



## VINCENT SARDON: THE STAMPOGRAPHER

Gorgeously uncouth, Sardon's work revels in a Dada-like spirit. —Publishers Weekly

Parisian artist Sardon commandeers the rubber stamp with razor-sharp wit, unabashed profanity and sublime beauty.

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## Lush Life

A look at unsavory '60s cuisine through the *Mad Men* lens.

MELANIE REHAK



Bottoms up! Roger Sterling's Martini.

In 1941, M. F. K. Fisher famously considered the oyster. To her many thoughts on how, when, where, and why to eat it, she added this little excursion into its amorous dimensions: "The love-life of an oyster is a curious one, dependent on the vagaries of temperature and the tides," she mused. "The love-life of a man has also been called curious, and part of it has long depended on the mysterious powers of this bi-valved mollusc." And that was pretty much the definitive word on oysters, sex, and love. Many other people have commented on and dissected and discussed the matter since, but never quite so eloquently or delicately.

Not, that is, until 1960, when Sterling Cooper's star adman Don Draper, he of the slicked hair and silver tongue, who turned Lucky Strike cigarettes from cancer-causing agents into toasty treats and transformed the Kodak slide projector into a time machine, came along and added his own delectable assessment to the conversation, nearly beating Fisher at her own game in spite of his utter lack of credentials as a foodie. "It's like eating a mermaid," he tells his boss, Roger Sterling, at lunch one day, flashing a lopsided grin over a heaping platter of half shells and, of course, an ocean of martinis and old-fashionedes. It's his first sojourn into the land of the bivalve, but his briny, ethereal description is as potent and evocative as any I've ever heard. (And surely I'm not alone in suspecting that Don may actually have a real point of comparison. If anyone could pull it off, he could.) It's a classic Don Draper moment—suave, amusing, freighted with implied double meaning.

It's also a classic *Mad Men* moment, if less obviously so. The series has had an outside impact on everything from the cocktails we drink to the debate over whether TV has taken the place of film to the clothes we wear (you know something has gone amok when Banana Republic trots out an entire line of clothing based on a television show). But food is not one of the areas in which *Mad Men* has made much of a mark, perhaps because the period in which it unfolds, the 1960s, wasn't exactly a high point for American cuisine. What that usually means is that when food appears in the show, it seems to function either as a nostalgia item for viewers, as the backdrop to the true action of the plot, or—and I'm thinking in particular of the clumsily themed food put out for various client meetings at Sterling Cooper—as a sight gag.

If you look closer, though, it becomes clear that all the meals and snacks prepared, consumed, offered, and rejected on the series tell a story. It's the tale of a young country long on ambition and short on tradition, reliant on other people's ideas of what constitutes the good life—hello, fancy French cuisine!—even as they rush toward the dazzle and ease of the space age with abandon, convenience foods included. Roger Sterling may order up a nice, labor-intensive beef Wellington to cap off a hotel-room tryst, and Betty Draper may channel her inner Jackie Kennedy by ordering an Avocado and Crabmeat Mimosa from room service while watching the White House tour on television, but for daily living, the younger set is all about opening cans and boxes.

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Which brings me, as fans of the show know it must, to the infamous Campbell chip and dip. Just as Don's oyster revelation (which happens to appear in the same episode) contains multitudes about him, the hideous salad-themed chip-and-dip holder that Pete Campbell brings into the office on his way to return it—it was a duplicate wedding present—is an emblem of far more than delicious party snacks. "It had sour cream with these little brown onions in it," Pete explains, describing to his baffled colleagues the dip he and Trudy recently sampled from some friends' similar conveyance. "It was *very good*." In that one short exchange, we learn about the social gulf between the moneyed, now-married Pete and his bachelor coworkers, who have never heard of either a chip and dip or even dip itself. We also learn that Pete, contrary to appearances, is open to new ideas—in this case, the taste of newfangled, instant Lipton onion-soup mix.

