

Effectiveness of Food Photography and Food Styling as a Marketing Strategy

Sameer Diwanji*, Pooja Bindra**

Abstract

Food photography and styling has become increasingly important these days because of the increasing usage of social media platforms for the marketing of restaurant. The quality of photographs uploaded on websites and social media photographs have a lasting impact on consumers because of its visual impact. The main motive behind the research on this topic was to know about the importance of food photography and styling in marketing of restaurants and to show that consumers choice not only depends on the taste of food but the overall appeal of it. The researcher did the research by personally interviewing a food stylist and food photographer to get more clarity about the topic and to collect data. The researcher also visited restaurants and passed on a questionnaire as a part of the survey. After the research, we have come to the conclusion that food photography and styling are an important part of the marketing strategy of a restaurant and professional help is necessary to make one's restaurant stand out and to meet the increasing competition in today's day.

Keywords: Food Styling, Food Photography, Restaurant, Chef, Marketing

OBJECTIVES

- To learn and understand more about food photography and food styling and its tricks.
- To understand the importance of food photography and styling in marketing of a restaurant.
- To show that consumers choice depends not only on taste of food but on its overall appeal.

INTRODUCTION

What is Food Photography and Food Styling?

We've all heard the phrase, "A picture is worth a thousand words," and when it comes to professional food photography, it's a good idea to give a nod to that saying.

Food photography is a still life photography genre used to create attractive still life photographs of food. This branch of commercial photography is a specialized one. There is wide usage of its products in Menus, advertisements, trade magazines and others, packaging, cookbooks to name a few.

Professional food photography is team work really. It entails a lot of collaborative effort involving a Director (of art), a photographer and a food stylist.

Food styling is the art of making food look good for food photography. It includes activities like, processing, arranging, or decorating food to enhance its aesthetic appeal. Food styling and food photography go hand in hand. The job of a food stylist is to make food visually appealing and attractive for photographs used in magazines, cookery books and for social media content.

Importance of Food Photography and Styling in Marketing of Restaurants

Food styling and photography are becoming increasingly important for the marketing of restaurants because of the visual impact that it has on consumers. Most consumers

* Associate Professor, AISSMS College of HMCT, Pune, Maharashtra, India. Email: sameerdiwanji@yahoo.co.in

** AISSMS College of HMCT, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

feel that the presentation of food is as important as its taste. These days one of the major motivations that drives a guest to a restaurant is the pictures that they see on social media platforms. Most restaurants have themselves on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook through which they promote themselves and attract guests thereby. Food photography is a wonderful way to highlight the work of the chef and the popular dishes. It gives a medium to the restaurants to promote dishes that they would like the customers to order.

In an environment with a high level of competition, it is very important to catch the eye of your potential customer. Professional food photography can help increase the appetite of customers and increase the footfall at the restaurant. We do eat with our eyes and first impressions (of a food) are everlasting”, feels celebrity Chef Ranveer Brar. Food photography helps restaurants get a unique identity by distinguishing the food served in the restaurant from that of other restaurants.

Reasons Why High-Quality Food Photography and Food Styling Help Bring in More Customers

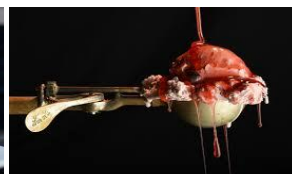
- Quality images of food served help set up the customers’ expectations.
- Showcasing the products gives the customer a reason to buy it.
- Images have a higher retention value than words.
- High-quality images take the social media visibility and influence to another level.

Role of Food Stylists in Food Photography

Food styling is a very specialized line of work and takes years of experience to learn the tricks of the trade and understand the properties of food. Food styling is basically ‘creating a feast for the eyes’ – making food look so picturesque, that one is tempted to eat what one sees in the photo. One should know the basics of cooking to be able to style it. A chef makes food that tastes good; a food stylist makes food that looks good! A chef’s main concern is taste and aroma; the food stylist looks at textures, shape, appearance, freshness, garnishing etc. In smaller shoots, the food stylist organizes everything; in larger ones, there is a designated prop-stylist.

Food stylists aim at making the food look fresh and enticing for long hours under different lighting and temperature condition. The fundamental role of a food stylist is making foods look the way a client or director wants them to, the exact nature of food stylist jobs can vary.

