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FOOD PRESENTATION

Until this point, most of the focus of this book has been on the preparation of food, from the selection of ingredients through mise en place and final cooking. We still have not reached our final goal, however. The point of learning and practicing procedures to prepare food of high quality is to ensure the food is eaten and enjoyed.

In other words, our work isn't done until the food we have prepared is arranged on plates or platters and ready to be presented to the diner.

In traditional classical cuisine, until well after the middle of the twentieth century, the normal practice in fine dining establishments was to send the food on platters and in casseroles and other serving dishes to the dining room, where it would be transferred to dinner plates by the serving staff, sometimes after carving or portioning. The chefs who developed nouvelle cuisine, however, wanted to control the appearance of the food down to the last detail and so began to arrange food on dinner plates in the kitchen. Since that time, many styles of plating have come and gone, as chefs have devoted much attention to the appearance and arrangement of food on dinner plates.

Throughout this book, we stress making food look good as well as taste good. We talk about accurate, neat cutting of vegetables and fruits, about proper trimming of meats, poultry, and fish, about grill-marking steaks, about preserving color in cooked vegetables, and about attractive plating of salads. In this chapter, we continue the discussion of making food attractive.

AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

1. Serve food that is attractively arranged on the plate or platter, with proper balance of color, shape, and texture.
2. Plan and arrange attractive food platters for buffets.

HOT FOOD PRESENTATION

We eat for enjoyment as well as for nutrition and sustenance. Cooking is not just a trade but an art that appeals to our senses of taste, smell, and sight.

"The eye eats first" is a well-known saying. Our first impressions of a plate of food set our expectations. The sight of food stimulates our appetite, starts our digestive juices flowing, and makes us eager to dig in. Our meal becomes exciting and stimulating.

On the other hand, if the food looks carelessly served, tossed onto the plate in a sloppy manner, we assume it was cooked with the same lack of care. If the colors are pale and washed out, with no color accent, we expect the flavors to be bland and monotonous. If the size of the plate makes the steak look small (even if it's not), we go away unsatisfied.

Your job as a cook and a chef, then, is to get your customers interested in your food or, better yet, excited about it. You can't afford to turn them off before they even taste it. Your success depends on making your customers happy.

FUNDAMENTALS OF PLATING

When a chef plans a new dish, appearance as well as flavor must be considered. Turn back to page 127 and look once again at the discussion of flavor profiles. Remember that the senses of sight, taste, smell, and touch all come into play when we evaluate and enjoy food. How a dish looks is part of the identity of the dish, just like how it tastes, smells, and feels in the mouth.

In other words, how a dish looks is not something you think about only after you have prepared it. It is something you have in mind from the beginning of preparation. Remembering this helps you create natural-looking presentations, so the food looks like what it is rather than like an artificial construction with a complicated design.

Most of us have had the experience in a restaurant of seeing another dish carried past our table by a server and immediately thinking, "I want whatever that is." Only rarely is this thought prompted by an overelaborate, fussy arrangement. Rather, the dish appeals to us most likely because it simply has the appearance and the aroma of well-prepared food.

Three Essentials of Food Presentation

Making food look good requires careful attention to all kitchen tasks. The following three principles should be observed in order to create attractive food. Note that only one of them concerns arranging the food on the plate.

Good Preparation and Cooking Techniques

If vegetables are improperly cut during prep, the plate presentation will look improper. If meat is badly trimmed before cooking, a fancy plating design won't correct it. If a fish is overcooked and dry or a green vegetable is drab and mushy, it won't look good no matter what you do with it. On the other hand, well-prepared and properly cooked food with a good aroma is usually appealing all by itself.

Professional Work Habits

Serving attractive food is largely a matter of being neat and careful and using common sense. This is an aspect of the professionalism we discussed in Chapter 1. Professionals take pride in their work and in the food they serve. They don't send a plate to the dining room with sauce accidentally dribbled across the rim and maybe a thumbprint or two for extra effect—not because their supervisors told them not to or because a rule in a textbook says so, but because pride of workmanship prevents it.

Visual Sense

Beyond just being neat, effective food presentation depends on developing an understanding of techniques involving balance, arrangement, and garniture. These are the subjects of our next sections.

Balance

A plate arrangement may consist of the following components: ***main item, accompaniments*** or ***side dishes, sauce*** or ***sauces,*** and ***other garnish***. The main item is almost always present. The others may or may not be included. (See Garnish sidebar for more on the meaning of the term.)

In a good plate arrangement, all these components are in balance. ***Balance*** is a term we used when talking about menu planning in Chapter 4. The rules of good menu balance also apply to plating. Select foods and garnishes that offer variety and contrast while avoiding combinations that are awkward or jarring.

