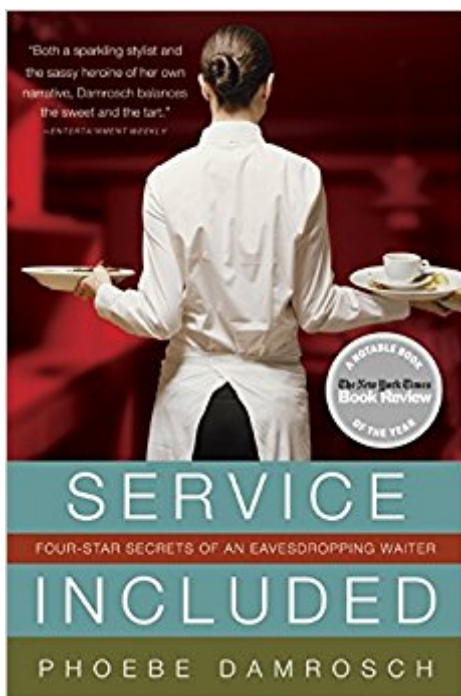


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Service Included: Four-Star Secrets Of An Eavesdropping Waiter



Synopsis

Warning: May contain material offensive to vegans, pharmaceutical lobbyists, and those on a low-sodium diet. Animals were harmed during the writing of this book. While Phoebe Damrosch was waiting for life to happen, she supported herself by working as a waitress. Before long she was the only female captain at the four-star New York City restaurant Per Se during its first year. Service Included is the story of her obsession with food, her love affair with a sommelier, and her amusing, eye-opening, and sometimes shocking experiences in the fascinating, frenetic, highly competitive world of fine dining. Sitting down at a restaurant table will never be the same.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A charming debut by a former waiter at the New York City restaurant Per Se slips in some high-end tricks of the trade. Vermont-bred foodie Damrosch was a few years out of Barnard College when she landed a job at chef Thomas Keller's Per Se. Fast-talking and prone to do her homework, in this case assiduously absorbing Keller's French Laundry Cookbook, Damrosch starts as a backserver, and her training is intensive: attending food seminars, memorizing the acreage of Central Park and learning how not to interrupt dining couples holding hands. In a few months, she's elevated to captain (a rare job for a woman), which entails navigating guests through the elaborate menus and essentially learning the subtleties of putting the guest at ease. Anticipating desire becomes Damrosch's role, as well as making sure New York Times food critic Frank Bruni has the best meal of his life. (Indeed, the place receives four stars.) She begins a romance with Andre the sommelier. Much of the latter half of this youthful, exuberant memoir is overtaken by their burgeoning affair,

although the most delightful chapter, I Can Hear You, is full of vignettes of Damrosch's real-life waiting, i.e., the delivery of the Fabergé egg as a marriage proposal, and the parade of celebrities she meets along the way. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Damrosch details her brief, yet remarkably fulfilling, career as a waiter and lays bare for readers the intimate workings of restaurant table service. Damrosch's ascent through the ranks at chef Thomas Keller's Midtown Manhattan's Per Se offered her a unique glimpse into high-end dining.

Demystifying the hierarchy of captains, waiters, and busboys, Damrosch gives the uninitiated a crash course in those management and organizational issues that keep food streaming in perfect synchronization from kitchen to table. Although maintaining perfect service is a good restaurant's habit, success flows equally from good publicity. So Damrosch describes the frenzy produced in the kitchen by every sighting of a critic in the dining room. Without naming names, Damrosch also offers tales of overbearing, self-involved celebrities and their dining foibles. Tips on how to earn a waiter's respect (don't be a no-show; don't send back an entrée that you've nearly finished) pepper the text. Knoblauch, Mark

As someone who's worked in a lot of restaurants, loves food, and lives in New York City, this book is pretty good. But if you're hoping for any "4-Star Secrets" from an "Eavesdropping Waiter", you're in for some severe disappointment. However, if you're a foodie looking for an easy read, you probably won't regret reading this. As other reviewers have noted, this book is 98% about the author, her personal life, and how it involves one of the best restaurants in the World: Per Se. There is literally 0.002% "dish" in this book. There are no secrets. There is even less "eavesdropping". It's not a bad book, and Pheobe Damrosch is a decent writer. But the publishing company really screwed the pooch on this title. So much so, that once you finish the book, you might be kind of angry. I'm not even one to pick up an "US Weekly" or read "Page Six", but you simply cannot outright LIE when you title a book. "Service Included: Life and Love Inside The World's Best Restaurant" wouldn't've sold as many books, but it would've been a much more appropriate description. And Ms. Damrosch's future as a writer might very well be adversely affected by such a blatantly misleading title.