Food stylist come armed with various tools and techniques to make food look both appetizing and beautiful. Preparing food for photographing requires many different skills. Food styling is both an art and a science. Food stylists need to truly understand the properties of the foods they cook for photo shoots in order to know how far in advance they need to be made. This includes knowing what color an item would have if it were freshly baked or how long a food that needs refrigeration can survive outside of a cold environment.



Tricks Used by Professional Food Photographers to Make the Food More Attractive and Appealing

- *Buying Food:* The first and most important thing to always remember is to buy the most beautiful and fresh food. Sometimes one has to go through each piece of fruit or vegetable to find the best-looking pieces. It is very important as if you get a vegetable which has an odd shape it could lead to spoiling the pictures when taken from different angles.
- *Cooking:* Never overcook the food. Most of the time it's best to undercook the food. For example, when making vegetables such as green beans or asparagus, briefly blanching the vegetables in boiling water for just a few minutes and then shocking them in an ice bath will keep the bright natural color as well as keep it looking fresh but cooked. It helps to retain the colour.
- *Hot Food on Set:* In order to keep hot food "alive on set" it must maintain a just-cooked-look and the way to do that is to simply brush with vegetable oil or spray with water before shooting so that it looks like steam and adds to the dramatic effect of the picture.
- *Cold Food on Set:* Again, in order to keep cold food "alive" it must look cold. For example, make sure that a glass of iced tea has condensation on the outside of the glass. A lot of the times fake ice cubes are used so the liquid is never actually cold and to make the glass have condensation, spray the glass with dulling spray and spritz the outside of the glass with a mixture of water and glycerin. Dulling spray gives the illusion of the glass being frosted and the water and glycerin form droplets on the glass that makes it look like it's sweating, hence, creating a glass that looks cold.
- *Fake Ice:* There are many manufacturers that make fake ice cubes and sometimes the ice cubes can be extremely expensive and look very real. There are also products available to use for frozen drinks. These products are made of granulated gel that absorb whatever liquid you put them in taking on the color of the liquid and creating an icy, cold looking drink which creates a very tempting look.
- *Storing Food:* Most foods should be refrigerated but if they are not put in the refrigerator properly then there is the potential that they will wilt, turn brown

or spoil. Herbs are the perfect example. When you buy fresh herbs you should cut the bottoms off, as you would with fresh flowers, put them in fresh water, cover the top of the herbs with a plastic bag. Then store on a middle shelf close to the front of the refrigerator to be sure that the herbs do not freeze. Other fresh vegetables should be stored in plastic bags in vegetable drawers in the refrigerator. Lettuce or greens should be wrapped in damp paper towels and put in a plastic bag and stored in a drawer as well. This helps in maintaining the freshness of the product which in turn helps in making the photograph better looking.

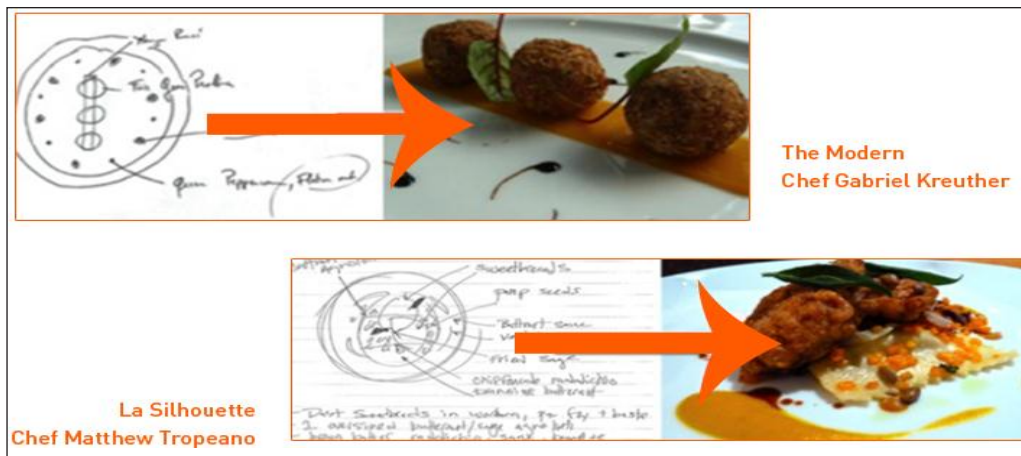
- *Froth For Coffee:* Non-fat milk makes the best froth and stays frothy the longest.
- *Oxidation:* To keep fruit from turning brown, put in a cold-water bath with alum in it. This helps in preventing oxidation by slowing down the process.
- *Glue:* Yes, there are situations where food just simply does not cooperate and it must be glued. For instance, when working with big pieces of meat, inevitably there will be a hole or tear right where you don't want it to be. Glue will solve the problem.

