

Tech tycoon serves up ultimate cookbook

By Katrina Heron, Newsweek

For a wunderkind who began his career as a research assistant to Stephen Hawking, went on to become chief technology officer for Bill Gates at Microsoft, and now leads an invention brain trust, producing a cookbook might suggest, well, a half-baked anticlimax. Or would, if the work in question could by any plausible definition be called a mere cookbook.

There can be little fear of that for Nathan Myhrvold's much anticipated *Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking*, which goes on sale March 7. In size alone the six-volume set defies categorization, weighing in at 43 pounds (not counting a five-pound custom-made acrylic case). Then there's the outsize price tag: \$650. (Online retailers Amazon and Barnes & Noble are advertising a discounted price of \$467.62 and free shipping, which will come in handy.)

At 2,438 pages, laden with illustrations and edibly explicit photography (from skinned animal carcasses to microscopic globs), *Modernist Cuisine* stakes its *raison d'être* on its title, seeking to establish the past, present, and—most important—the future of food preparation as a purely scientific yet inherently artistic endeavor. By turns breathless and pedagogical, it aspires to be to cooking what Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* was to the building arts of the 1920s: a true modernist manifesto.

"Something much like this book could have been done earlier," Myhrvold says, noting that many of the techniques and even a fair amount of the technology employed are not new. What he and his team bring to the table, he says, is "the attitude and outlook of the cuisine"—a way, in other words, to savor its

intellectual and emotional impact on us, the eaters.

Myhrvold, 51, was on the hunt for such first principles when, back in 2004, he set out to learn the secrets of sous vide (a method of slow-cooking food inside vacuum bags in a water bath). From there, he pondered the greater mystery: why had the modernist thinking that revolutionized art, architecture, and design in the 19th and 20th centuries all but ignored the clanging in the kitchen?

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