

CHAPTER 03 : FOOD PRESENTATION

Finally, the real test has come. It is time to put away the spatulas and the whisks. The food must be served. It is important that the creativity and the skill that went into the cooking, baking or otherwise preparing the food are not wasted because of sloppy presentation.. While Food Preparation is a science, Food Presentation is an art. Good plate presentation results from careful attention. How food is presented is as important as how it is prepared. Poor presentation of well-prepared food lowers its value. Throughout history, man has adorned and decorated his food in one way or the other. Whether this was done in extreme measures or in a very simplistic manner, the intent was to make it more appealing.

The final step in food preparation is to justify the hours of hard work spent in cooking the food by serving and presenting it properly. *Service* is the process of delivering the selected food to diners in the proper fashion. Hot food should be served hot and on heated plates. Cold foods should be served very cold and on chilled plates. *Presentation* is the process of offering the selected food to the diners in a fashion that is visually appealing. When presenting food, remember that diners consume first with their eyes and then with their mouths. The food must be pleasantly and appropriately colored, cut or molded. The colors, textures, shape and arrangements of all foods work together to form a pleasing combination on the plate. Plates should be neat and clean.

Presenting food properly required a high level of skill, knowledge and imagination it is much more than just placing a sprig of parsley on a plate beside the steak or the chicken. The key word in plate presentation is **BALANCE**. It is a balance of color, texture, size, shape. And then there is **Temperature**. The food presented must be appropriate to the occasion. It must be matched to the likes and often the beliefs of the guest. Presentation must complement the food, not disguise or hide it. Failure to do these things will doom to failure the best of dishes.

BASIC FACTORS OF PRESENTATION

Temperature:

Good presentation of food means nothing if the food is not served at the correct temperature. To ensure the quality of hot food, it must be served on hot plates. All food should also be of the right temperature before it is placed on the plate. Hot food should be covered with warm food/plate covers to retain the temperature. It is vital that hot food is served to the customer immediately.

Cold food should be served on chilled plates. It should be thoroughly chilled before serving - either refrigerated or held on ice before plating. As with hot food, cold food too should be served immediately after plating.

The most basic factor in Food Presentation is Temperature. **HOT FOOD SHOULD BE SERVED PIPING HOT AND COLD FOOD MUST BE SERVED CHILLED.** Successful coordination of temperatures required good planning and execution.

Flavor:

A plate of food is intended to be eaten. This means everything on the plate. When the guest begin to eat, they do not eat first the meat, then the potatoes and then the vegetables. They take bites of each. At any time, the mouth of the guest contains the flavor of every food that is on the plate. If the combined flavors of the items are not pleasing, then the meal is a failure. No matter how well each item on the plate is prepared, if the flavors are not complementary, the effect is not pleasing. It is not enough to ensure good preparation. You must also ensure a good balanced presentation of the flavors. Escoffier said that a meal is like a symphony. It should begin softly, gradually building to a grand finale. He understood that it is the melding of the flavors in the mouth, which determined the pleasure of the meal.

To place shrimp in cream sauce on the same plate as sweet and sour cabbage is to create an unpleasant taste for the guest. The acid in the cabbage will curdle the cream in the shrimp sauce as they meld in the mouth. It is this type of mis- matching that should be avoided. Both dishes may have been excellent if they had been served separately. Yet, when served together, the effect was undesirable. Balancing flavors on the plate become easier once you understand the nature of foodstuff and ingredients. To begin, remember, rich is served with lean, sweet with sour and sweet with spicy. The goal is to produce a pleasing, not overpowering, taste experience for the guest. If everything on the plate were highly seasoned or sweet would be overwhelming for the taste buds. Remember that it is flavor, which makes the food enjoyable. However, flavor is not always obvious to the eye. It is necessary to create eye appeal in presentation, which leads us to the next part of this discussion.

COLOR

Although a plate of Fried fish and French fries may taste good, it has minimal eye appeal. Everything is brown in color and crisp in texture. It offers little variety or excitement for the eye. A simple addition of a portion of Cole slaw on a bright green lettuce leaf will transform the plate completely. It improves not only the flavor and the mouth feel of the dish but provides color and contrast to the eye. In presenting food, hot or cold remember that multiple colors are more eye appealing. Yet, however, too many colors can create a gaudy and confusing effect. The colors used on the plate should be natural. Artificial and non-food colors should be avoided color. The use of fruit and vegetables with a meat dish will always improve

the color, but must be appropriate. The plate should be empty when the guest finishes eating. Therefore color on the plate should be part of what is to be eaten. A sprig of parley might add color but is of no use if it is left behind on the plate.

SHAPES

Eye appeal can be gained not only through color but through the shape of the food as well. As with color, variety is the key. A plate of meat balls, new potatoes and brussel sprouts may taste good and have a pleasing color. Yet it is boring...everything is round. Replace the sprouts with green beans and the potatoes with mashed potatoes. You now have variety not only in the color but also in the shapes. The effect is pleasing to the eye. The variety in shapes is limited only by your imagination. There are a great number of different cuts of fruit and vegetable which can be produced in quantities. Use a variety of cutters : rounds, triangles, squares and half slices to improve your presentation without too much effort. Choose foods whose natural shapes complement each other.