I was initially going to write an awful review of this memoir but, after reading some of the other harsh customer reviews, I must say that SERVICE INCLUDED is not as terrible as some reviewers make

it out to be. For starters, I don't think the Damrosch claims or pretends that this book will be a gossip column about all of the scandals witnessed at Per Se. It is a memoir about her life, bookended by her experience at the esteemed restaurant. 'Foodies' who are interested in what happens behind the scenes will get a firsthand account of what it is like to train and work at a four-star restaurant, including the pressure, camaraderie, pride, and self-doubt that comes with it. Damrosch has tales of Chef Keller and staff's generosity and absurdly high standards. Those who are interested only in celebrity gossip will be disappointed. The book is ultimately about a young woman at a crossroads in her life, who is trying to figure out who she is, and happens to be working at one of the world's best restaurants while doing so. I must admit that Ms. Damrosch's writing style sort of annoyed me, but I think the main failing of her memoir is that she isn't genuinely vulnerable in her accounts of her experience. She doesn't make herself out to be more exceptional than she is, but she doesn't let us in on her true feelings either. After describing in great detail the personal dedication necessary and the consuming nature of working at Per Se, Damrosch says that a period in her life was "defined" by two failed relationships without going into any of the emotional detail that would enable us as readers to connect with the experience. Similarly, she mentions her father's infidelity which leads to the dissolution of a decades-long marriage to her mother without exploring how that felt to her -- betrayal? relief? We don't know. Damrosch is guarded while masquerading as transparent, and her readers are thereby kept at arms length from the deep emotions of her soul which we so long to understand and empathize with. As such, the (very interesting) details of Thomas Keller's prestigious restaurant are all we have to hold on to. Damrosch relies on our fascination with that mysterious world to sell this tale, tragically unable to see that we'd genuinely like to know the woman behind the collar as much as the wizard behind the kitchen door.

Extremely hard to put down. Great prep for dining at Per Se. Only wish it was longer so I could still be reading. :)

The book stands alone but if by chance you're headed to a dinner at Per Se (as I was), it will make the anticipation that much sweeter.

The author provides an interesting behind-the-scenes look at a fine restaurant. Her description of the training the staff went through in preparation for opening night was particularly interesting. The book bogs down about three quarters of the way through, however, when the author spends way too much time telling us about her love life (not in a graphic way--just in a tedious way).

I'll admit to owning all of Thomas Keller's cookbooks, and that one of my favorite recipes is the special dish he created for the movie Ratatouille. My son's roommates from college were able to get reservations for French Laundry last summer, and invited us along. To eat food that is conceived, prepared and served with such love is something that is for me at least a once-in-this-lifetime-it's-worth-it experience. So I was prepared to enjoy Phoebe Damrosch's book. And I did. She's obviously a very spunky woman, who likes to eat. This is her first book. No, she is not yet the perfectly polished writer that is Ruth Reichl or MFK Fisher, but neither were they right out of the chute. I think there's lots more good writing to come from Ms. Damrosch. Just as she used her powers of observation of the restaurant, and her own personality to master a difficult job, those observations and her sense of humor make the book fun for foodies and former waitresses. (Oh yes, I forgot to mention my try at waitressing, at the old La Terrasse in Philadelphia, where I flunked out when the customer refused the bartender's third try at a banana daiquiri.) So read it! You can say you knew about her before she hits the big time!

I gave this book only two stars because it's just not written that well. I wanted to like this book a lot. As a former restaurant owner and fan of Tony Bourdain, I was hoping to read something to be witty and tart, from a front of the house perspective. But alas, while there were a few genuine laughs, Phoebe's editor allowed her to get off topic frequently and at times the writing needed some heavy editing. I know this was a first effort, but there were too many times when Phoebe got lost in the detail of something that was irrelevant to the story or even lost the storyline. There were also too many instances of bad grammar, continuity errors and items that popped up that had no relation to the story. Sadly inconsistent writing style. I wish I could have given this more stars, but the writing and editing were so poor I almost gave it 2 stars.

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