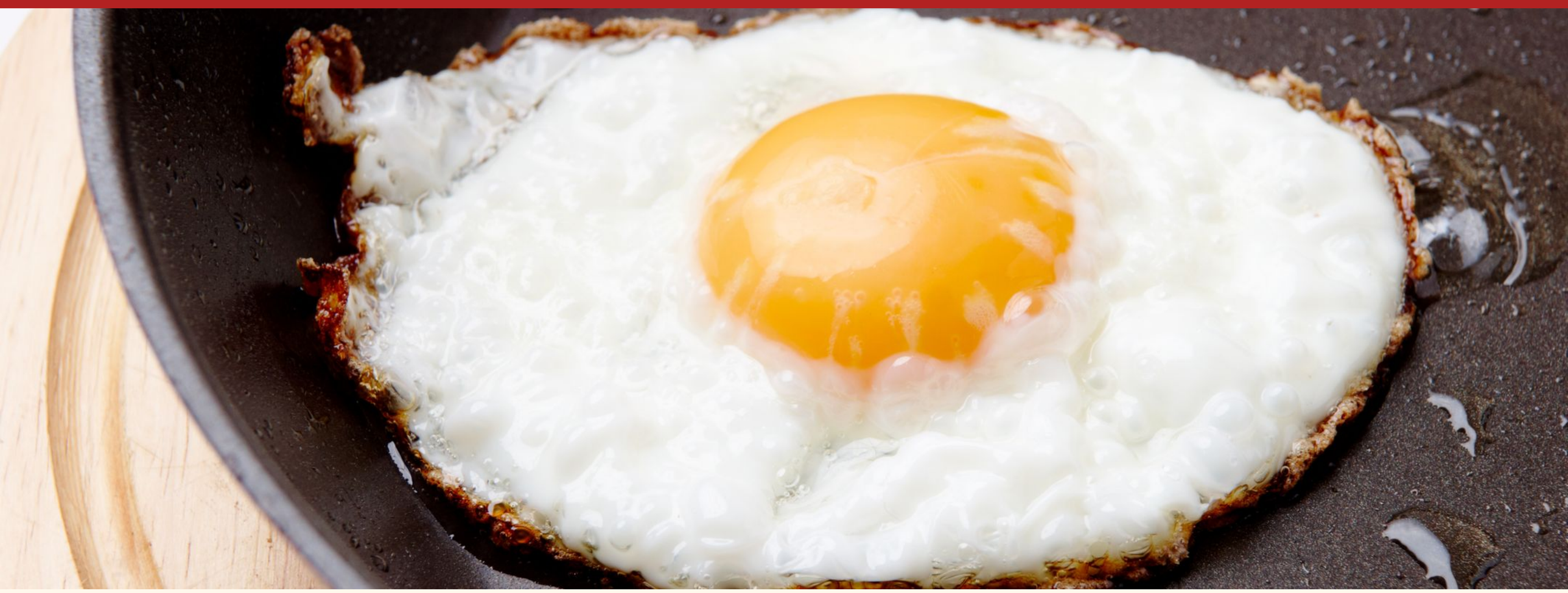


My mother kept her small kitchen tricks in one drawer in Bari. I stood beside her at the stove and watched. This is that drawer, opened for you: six rules, one page each, the ones I would teach you first. Do one this Sunday. Piano, piano.

Do one rule this week. Piano, piano.

Fry the egg in olive oil

Two tablespoons, one minute, lace



THE MISTAKE

A little butter on medium, the egg spreads flat like a puddle. The white goes pale and rubbery, the yolk raw or hard, nothing between. Then you flip it, press the yolk dead, and eat it anyway because it is early.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Oil at medium-high is far hotter than boiling, so the water in the white steams out fast and blows holes the oil fries into lace. Butter burns black before the edge crisps. Olive oil smokes near 375 F / 190 C; stay under it. My mother did six at once in a dented pan.

DO THIS

1. Crack on the counter into a cup
2. 2 tablespoons olive oil, 8-inch pan, medium-high, until it shimmers
3. Slide the egg in low, spoon oil over the white, out at one minute
4. Salt on the plate, white only

More oil than you think, and never flip.