TEXTURE

Texture in food presentation takes two forms. One is the way food feels in the mouth: crunchy, soft, firm. The second form is the exterior appearance of the item. Does it look soft and yielding, or hard and unyielding. Is it liquid, solid, viscous, Is it dull shiny, wet or dry? Texture is all of these. As with flavor, color and shapes, variety is the key to using texture. Food presented in a group must be balances in texture. Soft, firm and crunchy textures should be judiciously mixed on the plate. A crispy fried chicken would go well with a portion of mashed potatoes. Physical textures would include: smooth, coarse and solid. Visual textures would include : pureed, speckled and patchy.

GARNISH

Food presentation is often referred to as garniture. This is defined as the process of garnish. In the classical French kitchen the terms **garni** and **garniture** have a long history. It was unthinkable to write a menu without the classical garniture of each particular dish. The French kitchen had many simple and elaborate garnishes which were often named after diplomats, politicians, places, regions and even events. Some of these classical garnishes

are still used today in the modern kitchen. They act as a base to develop new and different presentations.

MODERN PLATE GARNISH

Today the term garnish is widely misused. A sprig of parsley, a leaf of lettuce, a slice of orange is placed on the plate next to the steak or a piece of fried chicken. This might add to the color of the plate but does little else. It is not functional and is more often than not left behind on the plate. Use imagination and thought before applying a garnish. Very often, if the plate has the proper balance of the five basic factors, no garnish is required. Where there is poor contrast, such as steak and baked potato, a simple garnish may be required for contrast. However, this should be appropriate to the food, functional and edible.

Currently, there is a shift towards smaller portion sizes with good nutritional balance. Plates should not be overcrowded. The plate is best when simple yet elegant to the eye. The plate should present a combination of foods working together. It should not be several components that happen to be on the same plate. Harmony and unity is a combination that pleases the eye. It is one in which no one particular item is overbearing. This does not mean that one item may not be dominant, but that the others present complement it. Of primary importance is that the portion size match the plate size. It should not look crowded nor sparse. Each item should logically balance with the other. It would be wrong for the vegetable portion to be larger than the meat which is the main item. The meat is the central focus of the plate and the vegetables should only complement and highlight the meat, not overshadow it. Some simple and basic guidelines are given below. These should be used together with the five basic factors already mentioned.

THE PLATE:

Properly cooked, neatly cut and appropriately molded food should not be haphazardly slapped onto a plate. Rather, you should coose and position the food carefully to achieve a plate presentation with a balanced and harmonious composition. The composition can be further enhanced by use of garnish and sauces. They will not affect the flavour of the food per se but they can make the presented food more attractive.. some garnishes like the

addition of chopped nuts to a dessert or painting the plate with two sauces will add flavor and texture to the dish.

Choosing the plate: Restaurant china is available in a variety of shapes sizes and colors. It is the chef's responsibility to choose an appropriate plate for a particular dish. Most plates are round, but oval, square and even triangular plates are now available. Plates are also available in a variety of sizes. The traditional 12" plate for a main course is no more essential and necessary. Plates are also typically concave and their depths vary. Absolutely flat plates could also be used now. The rule should be that plates must be large enough to hold the food comfortably without over crowding. Portion size should determine the size of the plate. The plate should highlight the food and not take away from it. Highly patterned plates should be avoided. That is why, most chefs prefer simple white plates. Colored plates could be used to accent food however. The obvious choice is to contrast dark plates with bright or light colored foods and light plates with dark colored foods. The shape of the plate could also contrast the food. Round shaped foods in a square/rectangular plate. The *food* should always be the focal point of the presentation; the *plate* should only serve to enhance this presentation

PLATE ARRANGEMENT - SOME GUIDELINES.....

1. Keep food off the rim of the plate. The well of the plate is where the food should be, If the food is too much for the well of the plate, then get larger plates or reduce the amount of the food.
2. Arrange the food in unity. Do not have the food spread to all parts of the plate. The focus should be on the center of the plate, not on the edges and the rim.
3. Place the food in the most attractive manner. The better side of the meat on top. The bone of a chop should face away from the guest.
4. Sauces can improve plate presentation. Serve the sauce around or under the food....never on the top of the main item. Be careful not to over sauce and drown the food. Serve extra sauce separately in a sauce-boat. Keep sauces light and natural...not heavy and pasty.
5. Refrain from using the same pattern over and over again in the different courses.
6. Garnish only when necessary. A garnish is added for balance and must be functional.

7. Simplicity is the key. It is more attractive to have a simple plate presentation rather than a complex one. Elaborate designs are often confusing and time consuming. They are unpleasant to the eye if not done properly.

To conclude, presentation of food requires skill and practice. It is not just a matter of putting the food onto the plate and sending it out to the guest. The time and effort spent on preparation of the food can be spoiled by a sloppy and shoddy presentation. There is a great deal of opportunity for creativity and imagination. Experiment, develop and originate your own unique style. Use classical garnishes to good effect. Balance is the key and, if achieved, quality is the result. The meals you serve to your guests will be symphonies and will be long remembered.

VERNON COELHO
ihm mumbai
2009-2010