Colors

Two or three colors on a plate are usually more interesting than just one. Visualize this combination: poached chicken breast with suprême sauce, mashed potatoes, and steamed cauliflower. Appetizing? Or how about fried chicken, French fries, and corn? Not quite as bad, but still a little monotonous.

Many hot foods, especially meats, poultry, and fish, have little color other than shades of brown, gold, or white. It helps to select vegetables or accompaniments that add color interest—one reason why green vegetables are so popular.

Shapes

Plan for variety of shape and form as well as of color. For example, you probably do not want to serve meatballs with Brussels sprouts and new potatoes. Too many items of the same shape, in this case round, looks monotonous or even odd. Green beans and whipped potatoes might be better choices to accompany the meatballs. Try for a variety of shapes that work together well.

Cutting vegetables into different shapes gives you great flexibility. Carrots, for example, which can be cut into dice, rounds, or sticks (bâtonnet, julienne, etc.), can be adapted to nearly any plate.

Textures

Textures are not strictly visual considerations, but they are as important in plating as in menu planning (Chapter 4). Good balance requires a variety of textures on the plate. Perhaps the most common error is serving too many soft or puréed foods, such as baked salmon loaf with whipped potatoes and puréed squash.

Flavors

You can't see flavors, either, but this is one more factor you must consider when balancing colors, shapes, and textures on the plate. Consult the menu planning guidelines in Chapter 4.

GARNISH

The word **garnish** is derived from a French word meaning "to adorn" or "to furnish." In English, we use the word to mean "to decorate or embellish a food item by the addition of other items." The word is used also for the decorative items themselves.

In classical cooking, the term *garnish* is used the way we use the term *accompaniments*. In other words, garnishes are any items placed on the platter or plate or in the soup bowl in addition to the main item. It happens that these accompaniments also make the food look more attractive, but that is not the emphasis. The classical French chef had a tremendous repertoire of hundreds of simple and elaborate garnishes, and they all had specific names (see **Classical Garnish** Terms sidebar).

Eventually, the term *garnish* evolved to mean just a sprig of parsley or other small decorative item placed on a plate, often not intended to be eaten. Today, the use of parsley sprigs on every plate, once common, has become rare. We are again using the word in a more traditional way.

CLASSICAL GARNISH TERMS

Many of the classical names for garnishes are still sometimes used in modern kitchens, although they have lost the precise meanings they once had. You will encounter some of these terms in your career, so it is worthwhile learning them. Remember that the following definitions are not the exact classical ones but simply the garnish or accompaniment generally indicated by the terms in today's kitchens.

Bouquetière: bouquet of vegetables
Printanière: assorted spring vegetables
Jardinière: assorted garden vegetables
Primeurs: assorted first spring vegetables
Clamart: peas
Crécy: carrots
Doria: cucumbers (cooked in butter)
Dubarry: cauliflower
Fermière: carrots, turnips, onions, and celery, cut into uniform slices
Florentine: spinach
Forestière: mushrooms
Lyonnaise: onions
Niçoise: tomatoes concassé cooked with garlic
Parmentier: potatoes
Princesse: asparagus
Provençale: tomatoes with garlic, parsley, and, sometimes, mushrooms and/or olives

Unity

Basically, there is unity when the plate looks like one meal that happens to be made up of several items rather than like several unrelated items that just happen to be on the same plate.

Create a center of attention and relate everything to it. In a main course, the meat or fish is generally the center of attention and is traditionally placed front and center. Other items are placed around and behind it so as to balance it and keep the customer's eyes centered rather than pulled off the edge of the plate.

Visual balance is similar to the balance of flavors discussed on page 127. In that discussion, we introduced the concept of primary flavors and supporting flavors. The primary flavors, you recall, are those of the main ingredients, and the supporting or secondary flavors are those of additional ingredients selected to enhance, harmonize with, or contrast with the primary flavors. Visual design works in a similar way. The main item on the plate is the primary design element. Other items, including side dishes, garnishes, and sauces, are supporting design elements. Each item should enhance, harmonize with, or contrast with the main element and each other in a pleasing way.

Don't add unnecessary elements to the plate, especially unnecessary inedible garnishes. In many or even most cases, the food is attractive and colorful without garnish, and adding it clutters the plate and increases your food cost as well.

In any case, it is usually best to add nothing to the plate that is not intended to be eaten. Before you place the parsley alongside the fish fillet or plant a bushy sprig of rosemary in the mashed potatoes, first consider if the plate needs an extra item. If it does, then consider whether it wouldn't be better to add something edible to enhance the other foods with its taste and texture as well as its appearance.