Eggs that peel: hot water, then ice

Week-old eggs, hot start, ice bath



THE MISTAKE

You bought the eggs this morning, started them in cold water, and the shell took half the white with it. It comes off in sticky chips and the yolk wears a gray-green ring. Nobody wants that egg in the salad.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

A fresh egg's membrane grips the shell; after a week, air gets in and it lets go. Hot water sets the white fast, so it hugs itself, not the shell. A test kitchen tried five ways: boiling and steaming gave nine smooth eggs in ten, the cold start the worst. Carmela penciled the date on every carton.

DO THIS

1. Buy eggs 7-10 days ahead
2. Spoon into boiling water, 212 F / 100 C, one layer, lid, 12 minutes large
3. Ice water 5 minutes, peel under the cold tap from the fat end

Old eggs, hot water, ice, peel at once.

Cold pan for a fatty cut

Salmon skin, lamb chop, chicken thigh



THE MISTAKE

You heat the pan until it smokes because television said so. The skin welds to the metal, white paste creeps out the sides, and when you flip, half the skin stays behind. Dry outside, raw middle, and you decide salmon is restaurant food.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Thick fat sits under the skin. Hot metal seizes the skin before the fat melts; it curls and only the edges touch. Started cold, the fat renders slowly and the skin fries flat in it. Pull at the government's 145 F / 63 C and rest 3 minutes. My mother did sardines this way.

DO THIS

1. Dry it with two towels
2. Oil in a cold pan, skin down, press 10 seconds, medium heat
3. Flip when the pale color climbs two-thirds up the side; one minute more, heat off

Dry skin crisps. Wet skin steams. Start it cold.

Broccoli never boiled: hot pan, splash, lid

Three minutes of steam, then brown



THE MISTAKE

You dropped it in boiling water for ten minutes until a fork went through. Around minute six the kitchen smelled like a wet dog, and what came out was the color of an old army jacket. The kids pushed it aside.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

The green is chlorophyll: long heat, acid and water all break it, and a pot gives all three. A splash under a lid steams it through in 3 minutes with nothing to leak into. The smell starts around minute 8; you never get there. In Bari, water was for pasta, the pan for everything else.

DO THIS

1. Peel the stem into coins, cut florets walnut size, dry them
2. Garlic in cold oil to golden; broccoli, salt, quarter cup water, lid, 3 minutes
3. Lid off, brown 2-3 minutes; lemon only on the plate

Splash, lid, three minutes, brown. Pull early.

The 20-minute tomato sauce from one can

Whole peeled, wide pan, twenty minutes



THE MISTAKE

You pour the $8 jar into a pot and warm it, or the $2.50 one with sugar third on the label, add garlic powder and dried oregano, and it tastes like ketchup with oregano. Fine, you say. Like every other night.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

Diced tomatoes carry a firming agent and never melt; whole peeled ones fall apart the moment asked. A wide pan lets the water leave from the whole surface: 20 minutes, not two hours. My mother tilted the pot to the window; when the oil came back on top, we ate.

DO THIS

1. Crush a big can of whole peeled, about $1.50, by hand
2. Smashed garlic in olive oil from cold; a spoon of tomato paste fried one minute
3. Tomatoes in, uncovered 20 minutes, whispering bubbles; a carrot, not sugar; basil last

Whole peeled, wide pan, basil last.

Creamy beans from a $2 bag

Salted soak, never a boil, sage



THE MISTAKE

The doctor said beans. You heated a can, no salt, no fat, and ate gray mush that tasted of the tin. Later came the thing nobody talks about. You decided beans are for cowboys and went back to the chicken.

THE BUTCHER'S REASON

A bean needs what the can lacks: fat, an herb and time. Salt in the soak softens the skin, whatever grandmother said. A hard boil bursts skins before the heart softens; acid too, so tomato goes in last. The old men at my counter made beans when meat money ran out.

DO THIS

1. Soak 1 lb overnight with 1 tablespoon salt; pour that water away
2. Lidded pot, water 2 inches over, olive oil, sage, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt
3. Oven 250 F / 120 C, lid on, 3 hours; mash a third; never drain

Fat, sage, time, a bubble you can count.

The numbers card

Print me. Tape me inside a cupboard door.

