

cookbook are exactly the same as the recipes used in the restaurant. Again, the goal was for you to

be able to cook at home, without the benefit of all the toys and resources we have in a professional kitchen.

Fluke tartare with cashews, mango, and coconut is a great example where the recipe is very close to what we prepare in the restaurant and is still very easy. Grilled swordfish with black olive bagna cauda and grilled escarole is another.

**Give us some tips for buying fresh fish.**

Buy your fish somewhere reputable and, when possible, from your local fishmonger. Don't be afraid to have a conversation about the fish. Ask to smell the fish—all fish should smell like the sea, and smell a bit sweet. Yes, it can smell like fish, but shouldn't smell "fishy." It should look bright

and moist. If you're buying a whole fish, the eye should look full, clear, and moist; the gills should look bright red; and the fins should look whole and not dried out. If it's a filet or steak with the bloodline, then the bloodline should look red as well.

**What's the most forgiving method of cooking fish, and why?**

I think steaming is the most forgiving method. There is very little variable in the cooking environment—you either have steam or you don't, and the fact that it is such a moist process ensures that there will be some moisture left in the fish even if you slightly overcook it.

**Your favorite method is broiling. Why?**

Broiling is a pretty easy and mess-free at-home method, and it also imparts its own flavor, similar to a grill, with the little bit of charring and browning. It

also works beautifully with caramelizing glazes and other toppings that brown up nicely.

**I love the idea of poaching in olive oil—even beer. What are the benefits?**

Poaching fish in olive oil keeps the fish really moist and lets the natural sweetness of the fish shine through. And it isn't really greasy or oily, despite the way it sounds. Beer is such a natural match for shellfish; it can't be beat. And it evokes great summertime memories for me—simply cooked lobster and clams on the grill down at the beach house.

**Do you have a favorite recipe?**

Poached scallops with pea shoots, sugar snaps, walnuts, and orange vinaigrette is one of my favorites in the book. When I developed the recipe for the book, it became clear very quickly that it belonged on the menu at Oceana—it's so good and elegant without

even trying! It was one of the top-selling appetizers last summer.

**Which recipes will allow children to develop a taste for fresh fish, rather than fish sticks?**

Parents might be lucky enough to get their kids to try dishes as they are, but I think the best approach to getting kids to eat fish is to offer the simply prepared fish on its own, paired with something that you know they like.

I recommend following a baked or grilled recipe. Baked New Jersey fish 101 is the perfect example. I had already gotten my kids hooked on simple baked fish when one day I brought them into the restaurant. They wanted to—or thought they wanted to—try something "fancy." Well, they didn't go for it. I asked them what they wanted and they responded, "New Jersey fish!" I asked what that was, and they said, "You know, fish like you make back home in New Jersey!"

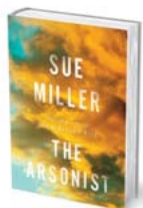


## The Ambiguity of Life, Examined

*Sue Miller's new novel explores themes of class, home, and love in midlife* BY JOHN O'ROURKE

THERE ARE FEW CONTEMPORARY WRITERS MORE adept at charting the intricacies of modern love and marriage than Sue Miller. Ever since her best-selling debut novel, *The Good Mother*, was published nearly 30 years ago, Miller has brought her considerable observational skills to bear on matters of the heart.

Her new novel, *The Arsonist* (Knopf), explores what Miller (GRS'80) describes as "the ambiguity of life, the unresolved quality of so much of life and somehow learning to live with that and to make peace with it in some way or another." The story opens with the arrival of Frankie Rowley, a 40-something relief worker who has just returned to her parents' home in the fictional town of Pomeroy, N.H., after 15 years in Africa. Frankie is



Miller is drawn repeatedly to the subject of marriage in her fiction because it represents "a deep and difficult and complicated encounter between two people."

ELENA SEIBERT

suffering not only from jet lag, but also from an existential identity crisis. Exhausted by the demands of her work overseas and a series of broken romantic entanglements, she finds herself at geographical and emotional crossroads as she struggles to find some semblance of home in the world.