Arrangement on the Plate

Until recent years, plated main courses followed a standard pattern: meat or fish item at the front of the plate (closest to the diner), vegetable and starch items at the rear.

This arrangement is still commonly used because it is one of the simplest and most convenient. Nevertheless, many chefs are eager to display their creativity with imaginative plating presentations.

In high-end restaurants in both Europe and North America, for most of the twentieth century, food was not plated in the kitchen. Instead, items were arranged on platters and presented to the diner by the serving staff. After performing various finishing tasks, such as carving small roasts, the dining room staff then plated the main items, side dishes, and sauces and set them before the customers. All this changed in the 1970s, when chefs began plating in the kitchen. Since then, plating styles have been changing constantly.

So far, this chapter has focused on general guidelines applicable to nearly any style of plating, but we haven't yet had much to say about specific styles. Plate arrangements that were modern and daring during the era of nouvelle cuisine look old-fashioned today.

Because styles change and evolve, almost any modern plating we can describe here is likely to look dated in a few years. In fact, the more unusual and "styled" a plating is, the more quickly it will become out of date.

Not only that, but different styles are suitable to different kinds of restaurants. Guests at a casual neighborhood restaurant are most likely to expect casual or even home-style arrangements on the plate, while at high-end restaurants noted for their creative, modern cuisine, guests will expect more creative and refined presentations.

Using recipes from this book, let's look at some examples of how the same items can be presented in different ways suitable for different venues. Even the simplest dishes, such as soups and salads, can be styled in endless ways.

Creating a Plating Style

We can learn a lot about how creative chefs apply their imaginations to food presentation by looking at an item as simple as the Roasted Beet Salad with Gorgonzola on page 714. This dish consists of only three main elements that need to be arranged on the plate: beets, greens, and gorgonzola cheese. The photo that accompanies the recipe shows how the salad might look when plated exactly according to the recipe instructions.

A chef might decide to keep the recipe essentially the same but arrange the beets on a round plate in a slightly different fashion. While doing so, she adds a few walnut pieces to the salad for an appealing texture contrast and a new flavor element that goes well with the beets and cheese. The result is shown in the Plate 1 photo.

The second plating illustrated here is only slightly more elaborate. It differs from plate 1 in the following ways: (1) Pear slices have been added for a sweet flavor contrast. (2) To keep the presentation simple, the golden beets have been eliminated to compensate for the added complexity of the pear addition. The chef has arranged the red beets in a circle on the plate as in the original recipe. (3) Rather than being crumbled, the gorgonzola is cut into small wedges, and the quantity of the cheese is increased. (4) The walnuts have been candied, so that they harmonize with the sweetness of the pear.

A third chef decides to use the same basic elements—beets, greens, gorgonzola, walnuts, and pear—and transform them into an imaginative and elegant creation for a high-end restaurant. The pear is poached rather than raw. It is sliced lengthwise and arranged in a wave pattern on a long, narrow plate as in the photo of plate 3. Wedges of red beet and slices of golden beet are coated with vinaigrette and arranged at opposite ends of the plate. Instead of plain gorgonzola crumbles, a single Gorgonzola Truffle (p. 809) is placed against the line of pear, next to a spoonful of Pear Chutney (p. 215). The salad is completed with fresh greens and walnut pieces.

Finally, a chef at a new restaurant specializing in modern, cutting-edge cuisine imagines a completely new way to plate this salad of beets, cheese, pear, and walnuts. Instead of plain roast beets, the chef prepares Vanilla Roasted Beets (p. 341). He cuts rectangles of gorgonzola, sprinkles the top with sugar, and caramelizes the top with a torch. Candied walnuts are powdered and placed in a line along the edge of the large, square plate. The photo of Plate 4 shows how these elements are arranged in a modern style. Two new flavor accents are three "swooshes" of Orange Fluid Gel (p. 224) and a few drops of beet-green oil (prepared the same way as Basil Oil, p. 222).

These examples give you an idea of the tremendous range of plate presentation styles, suitable for any kind of restaurant, that can be designed from a single recipe or combination of foods.

Beet salad plate 1



Beet salad plate 2



Beet salad plate 3



Beet salad plate 4



The same ideas and techniques can be applied to nearly any dish, even a simple bowl of soup. Many of the recipes in this book include instructions for plating, but often they don't. In both cases, the cook is free to use creativity to make attractive plate presentations, keeping in mind the general guidelines in the first part of this chapter. Following the pattern that we used with the Roasted Beet Salad, we have selected additional recipes from this text and have designed four different plate presentations for each basic dish, from simple to complex.

Butternut Squash Soup

Base dish: Butternut Squash Soup with Caramelized Apples (p. 255)

Plate 1: Prepare the recipe as directed. Instead of the swirl of cream, finish the soup with a swirl of caramelized juices from the apple.

