



Culinary Institute of America

TECHNIQUE OF THE QUARTER: ENHANCING FOOD PRESENTATION

The food is generally the focal point for the guest. It supplies the majority of the drama, excitement, and interaction and it falls to the chef to produce food that is flavorful and attractive. Food presentation is an important opportunity that allows chefs to emphasize the talents of the kitchen staff. The chef's task is to exploit the full sensory potential of every dish to create a presentation that is practical, functional, and appealing to all the senses, which heightens the guest's experience.

Menu selections and food presentation integrate all aspects of the foodservice operation – including the theme, the menu, the style of service, and your clients' expectations. The goal is never to simply meet those expectations and standards, but to exceed them.

THE ROLE OF DESIGN

Judgments about what is fashionable or beautiful are subjective. They change over time, sometimes quite rapidly. However, the basic principles behind good design and presentation remain constant, even if the specific expressions of those principles keep evolving into new styles and trends. It is important to remember and always think of these techniques as enhancements to the foods' appeal.

The food on a plate supplies important visual elements: colors, textures, and shapes. Additionally, the foods you serve also supply two important, but nonvisual, elements: arrangements, and the use of lines to create patterns or indicate motion.

A variety of words can be used to describe the elements and effect of plate design and presentation – simple, elegant, balanced, integrated, unified. A certain amount of regularity and repetition is comfortable and appealing, but too much of anything becomes monotonous, whether it is an ingredient, a color, a shape, a flavor, or a texture. The real importance and focus of the food should always lay, ultimately, in its flavor and texture.

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THE ROLE OF TEXTURE

Texture is important to the way the food looks, as well as the way it feels in our mouths. The surface of a food will have a tendency to either reflect light or absorb it, making some foods glossy and others matte. Some foods have highly textured exteriors while others are very smooth. The way the food feels when you bite into it is another aspect of texture that the chef needs to include in a plan. Too much of the same texture is monotonous.

THE FOCAL POINT

Food has many dimensions and the shape, height, and lines of the food are important components of presentation. Cubes, cylinders, spheres, pyramids, and lines are just some of the shapes food can assume. Alternating or repeating shapes in a design is one way to add visual interest to food arrangements; you can modify the natural shape of a food by cutting or slicing it. To give height to foods that are naturally flat, you can roll or fold them, and arrange them in piles or pyramids.

Dimension can also be added to a dish by providing strong, clean lines that arrange the food neatly and logically; these lines can be straight, curved, or angled. When two lines meet, they create a shape and when a line is repeated, a pattern emerges. The more evenly spaced the lines, the more obvious the pattern, the wider the spaces, the more obvious they are as discrete lines.

By providing a focal point to a dish you can introduce a large shape into a field of smaller shapes while adding height and make the arrangement logical and sensible to the guest. One common focal point, sometimes referred to as a *grosse pièce* (literally “big piece”), is simply a portion of a larger item, such as a roast leg of lamb or a terrine, left intact and arranged on the platter; the guest can instantly identify the food. Sometimes, in place of a *grosse pièce*, there may be one or more significant garnish elements. Such a garnish functions in the same way as a *grosse pièce*; they too are most effective, and attractive, when they offer some information about the food instead of simply adding a spot of color.

The position of the focal point on a plate determines how the food is arranged. A focal point positioned off center means that one side of the arrangement appears to have more weight than the other. The lines extending away from the focal point are of different lengths. When the focal point is positioned in the center, it gives the impression that both sides of the arrangement are in equilibrium. The lines radiating from the focal point are the same length. Asymmetrical arrangements tend to look natural while symmetrical arrangements look formal.

THE COOKING TECHNIQUES

The cooking technique is vital to great presentation, because no matter how artful the display, the way the food tastes is the most important element. In addition to assuring that foods are flavorful and at the right temperature, the process of cooking gives the chef a chance to enhance the food in other significant ways.

“*Visual flavor*” is an important concept. Some techniques deepen or darken the food’s exterior; grilling, roasting, and smoking are a few examples. With these cooking methods, it is relevant for guests to be able to see the seasonings used on the food, i.e. specks of seasonings and herbs or the shine of oil from a dressing. Other techniques introduce new elements, such as coatings or wrappers; pan frying and deep frying are two such techniques. For an interesting selection, you should introduce a number of different techniques for a variety of flavors, colors, and textures throughout your menu.