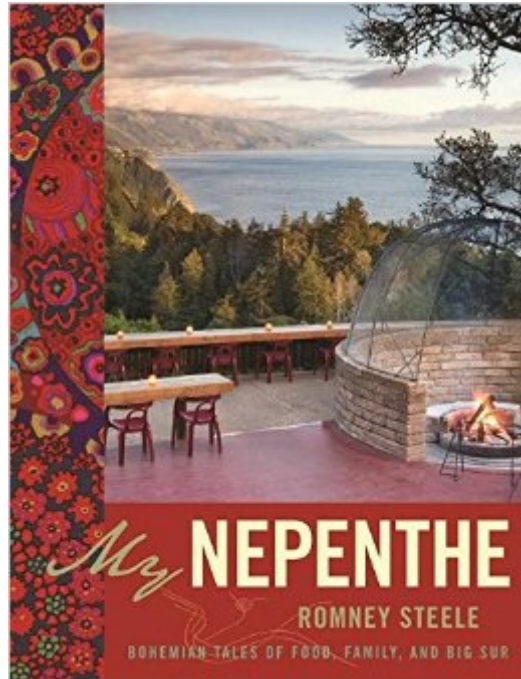


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# My Nepenthe: Bohemian Tales Of Food, Family, And Big Sur



## Synopsis

More than sixty-five years after it first opened, Nepenthe restaurant is still today a favorite tourist destination on the scenic drive along Highway 1 to Big Sur, California. Now available in paperback, *My Nepenthe*, captures the interesting history and people, myriad wild stories, delicious recipes, and stunning photography of this famous location. *My Nepenthe* weaves together stories and tales about the famous California restaurant perched on the majestic cliffs of Big Sur. Located 808 feet above the Pacific Ocean, Nepenthe Restaurant boasts sweeping views of the rugged Santa Lucia Mountains and the wild south coast of Monterey County. Angular mountains plunge into the crashing surf below, and on a clear day there is no limit to the scenery, unspoiled and immense in nature. It is nestled among native oak trees and a historic log cabin (now faced by brick) that was once owned by Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth. The magic and history of place are celebrated through food and the Fassett family who opened Nepenthe in 1949. A lyrical feast written by the owners' granddaughter, Romney Steele, who grew up at the restaurant, *My Nepenthe* is as much about a family enterprise as it is about the Fassett family and their legacy. It recounts stories about the family's more than sixty-five year history on the coast, the arts and architecture, and the colorful people who were the genesis of this legendary restaurant. *My Nepenthe* marks the restaurant's vibrant past as a gathering place and noted bohemian haunt, and its foray into the film industry during the shooting of *The Sandpiper*, featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. It also explores the lively scene that played out into the '70s, and onward through the current decade where it showcases Nepenthe's unique relationship with Pisoni Vineyards, owned by the renowned winemaker family. *My Nepenthe* includes more than seventy-five special recipes from the Fassetts, the restaurant, and the cafe, along with spectacular photography that completes the tale. Ultimately, *My Nepenthe* is a story about food, family, and the culture of place, and how it all unfolds around the table and why that matters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have just finished feasting, and am still savoring tasteful images and recipes from the most breathtakingly beautiful "cook book" I've ever read. Perhaps it is because it is so much more than food that is displayed here. Romney Steele has preserved the unique legacy of precious photos, of long forgotten places and faces, of people I have known and loved personally, all bound together in an elegant treasure chest she calls, "My Nepenthe". Romney (known as Nani) Steel has crafted a lovely monument of history, rendered in the simple language of reverie, that explores her family's roots, and how visionary people brought the gift of Nepenthe to Big Sur and the world. Nepenthe (no sorrow) is an architectural wonder of a restaurant with an unrivaled view of the coast that has become a world-class tourist must-see place during its 60 year history. People still come to look, to wonder, to drink deeply of the beauty, to dine and to dance on its moon-washed balcony overlooking the ocean. Visitors in the past might have been treated to a fashion parade from the Phoenix Boutique, or to an impromptu folk dance. There are those who would line the stone bleachers festooned with pillows, sipping martinis, watching from a distance the fire dancing in the huge fire pit, or the Fire dancers, and belly dancers who often came to grace the gleaming red-stained dance floor. In the sparkling summer days brightly colored umbrellas shade the diners as they enjoy a classic house specialty called "ambrosia" burgers served with homemade french fries, a bean salad, and fine local wines, creating a French Riviera atmosphere. Last year Nepenthe withstood the most devastating fire ever to sweep through the Ventana wilderness area.

This exceptionally entertaining and absorbing family biography is almost a time machine. It takes you back to the glory years of Nepenthe--the world-famous restaurant perched on the ocean cliffs off Highway 1 in California's rugged Big Sur region--and makes you feel as if you were actually there in the 50's, 60's, 70's, and all the decades up to the present day. The restaurant, founded in 1949 and still operated by the amazing Fassett family, was an early center of coastal California Bohemian culture, visited by Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, Richard Brautigan, Man Ray, Anais Nin, Dylan Thomas, Steve McQueen, Kim Novak, Clint Eastwood, and many other actors, authors, artists, and photographers. The book, presented as an annotated family scrapbook and recipe book,

is copiously illustrated with photos of "ordinary" family life in Big Sur; of family weddings, fashion shows, art shows, and other events celebrated at Nepenthe; and of daily dining and dancing at the restaurant and its smaller cousin, Cafe Kevah. One photo of Holly Fassett in a long Bill Gibb dress (on page 102) has been reprinted so often--in chronicles of the hippie culture, if memory serves me--that I was amazed to learn that the identity of the lovely young woman was actually known. The book also includes special sections devoted to the movie THE SANDPIPERS, which was filmed at Big Sur and Nepenthe. There are many, many wonderful Nepenthe recipes included. They seem almost too simple to have come from such an expensive restaurant, but their very simplicity makes them practical and accessible to anyone who cooks.

3 1/2 stars. 338 pages (the product description is incorrect, listing 352 pages.) This semi-cookbook chronicles the Big Sur, California restaurant, Nepenthe, which owes much of its great success over the years since 1949 to the following causes: (1) through terrific timing (on when and where to open for business) and the wisdom to change with the times (while maintaining selected standards) in certain aspects of the operation, (2) by offering superb recipes/dishes which are founded largely upon the finest available ingredients, (3) by attracting a celebrity clientele which was sure to boost continuing public interest, (4) by initiating great architectural vision, (5) by the fact that this restaurant has been operated over the years by a family (the Fassett family) which has been dedicated to its every detail and high standards. The author (Romney Steele) is a member of the family operation and has documented a detailed and personalized history of this semi-renowned culinary establishment. What do I most like about the book? It's very artsy, heavily illustrated (dishes/landscape/nostalgic photographs), unique to other books, and the recipes (85 of them) are all manageable, given some planning, and they lead us to something different with which to grace our dinner tables. Discussing the recipes first, these dishes almost all scream out CALIFORNIA, a place from whence most things new in the United States typically issue.

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