Plate 2: Prepare the soup as in the basic recipe, but flavor with ground ginger. Replace the swirl of cream or apple juices with a drizzle of sage oil (made using the procedure for Basil Oil, p. 222). Garnish with curried almonds (toss sliced almonds with vegetable oil, salt, and curry powder; toast lightly in the oven).

Plate 3: Instead of cutting the apples into small dice, cut them into thick 1-inch (2.5-cm) disks and caramelize them. Finish the soup with candied squash seeds and Maple Emulsion (p. 226).

Plate 4: Prepare caramelized apple disks as in Plate 3, arrange them in the center of the bowl, and top them with a few slices of smoked chicken breast. Top the chicken with Pickled Apple (p. 713) and a few frisée leaves. Dot the soup with sage oil.

Butternut squash soup plate 1



Butternut squash soup plate 2



Butternut squash soup plate 3



Butternut squash soup plate 4



Braised Short Ribs

Base dish: Braised Short Ribs (p. 451), plus a vegetable and a starch

Plate 1: Make a simple arrangement, in the center of a round plate, of short ribs, Dauphinoise Potatoes (p. 364), and steamed green beans sautéed with chopped shallot.

Plate 2: Using the recipe for Grits with Cheddar Cheese (p. 397) as a base, prepare the grits but omit the cheese and, instead, add a little heavy cream. Place grits on center of a round plate and top with Collards with Ham (p. 319). Place short rib on top of the collards, nappé with a little sauce, and top with crispy onion rings.

Plate 3: Prepare Grits with Cheddar Cheese using smoked cheddar. Pour the grits into a hotel pan, smooth, and chill until firm. Cut rectangles and brown lightly in butter. Plate the grits cake on a large square plate with the short ribs, Collards with Ham, and Glazed Tournéed Carrots (p. 321).

Plate 4: Prepare potato purée, flavor with horseradish, and thin with hot cream. Spread a little purée on rectangular plate and top with Pont Neuf Potatoes (p. 367). Add short rib and spinach flavored with garlic. Top the short rib with a little salad of frisée and shallot mixed with vinaigrette.

Short rib plate 1



Short rib plate 2



Short rib plate 3



Short rib plate 4



Roast Rack of Lamb

Base dish: Roast Rack of Lamb (p. 498) plus vegetable and a Duchesse Potato (p. 359) preparation

Plate 1: This is a simple arrangement of lamb, lamb jus, duchesse potato, and Brussels Sprouts with Walnuts (p. 332) on a traditional round plate.

Plate 2: Here the lamb and jus are served with Zucchini Sauté Provençale (p. 328) and a few dots of Pesto (p. 405). The duchesse mixture is used to make Potato Croquettes (p. 368).

Plate 3: The idea for this presentation starts with the components of Plate 2, but the rack of lamb is rubbed with pesto before roasting. The duchesse mixture is spread in a pan, topped with a mixture of bread crumbs and parmesan cheese, and browned under a salamander. A rectangle of this mixture takes the place of the croquettes. In addition to the zucchini sauté, the presentation also features Orange and Tarragon Fennel Sous Vide (p. 323) on a large, square plate.

Plate 4: The lamb and jus are arranged on a rectangular plate with a creamy purée of cauliflower. The lamb rests against small mounds of Orange Scented Spinach (p. 316) and Roasted Cauliflower with Almonds and Raisins (p. 340). The duchesse mixture is made into small, round croquettes.

Rack of lamb plate 1



Rack of lamb plate 2



Rack of lamb plate 3



Rack of lamb plate 4



Beef Tenderloin

Base dish: Beef tenderloin, roasted following the basic roasting procedure in Roast Rib of Beef au Jus (p. 494), Bordelaise Sauce (p. 193), potatoes, and broccoli

Plate 1: A slice of roast tenderloin with Bordelaise sauce is plated in a traditional style with steamed, buttered broccoli and mashed potatoes.

Plate 2: This arrangement of tenderloin with Oven Roasted Potatoes (p. 362) and Broccoli Mornay (p. 317) is still fairly traditional but looks modern on a large, square plate.

Plate 3: Instead of the simple roast tenderloin, this presentation is lifted to another level by featuring Beef Tenderloin Sous Vide (p. 523), flavored with garlic and herbs. A long, rectangular plate showcases, in the center, the sliced tenderloin resting against sautéed mushrooms and accompanied by broccoli flavored with grated lemon zest and lightly browned, shaved garlic. The potatoes in this plating take the form of Potato Rods Rissolé (p. 369) sprinkled with parsley chiffonade. The long, narrow shape of the potatoes echoes the shape of the plate.