Tools Used by a Food Stylist

- Tweezers
- Cotton Swabs
- Paper Towels and Tea towels
- Paint Brushes
- Water Spritzers
- Glycerine:
- Squeeze Bottles
- Glass Cleaner
- Cooking Spray
- Cooking Oil
- Food Colouring
- Funnels
- Small Bowls
- Small Spoons
- A Pastry Torch
- Syringes
- Toothpicks

- Offset Spatula
- Fake Ice

Basics of Plating: Here are the 4 fundamentals to know before developing your plating styles.



Framework

It begins with one’s conceptualizing of one’s plating and presentation ideas. This is then followed by doing the actual plating. Let’s get started:

- It is a good idea to start with actual drawings before one actually deals with real food on a plate.
- Sketch out your presentation to help you visualise the final plate.
- Remember to keep up yourself abreast with the latest plating trends using various sources

Balance

After framework, next is Balance. It is very important to consider Balance while food plating and presentation. Some salient points to review:

- Be creative with colours and shapes. One can try to combine them as well - round shapes, cones, rods, etc.
- Provide a variety of texture. A mix creates an exciting variety of mouthfeel too!
- Balance can also be created by separating. One can try to serve different parts of the dish in separate presentation plates to tick this principle.

Portion Size

Nutrition is a concern for many diners today. The Chef and food stylist should be focused on this aspect as well. Dishes should always have a sense of right balance. Both

for nutrition and portion size. A dish that follows this principle can be:

- A wholesome nutritionally-balanced dish – one that has the right proportion of vital requirements like protein, carbohydrates.
- An adequately-sized dish that is well proportioned to the dimensions of the plate.

Highlighting the Key Ingredients

When plating, always highlight the key ingredient. One wouldn’t want to get a steak with everything else but the steak visible prominently. Note the following:

- Balance the portion size of the 3 elements of the plate.
- Make sure the main ingredient stands out among the 3 elements and not the other way around.

Current Plating Trends Followed by Food Stylist

Landscape

This one is inspired from gardens that are landscaped. Examples of landscape plating above.

Free Form

This one is like many modern paintings. It is a free form plating. While it may seem carelessly littered on a plate, actually it is well thought out.



Food on Organic Materials

This is very trendy - Using organic materials such as slate, wood, or even stone with its varied textures. It lends a rustic feel. It is like going back-to-nature feel to dishes.



Futuristic

This entails making use of sleek material, clean lines and trendy concepts. Metal, glass and steel lend a futuristic plating experience.

Alternative Receptacles

Using unconventional receptacles for your tableware creates a more interesting presentation for your dishes. Some examples include using a coffee siphon to hold broth, test tubes for soup or even something as simple as an airtight jar for food.



Tips for Taking Great Food Photographs

The best tip for beginners is to become aware of the intensity of the light and how it hits the food, and learn to adjust accordingly. Here are some tips for getting started.

Take Photos Under Natural Light

Do not use overhead lights or lamps or your built-in flash as it may create shadows.

Use a Neutral Background

Shooting a food photo, the background is very important. If the background is too messy or colorful, the viewer's attention will be drawn away from the food. Using a fairly neutral background allows you to place maximum emphasis on the food in the scene. A neutral background doesn't mean that it has to be completely plain, but it should complement the subject rather than suppress it.

Try Taking Photos from Multiple Angles

Some plates of food look better from above (like, pizza), or from the side (burgers), or at a 45-degree angle (drinks). Try moving around the plate and taking photos at various angles so you can pick your favorite later.

Minimize Clutter

If that spoon, napkin or busy background doesn't add to the photo, as it distracts the viewers from the main product. Focus on what is most important, but don't zoom in so close that viewers can't tell what the food is.

