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The Pressure Cooker Is On

How we stopped worrying and learned to love this time-saving, flavor-boosting kitchen workhorse

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Justin Walker for The Wall Street Journal, Food Styling by Karen Evans, Prop Styling by DSM

ACCELERATED COURSE | Cooking under pressure makes short work of long-cooking dishes like this classic French beef stew.

CHEFS ARE EMBRACING a green technology that makes cooking faster, flavors more intense, braised meats more tender, stocks richer, whole grains easier to handle and root vegetables more flavorful. The good news for home cooks: This transformational piece of equipment is not a pricey Pacojet nor a complex sous-vide setup. It's a common, relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use pressure cooker.

Chef John Currence of City Grocery in Oxford, Miss., said he once disdained pressure cookers as emblematic of "the great culinary shame" of the 1960s and '70s, the era of canned food and quick casseroles. But now he uses a pressure cooker to braise pork roasts, short ribs and beef blade roasts, and considers it essential for maintaining the shape and texture of legumes. "The greatest upside of the pressure cooker is the intensity of flavor," said Mr. Currence.