Plate 4: A large square plate holds an arrangement of Beef Tenderloin Sous Vide, garnished with a little special sea salt called fleur de sel and resting on Olive Oil and Garlic Confit Red Potatoes (p. 363), with the same shaved-garlic and lemon-scented broccoli in the rear. The Bordelaise sauce in front is complemented by Caramelized Roasted Onion Purée (p. 336) in the rear. Finally, the beef is topped with crispy fried shallot rings.

Beef tenderloin plate 1



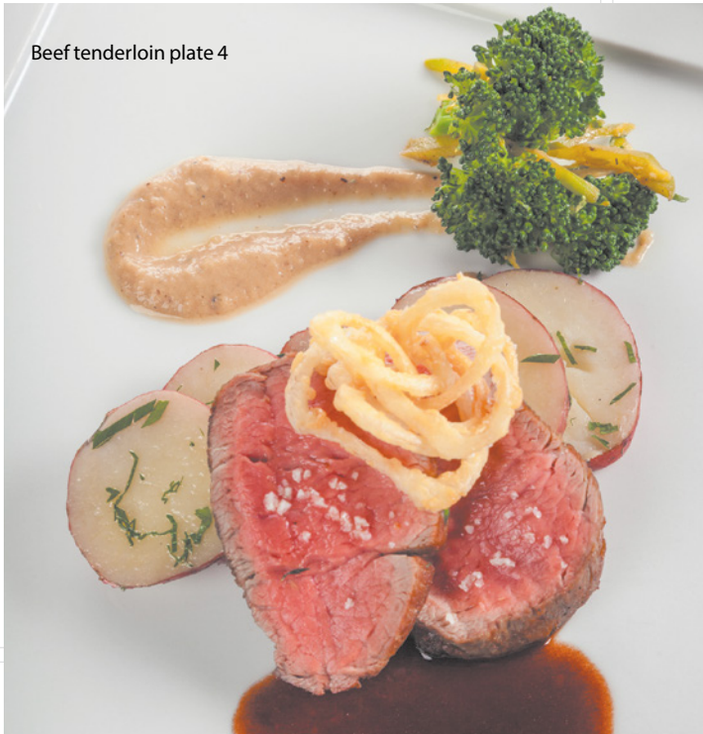
Beef tenderloin plate 2



Beef tenderloin plate 3



Beef tenderloin plate 4



Sautéed Salmon

Base dish: Escalope of Salmon with Red Wine Sauce (p. 640), plus vegetable and starch

Plate 1: A thicker cut of salmon is used than in the basic recipe and is served on a round plate in a traditional plating with mixed vegetables and parsleyed new potatoes. The salmon is lightly coated with herbs and a fine brunoise of shallot.

Plate 2: The same cut of salmon is now placed on top of side-by-side mounds of Braised Green Cabbage (p. 333) and Potatoes with Bacon and Onions (p. 371). On top of the salmon is a garnish of halved grape tomatoes, tossed with olive oil and herbs and roasted to concentrate flavor.

Plate 3: Complementing the red wine sauce, a swoosh of Root Vegetable Purée (p. 210) gives this presentation a modern feel, even on a traditional round plate. The salmon is served with Roasted Winter Vegetables (p. 338) cut in medium dice, and Green Lentils with Celery Root and Mustard (p. 380). The salmon is topped with a little Pear Salad (p. 712).

Plate 4: A modernist plating on a large, square plate balances the salmon and its sauce on the left against Herb and Garlic Sous Vide Potatoes (p. 356) with Carrot Purée (p. 210) on the right. The salmon is topped with a small mound of delicate salad greens and slivered radish.

Salmon red wine sauce plate 1



Salmon red wine sauce plate 2



Salmon red wine sauce plate 3



Salmon red wine sauce plate 4



Grilled Pork Tenderloin

Base dish: Grilled Marinated Pork Tenderloin (p. 510) with greens, sweet potato, and apple

Plate 1: In a traditional arrangement in the center of a square plate, slices of pork tenderloin rest against mashed sweet potatoes and spinach sautéed with diced shallot. Applesauce (p. 219) is a traditional accompaniment for pork.

Plate 2: In this plating, the sliced pork is served on a bed of spinach in the center of a large, square plate, with a spoonful of mashed sweet potatoes alongside. The pork is topped with Apple Relish (p. 214). Serving as a sauce for the arrangement is the juice from the apple relish mixed with a little additional olive oil.

Plate 3: A modern arrangement on a long, rectangular plate features the sliced pork against Roman-Style Spinach (p. 322), next to sticks of Fennel and Coriander Sweet Potatoes (p. 322). For a variation on traditional applesauce, apples are roasted (as for Roasted Winter Vegetables (p. 338) but without the garlic and herbs) before being puréed.