Or so I assumed. I was in for not one but two surprises when I got to the recipe for the dip about which Pete rhapsodizes in the surprisingly informative *Unofficial Mad Men Cookbook* (Smart Pop, \$17). First off, it's apparently called California Dip, so named after the anonymous cook in that state who first created it and sent the recipe in to a local paper. Second, it wasn't originally made with Lipton—they just took the idea and made it theirs by printing the recipe on every box of Lipton Recipe Secrets Onion Soup Mix starting in 1958. But regardless of the brand, onion dip was what all the well-to-do young housewives, Trudy Campbell included, were making in 1960, delighted by both the rich taste and the ease of preparation. In fact, the recipe has exactly two ingredients, soup mix and sour cream, followed by these instructions: "Place ingredients in a medium bowl, stir, and chill. Serve with potato chips." If you grew up sneaking bites of this heavenly concoction during your parents' cocktail parties and sometimes long for it in place of the more effete bites on offer these days, I defy you not to whip up a batch upon reading this. Go ahead: It will take you approximately two minutes.

Not that all cooking of the era was so simple, of course, as *The Unofficial Mad Men Cookbook* reminds us. To trawl through the book is to finally learn what exactly my mother was doing for all those hours in the kitchen before dinner parties. Possibly she was making Joan's Stuffed Crown Roast of Pork, which includes separate recipes for both the stuffing and the gravy and has to be roasted for an hour and a half, removed from the oven, filled with the stuffing, roasted for another two hours, removed again to take the foil off, and then roasted for another twenty minutes after that. At least it was always the man's job to carve the beast once it finally made it to the table. And remember Betty Draper's "Around the World" dinner party? Among her starters was rumaki, a then-trendy mash-up of water chestnuts, chicken livers, and bacon marinated ahead of time and then broiled on tiny little kebabs. There's a fair amount of Betty hate out there, but credit should be given where it's due. Could you make these and still get your hair set and your petticoat on straight by the 6 PM cocktail hour?

If a simple dinner for two is more your style, there's the chicken Pete throws out the window during an argument with Trudy, a basic roaster with stuffing. Or if you're more the breakfast type, you can whip up a batch of the accidentally rum-soaked French toast Sally Draper prepares while sleeping over at her father's toward the end of season 4. Liquid refreshment is understandably well represented, too. There are recipes for mint juleps and sidecars and all manner of hard-hitting drinks. All of it is accompanied by historical sidebars on Julia Child, the Stork Club, and the Oyster Bar at Grand Central Station (where Don theoretically made his mermaid comment), as well as many, many other tidbits of relevant American culinary and cocktail history, along with illustrations and dialogue from the show and reproductions of old advertisements. One of the unique features of the book, or one of its gimmicks, depending on how you look at it, is that the authors went to the sources for a lot of their recipes. We get the Wedge Salad to beat all Wedge Salads from *The Palm Restaurant Cookbook*. *The I Hate to Cook Book*, from 1960, provides us with Betty's Turkey Tetrazzini, a (and I shudder to even write the word) casserole with noodles, cream, chicken, sherry, and many other horrors combined that put me on a very unfortunate path directly back to my childhood dinner table.

And while it's doubtful that you'll find yourself with a sudden urge to whip up a batch yourself while pondering your Thanksgiving leftovers, or to make Cream Cheese and Nut Balls or Stuffed Celery for your next cocktail fundraiser (though who am I to judge if you do?), *The Unofficial Mad Men Cookbook* is not without its charms. Since each recipe is presented with an introduction that sets the scene of its appearance in the show, complete with season and episode, you can use the book as a primer for seasons 1 through 4 while you wait impatiently, bowl of homemade Chex Mix close at hand, for season 5 to air at long last.

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charlieh  
December 7, 2011  
12:55 pm

I had no idea that Mad Men could be viewed through the eyes of a foodie. Ironically, the onion soup dip has become somewhat of a regular, making appearances at my bbq's, as well as holiday functions. Is that so wrong?

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