

Cooking up a storm



How do particular pieces of everyday cookware accumulate an army of devoted followers? GRACE CAIN explores a world where what you use is as important as what you conjure up

recipe (haha!) for a cult cookware product?

One of the most important ingredients is the aesthetics. Anything deserving of cult status has got to look the part, and there's absolutely nothing shallow about that. Knowing that something is beautiful enough to bring you joy is a worthy reason to invest in it. Of course, it also helps if the item is useful and offers a solution to perennial problems. The all-in-one Always Pan eliminates the need to clutter your kitchen cupboards with piles of different pans (most of which you probably don't use). It follows in the footsteps of Joseph Joseph's ever-popular chopping boards, which are colour-coded to reduce cross-contamination of food; basically a simple and effective creation that won't fight with your kitchen décor.

The Always Pan's photogenic design may have helped it to go viral back in 2020 (a period when home cooking really took off, as you may remember), but it has retained its loyal following thanks to Our Place's robust values. For example, the brand's leadership team is composed primarily of women and people of colour; its products are made in part from recycled materials, and it has recently reached carbon neutrality. So it's a company that an increasingly socially conscious consumer can get fully behind.

Then there's the appeal of Our Place's co-founder and co-CEO, Shiza Shahid. She's a firm believer in the power of home cooking to bring people together, with her reasons for creating the brand both deeply personal and sweepingly relatable. "When we immigrated to the US from Pakistan, my husband and I literally found our place in our new community by inviting friends to our dinner table, making a meal and sharing our stories,"

she says. "We've always believed that cooking at home, and sharing it with the people you love, is at the centre of a joyful life."

Beyond its ability to forge new connections, a comforting home-made meal can provide a tangible link to one's family and culture – even when such things may feel physically distant. "Whenever I ask people to share their most cherished memories, they often start talking about home-cooked food and traditions," says Shahid. "For me, it's my mother making my favourite foods when I visit, or date nights with my husband when we cook together in a way that blends the flavours of our different heritages." Over time, the kitchen tools used to create these dishes become intertwined with the rituals and memories that they represent – and in this way, assume an inherited cult status.



Top, from left Le Creuset Cast Iron Shallow Casserole 30cm, £270 and salt and pepper mills £36 each; above Marcato Atlas 150 pasta machine £120

CONSIDERING THAT THE only thing I've ever managed to successfully reduce in a kitchen is myself (to tears), you'll be surprised to learn that the number one spot on my wish list is currently occupied by a saucepan that I first saw on Instagram. I really am a social media marketer's dream come true.

If you've not yet come across the pastel-hued Always Pan on your scrolls, allow me to enlighten you. As the bestselling piece from American brand Our Place, the Always Pan is a lightweight cast-aluminium construction designed to replace multiple other pieces of cookware. You can use this ergonomic wonder to braise, sear, steam, boil, sauté and serve all your favourite dishes. I'm not even sure what sautéing is, or when one would do it, but it suddenly seems essential to my life.

Buoyed by a considerable online following and celebrity endorsements from the likes of Selena Gomez, Gwyneth Paltrow and Oprah Winfrey (who called it "a kitchen magician"), the Always Pan has achieved the status of a culinary icon. But how does an everyday appliance designed for everyday use garner such adoration? What is the exact



From left Our Place Always Pan £125 and Perfect Pot £140

Take Marcato's pasta machines, which the Italian company has been producing since Otella Marcato started selling them from his bicycle in 1930. Founded on the belief that everyone should be able to make fresh pasta, the brand aims to make it easier for anyone to transform their kitchen into a little corner of Italy. And its most iconic model – the sleek Atlas 150 – can be paired with a vast array of attachments that allow you to make everything from spaghetti to pappardelle to lasagne.

While much of the Atlas 150's charm comes from the way it allows both Italians and non-Italians to connect with an entire culinary culture, some cookware classics represent something closer to home. Beloved for its durability, design and ease of use, the instantly recognisable KitchenAid stand mixer is the definitive multigenerational cult cookware classic. It's the kind of tool that people inherit from their grandmothers, which gives it a whole lot of nostalgia value. In an uncertain and fast-paced world, there is something very comforting in the KitchenAid's trend-transcendent longevity. Plus, just having one

“THERE IS SOMETHING VERY COMFORTING IN THE KITCHENAID'S LONGEVITY”

on your countertop is a sign that you know your way around the kitchen; everyone who owns a KitchenAid stand mixer has their life completely together, right?

And therein lies the final ingredient for a cult cookware product – the message that it conveys about you as an individual. And, Michelin stars aside, nothing advertises your culinary credentials like a serious Le Creuset collection. In the decades since Belgian industrialists Armand Desaegeher and Octave Aubecq developed their first enamelled cast-iron prototype in 1925, the brand has become associated with a certain gourmet lifestyle, where enjoying good food

(and having the time and skills to cook it) is just one part of a blissfully luxurious existence. And now, the Le Creuset cocotte, essentially the Birkin bag of the kitchen, is available in a rainbow of colours.

In recent years, the heritage brand has garnered a strong following on TikTok, where youthful acolytes mood-board fantasy interiors based on their favourite casserole dishes and compare different colourways to Harry Styles' outfits. Le Creuset TikTok is one big escapist fantasy, where Dutch ovens have come to represent a particular kind of homeliness, and to own one is to reach the zenith of success.

As for me and my dreams of Always Pan ownership? Its greatest appeal is in its accessibility, even – maybe especially – for those who might just be starting out on their culinary journey. I like the idea that if I ever *do* need to sauté whatever it is that you're supposed to sauté, I'll be more than ready. Plus, the sage colourway would look *really* good in my kitchen. □