Plate 4: In this most modern of the four platings, the sweet potatoes are puréed until very smooth and enriched with cream and butter. They are spread in a diagonal on a large, square plate to serve as a base for the arrangement. Two thick slices of pork tenderloin, garnished with crushed pink Himalayan salt, are placed at one end of the sweet potato, and Apple and Fennel Salad (p. 712) at the opposite end. Between are two small mounds of Roman-Style Spinach and three pieces of Fennel and Coriander Sweet Potatoes cut into dice.


Pork tenderloin plate 1


Pork tenderloin plate 2


Pork tenderloin plate 3


Pork tenderloin plate 4



KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- Why is it important to plate food attractively?
- What is meant by balance when applied to plate arrangements? What elements should be balanced?
- What guidelines should be observed when plating food or planning plate arrangements?

COLD FOOD PRESENTATION AND BUFFET SERVICE

The buffet is a popular and profitable form of food presentation found in nearly every kind of food-service operation. There are at least three reasons for this popularity:

1. **Visual appeal.**
   An attractive presentation of foods has the effect of lavishness and ample quantity, and careful arrangement and garnish suggest quality as well.
2. **Efficiency.**
   The buffet allows the restaurant to serve a large number of people in a short time with relatively few service personnel.
3. **Adaptability.**
   Buffet service is adaptable to nearly every kind of food (except items that must be cooked to order, like broiled and deep-fried foods) and to all price ranges, occasions, restaurant styles, and local food customs.

BUFFET ARRANGEMENT AND APPEARANCE

The buffet's visual appeal is, perhaps, its greatest attraction for the customer. Eye appeal of food is always important, but perhaps nowhere more important than on a buffet, because the appearance sells the food. A buffet is not just food service—it is food display.

Lavishness and Abundance

Above all else, a buffet should look lavish and plentiful. The appearance of an abundance of food beautifully laid out is exciting and stimulating to the appetite. There are many ways to create this look.

1. **Color.**
   A variety of colors is as vital on a buffet as it is on a single plate. Plan menus and garnish so you have enough color on the table.
2. **Height.**
   Flat foods on flat trays on flat tables are uninteresting to the eye.

   A centerpiece is an important feature, giving height and focus to the buffet. Ice carvings, tallow sculptures, and floral or fruit displays are some possibilities. These should be placed on a separate table behind the food table.

   Centerpieces on individual platters also add height. Large food items such as large cheeses and whole roasts being carved at the table are also effective. Multilevel tables, when available, are used to good effect.
3. **Full platters and bowls.**
   Replenish items as they become depleted. A nearly empty bowl isn't as appetizing as a full one.

   Arrange platters so they still have interest even when portions have been removed (more on this later).
4. **Proper spacing.**
   While you shouldn't crowd the items, don't spread them so far apart that the table looks half empty.

Simplicity

This sounds like a contradiction to the lavishness principle, but it's not. You need to strike a good balance between the two. Lavishness is not the same as clutter.

1. **Overdesigned, overdecorated food scares people away from eating it.**
   How many times have you heard someone say, "Oh, it's so pretty I don't want to touch it!" or, "That looks too good to eat"? Even if they don't say it, they might think it.

   Too much design detracts from the food. Sometimes food is so overdecorated that it no longer looks like food. This completely defeats the purpose. The customer should at least be able to identify the food for what it is.
2. **Excessive garnish is quickly destroyed as customers take portions.**

Orderliness

A buffet should look like it was planned, not like it just happened. Customers prefer food presentations that look carefully done, not just thrown together. Keep three guidelines in mind:

1. Simple arrangements are much easier to keep neat and orderly than complicated designs.
2. Colors and shapes should look lively and varied, but make sure they go together and do not clash.
3. Keep the style consistent. If it's formal, then everything should be formal. If it's casual or rustic, then every part of the presentation should be casual or rustic. If it's a Mexican fiesta, don't include German sauerbraten just because your specialty happens to be sauerbraten.

   This is true not only of the food but of the dishes and serving pieces, too. Don't use ornate silver serving pieces for a country theme, for example.