Miller's narrative follows the parallel lives of two couples: Frankie and Bud, the local newspaper editor, who embark on a tentative, lurching relationship as they stumble into love, and Frankie's parents, Alfie and Sylvia, whose decades-long marriage has been marked by anger and resentment. As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear to all that Alfie has Alzheimer's disease, something his wife clearly resents. "She didn't want to assume responsibility for him yet again," Miller writes of Sylvia. "She was tired of being responsible."

There are some heartbreaking scenes as Alfie's disease progresses. As she charts his decline and its impact on his family, Miller writes from experience; her own father died from Alzheimer's disease, a plight she movingly recalled in a memoir, *The Story of My Father*.

In the novel, Frankie's return to Pomeroy—a summer resort community—coincides with a series of fires that claim the homes of part-time residents. The investigation into who is setting the fires provides Miller the opportunity to probe the thorny subject of class differences and the tension that exists between summer people and year-round residents. As one fire quickly turns into a dozen, Bud begins to question "whose home Pomeroy was, whose experience defined it—the chatty, self-assured summer people or the observant, perhaps resentful, year-round folks. A question about who owned the town and who merely used it." Miller provides no easy answers.

The subplot concerning the fires is based on real-life events. A number of years ago, Miller was

helping her father clean out his summer home in Randolph, N.H., when a series of arsons in the nearby town of Jefferson held the community in terror.

Miller says she is drawn repeatedly to the subject of marriage in her fiction because it represents "a deep and difficult and complicated encounter between two people, the nature of which is unique and really asks you to imagine what the other person is thinking, to try to be empathic in a way that I think is difficult for all of us." The question of identity is tested in marriage, maybe even shaped by marriage, she says.

*The Arsonist* is set in 1998 during the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, in part because she wanted to write about the US embassy bombings that occurred in Tanzania and Kenya at the time. The bombings marked "a particular point in the consciousness of our nation, when the notion of terrorists who might have some intentions on us was not on our radar at all. These bombings, which initially nobody in the States understood to be something that connected to us, seemed extraordinary to me," says Miller.

There was another reason she decided not to set her novel in the present. "I'm increasingly perplexed about the contemporary use of cell phones and the internet and internet issues," she says. "I just don't want to be on it, and I don't want to write about it....I know there have been some brilliant books that make use of it, but I just can't and I won't, and because of that I can't imagine I will ever write a really contemporary novel again." Miller, who still writes first drafts in longhand, says she was scared off from writing them on a computer in the 1980s, when a student of hers at MIT told her of research he was doing that showed the use of vocabulary and sentence structure changed when people used computers. "I just remember thinking, Oh my God, I can't do that," she says.

## Fiction

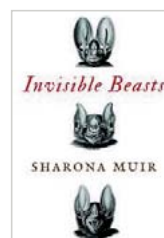
### Invisible Beasts

Sharona Muir (GRS'80)

Bellevue Literary Press

IN A LITERARY WORLD INCREAS- ingly arranged in tidy genres, Muir offers up a wild and woolly hybrid that refreshingly defies classification. Compelling throughout, this whimsical, wise guide to "the animals that go unseen among us" begs to be read aloud and can be digested front

to back as a novel, but would prove equally enthralling cracked open at random. The personal bestiary of an amateur naturalist named Sophie, the narrative plumbs the dogged discoveries of a girl whose gift is known



to her quirky family. But even they need convincing, and the narrative capitalizes on all Sophie's hyperalert senses as she navigates and reports on a parallel landscape crackling and thrumming stealthily through lush fauna, clinging to the undersides of visible creatures or burrowing along the urban infrastructure. *Invisible Beasts* toys with us, winking at the reader as it indulges the writer's love of wordplay as much as her infatuation with, and delicate observation of, her natural surroundings; it's the literary lovechild of Lewis Carroll and Rachel Carson filtered through the lens of zoology's godfather, Darwin himself.

The book, which, its author confesses, "began as an experiment," is divided into sections for common invisible beasts (the Pluricorn, Truth Bats), imperiled and extinct invisible beasts (the Foster Fowl, Beanie Sharks), rare beasts (the Hypnogater, the Oormz), invisible beasts in print (Fine-print Rotifers), and cyclically invisible beasts, the only representatives of which are Beacon Bugs, a firefly species that is invisible over 29-year periods until "they produce one generation that outshines every other firefly species." How lovely it would be if some (but most certainly not all) of these beasts existed