- [ ] Steak, chops, roasts: 145 F / 63 C, then rest 3 minutes
- [ ] Ground meat, meatballs, meatloaf, burgers: 160 F / 71 C
- [ ] Chicken and turkey, the government number: 165 F / 74 C
- [ ] Chicken thighs, silky: 175-185 F / 80-85 C
- [ ] Fridge at or under 40 F / 4 C
- [ ] Freezer at 0 F / minus 18 C
- [ ] Two hours from stove to fridge, one hour above 90 F
- [ ] Oil is ready when it shimmers and runs like water, not syrup
- [ ] Salt meat 40 minutes ahead or overnight; burgers outside only
- [ ] Thermometer in from the side, away from the bone

Two minutes is a guess. The number is a fact.

Notes and picture credits

Prices, limits, pictures

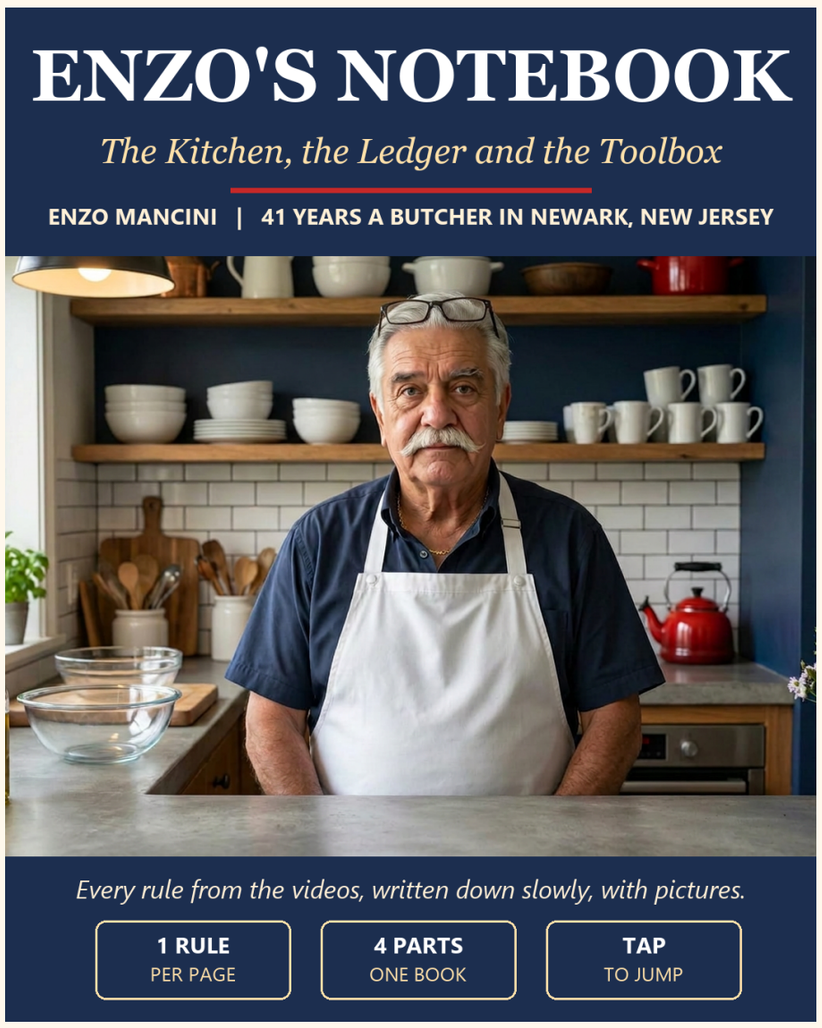
I am Enzo, a retired butcher from Newark, New Jersey. I am not a chef and not a doctor. These are the habits of my family, general guidance only. Prices are about prices from U.S. stores seen in October 2026 and change from store to store. For your health, ask your doctor. Gas, electrical or structural trouble: call a professional. Pictures: Storyblocks licence, Wikimedia Commons (credited below where required) and our own channel images. No product photos from retailers or makers.

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A WORD FROM ENZO

One more thing

About the bigger book



If these six pages helped you in the kitchen, my friend, there is a bigger book.

91 pages. My whole family's know-how, in my own words.

It is called Enzo's Notebook. It holds everything my family and I know, in one place: the kitchen, the ledger, the toolbox and Carmela's own pages. 91 pages, one rule on each, with the numbers we really use, written slowly from 41 years behind the counter. If you would like it, scan the code or visit enzosbook.com. If not, keep this little book and do one rule this week. Thank you for reading, my friend.

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