Menu and Serving Sequence

Practical reasons as well as visual appeal determine the order in which foods are arranged on the buffet. As far as possible, it is good to have items in the proper menu order (for example, appetizers first, main course afterward, desserts last) if only to avoid confusing the customers, who might otherwise wonder what the food is and how much they should take. But there are many reasons for changing the order. The following should be taken into account when arranging a buffet:

1. Hot foods are best served last. If served first, hot foods get cool while the guests make other selections from the cold foods. Also, it is more effective, visually, to place the decorative cold platters first and the less attractive chafing dishes last.
2. The more expensive foods are usually placed after the less expensive items. This gives you some control of food cost, as the guests' plates will be nearly full of other attractive foods by the time they get to the costly items.
3. Sauces and dressings should be placed next to the items with which they are to be served. Otherwise, the customer might not match them with the right foods.
4. A separate dessert table is often a good idea. This approach allows guests to make a separate trip for dessert without interfering with the main serving line. It is also possible, if the menu is large, to have a separate appetizer table.
5. Plates, of course, must be the first items on the table. Silverware, napkins, and other items not needed until the guest sits down to eat should be at the end of the buffet table or set in place on the dining tables.

The Cocktail Buffet

One kind of buffet doesn't conform to this menu order pattern. The cocktail buffet displays appetizers intended to accompany drinks and other refreshments at receptions, cocktail parties, and cocktail hours preceding banquets and dinners. There is no serving line—or, looking at it a different way, there is a separate line for each item. Guidelines for the cocktail buffet are as follows:

1. Only appetizer-type foods are served: tasty, well-seasoned foods in small portions.
2. Stacks of small plates are placed beside each item rather than at the beginning of the table.
3. The table or tables must be easy to get to from all parts of the room and must not block traffic. Do not place them next to the entry because guests gather around them, blocking movement into and out of the room.

COLD PLATTER PRESENTATION

The cold platter is the mainstay of the buffet and offers the most opportunity for visual artistry. It also can be one of the most demanding forms of food presentation, particularly in the case of show platters, which require great precision, patience, and artistic sense.

Cold platters can range from a simple tray of cold cuts to elaborate constructions of pâtés, meats, poultry, or fish decorated with aspic, truffles, and vegetable flowers. In this chapter, we have space only for a discussion of general guidelines you can apply both to formal buffet platters and to simple cold food arrangements. To learn more detailed, complex techniques, you must depend on your instructors, more advanced courses, and on-the-job experience. But this section should help you take the foods available in whatever kitchen you find yourself working and produce an attractive, appetizing buffet.

Basic Principles of Platter Presentation

1. The classic buffet platter has three elements:
   - Centerpiece or **grosse pièce** (gross pyess). This may be an uncut portion of the main food item, such as a pâté or a cold roast, decorated and displayed whole. It may be a separate but related item, such as a molded salmon mousse on a platter of poached slices of salmon in aspic. It may be something as simple as a bowl or **ravier** (rahv yay; an oval relish dish) of sauce or condiment. Or it may be strictly for decoration, such as a butter sculpture or a squash vase filled with vegetable flowers. Whether or not the grosse pièce is intended to be eaten, it should be made of edible materials.
   - The slices or serving portions of the main food item, arranged artistically.
   - The garnish, arranged artistically, in proportion to the cut slices.
2. The food should be easy to handle and serve, so one portion can be removed without ruining the arrangement.
3. A simple design is best. Simple arrangements are easier to serve, more appetizing than overworked food, and more likely to remain attractive when they are half demolished by the guests.

   Simple arrangements may be the hardest to produce. Everything must be perfect because less decoration is available to divide the attention.
4. Attractive platter presentations may be made on silver or other metals, mirrors, china, plastic, wood, or many other materials, as long as they are presentable and suitable for use with food. Metal platters that might cause discoloration or metallic flavors are often covered with a thin layer of aspic before the food is placed on them.
5. Once a piece of food has touched the tray, do not remove it. Shiny silver or mirror trays are easily smudged, and you'll have to wash the tray and start over again. This shows the importance of good planning.

   Following this rule also helps eliminate overhandling of food, which is a bad sanitary practice.
6. Think of the platter as part of the whole buffet. It must look attractive and appropriate not only by itself but among the other presentations on the table. The arrangement should always be planned from the same angle from which it will be seen on the buffet.

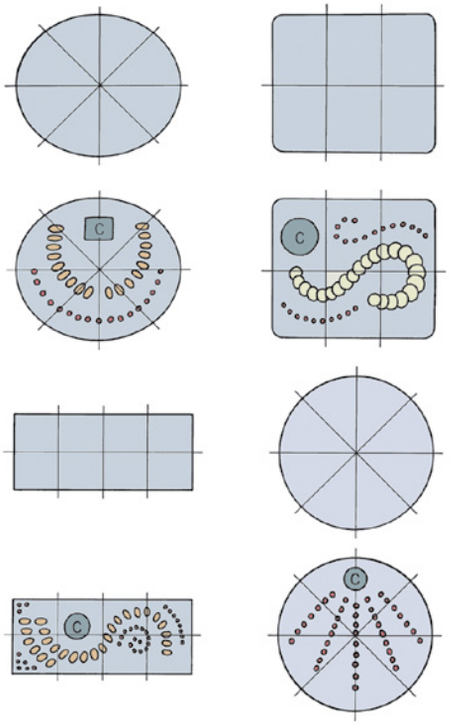


FIGURE 30.1 Begin your planning sketch of a buffet platter by dividing the tray into six or eight sections. This helps you lay out a balanced, symmetrical design. The examples shown here indicate the placement of the main items (usually slices of foods), the centerpiece (labeled ***c***), and the garnish (shown as tiny circles).

Designing the Platter

1. **Plan ahead.**
   Making a sketch is a good idea. Otherwise, you might have half the food on the platter and suddenly realize you have to start over because everything doesn't fit the way you had hoped. The result is wasted time and excessive handling of food.

   One way to start a sketch is to divide the platter into six or eight equal parts, as in Figure 30.1. This helps you avoid lopsided or crooked arrangements by giving you equally spaced markers as guides. It is relatively easy, then, to sketch in a balanced, symmetrical layout, as the examples show.
2. **Plan for movement in your design.**
   This doesn't mean you should mount the food on little wheels. It means that a good design makes the eye move across the platter, following the lines you have set up.

Most food for platters consists of single small portions arranged in rows or lines. The trick is to put movement into those lines by curving or angling them, as shown in Figure 30.2. In general, curves and angles are said to have movement. Square corners do not.

3. **Give the design a focal point.**
   This is the function of the centerpiece, which emphasizes and strengthens the design by giving it direction and height. This may be done directly, by having the lines point at it, or more subtly, by having the lines angle toward it or sweep around it in graceful curves. Again, see Figures 30.1 and 30.2.

   Note that the centerpiece isn't always in the center, in spite of its name. Because of its height, it should be at the back or toward the side so it doesn't hide the food. Remember, you are designing the platter from the customer's point of view.

   It's not necessary for every platter on the buffet to have a centerpiece. Some of them should, however, or the buffet will lack height and be less interesting to the eye.

4. **Keep items in proportion.**
   The main items on the platter—the slices of meat, pâté, or whatever—should look like the main items. The centerpiece should not be so large or so tall that it totally dominates the platter. The garnish should enhance, not overwhelm, the main item in size, height, or quantity. The number of portions of garnish should be in proportion to the amount of the main item.

   The size of the platter should be in proportion to the amount of food. Don't select one that is so small as to become crowded or so large as to look almost empty even before the first guest has arrived.

   Keep enough space between items or between rows so the platter doesn't look jumbled or confused.

   Figure 30.1 indicates placement of garnish as well as of the main item. Note how the arrangement of garnish reflects or accents the pattern established by the sliced foods.

5. **Let the guest see the best side of everything.**
   Angle overlapping slices and wedge-shaped pieces toward the customer. Make sure the best side of each slice is face up.

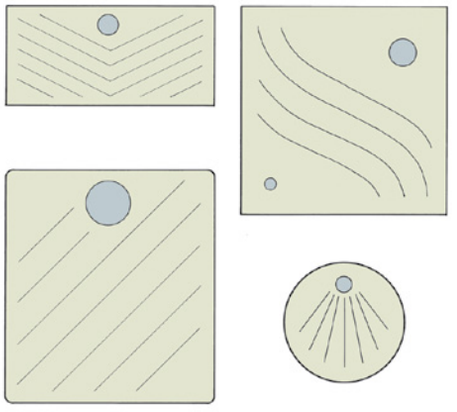


FIGURE 30.2 Arranging rows of foods in curves or angled lines gives movement to the design.



KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- When planning a buffet, how do you create the impression of lavishness? What guidelines help you achieve simplicity and orderliness?
- In general, in what order should items be arranged on a buffet?
- What guidelines should be observed when planning a cold buffet platter?

TERMS FOR REVIEW

garnish
classical garnish
grosse pièce
ravier

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the idea of professionalism and how it applies to the presentation of food.
2. Following are several popular food combinations. Describe what plating problems they present, if any, and how you might efficiently and economically solve them.
   - Fish and chips (deep-fried fillets and French fries)
   - Prime rib of beef and baked potato
   - Meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and gravy
   - Open-faced hot turkey sandwich
   - Beef stroganoff and egg noodles
   - Chicken à la king in a patty shell
3. What is the difference between a cocktail buffet and a luncheon or dinner buffet?
4. Customers like to see a lot of food on a buffet. Is it correct to say, then, that the best way to please customers is to put out as much food as possible? Explain your answer.
5. When you are preparing a cold buffet platter, why is it a good idea to plan ahead by making a sketch? What would you include in the sketch? What do the terms ***movement*** and ***focal point*** mean in platter design?