Gear Used for Food Photography

Cameras



A DSLR camera is most recommended for food photography (that's short for digital single-lens reflex camera). It's an investment that enhances the quality of the photographs. The camera should be user friendly and should feel comfortable in the hand of the user

Lenses



Using a compact fixed lenses is preferable. Fixed means that the lenses do not zoom in or out, so one has to physically move it closer or farther away from the subject.

fixed lenses are because they are generally smaller, cheaper and faster than zoom lenses. They often offer wider apertures, which gives greater control over depth of field and more flexibility while shooting.

Quality Tripod

Using a good quality tripod is of great importance as it increases flexibility and the ability to use manual focus

more accurately. It nails down the composition in a better manner. All of these small details play a part in taking your food photography from good to great.

Tethering/Remote Shooting

Tethering your camera to your computer is a great way to get a much larger preview of your image, plus the ability to control your camera from your computer, allowing you to find tune your settings without having to get into weird positions and crane over your tiny live view screen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- *The Power of Food Images to Communicate Important Information to Consumers*

Hennie Fisher, Gerrie Du Rand

27th June 2012 This paper reports on an investigative study of food magazine readers' responses when examining food images matched with aesthetic indicators. Findings could guide food stylists in compiling food images to better communicate intended messages. The Q-sort method applied in this study is a reliable psychometric technique that involves the use of photographs, often in non-food-related contexts such as architecture and the travel industry. In this novel application in a food context, six food images, matched with six aesthetic indicators, were Q-sorted by a predetermined sample of the readership of two of South Africa's most eminent food magazines.

- *A Flash of Culinary Tourism: Understanding the Influences of Online Food Photography on People's Travel Planning*

William C

November 1 2013 This article presents the results of an exploratory study in the online image-sharing community. The purpose of this study was to profile the users who are fond of online food photography as well as to explore the role of online food photography in their traveling planning process. Grounded in "uses and gratification theory," a mixed method was adopted for this research. Content analysis was employed to understand members' general motivation to participate in different online food photography activities. Results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses supported each other. The findings indicated that factors of entertainment, personal

identity, and social interaction were the main drivers of participation in online food photography activities. For active members, food images influenced them in terms of novelty and providing information. Active members also appeared to be more likely to seek out new places to travel for new food experiences, and food photography had a greater influence on where they consider traveling. On the basis of the results, implications for culinary tourism promotion and destination marketing were discussed.

- *It Tastes as Good as It Looks! The Effect of Food Presentation on Liking for the Flavor of Food*

Debra A Zellner, Christopher R Loss, Jonathan Zearfross, Sergio remolina

1 June 2014 Diners in a restaurant were served the same meal (composed of a sautéed chicken breast with a fines herbs sauce, brown rice pilaf, and sautéed green beans with toasted almonds served on a round white china plate). The same food was presented in two different arrangements on two different nights. Although the two presentations were judged as equally “neat”, one was judged as more attractive. Subjects reported liking the food on the plate (when all items were judged together) more when it was presented in the more attractive than the less attractive manner. When food items were judged separately, subjects reported liking the chicken and the sauce significantly more when presented in the more attractive manner. Subjects also reported more positive responses to the brown rice pilaf when presented in the more attractive plating style. How attractively food is plated can affect liking for the flavor of the food and could be used to increase acceptance of “healthy” foods.

- *Studying the Impact of Plating on Ratings of the Food Served in a Naturalistic Dining Context*

Carlos Velasco, Paul Fraemohs and Charles Spence

20th may 2014 An experiment conducted in a naturalistic dining context is reported, in which the impact of different styles of plating on diners’ experience of the food was assessed. A hundred and sixty-three diners were separated into two groups during a luncheon event held in a large dining room. Each group of diners was served the same menu, with a variation in the visual presentation of the ingredients on the plate. The results revealed that the diners were willing to pay significantly more for the appetizer (a salad), when arranged in an artistically-inspired manner. The main course was liked more, and considered more

artistic, when the various elements were presented in the centre of the plate, rather than placed off to one side. The participants also reported being willing to pay significantly more for the centred than for the offset plating. These results are consistent with the claim that people “eat first with their eyes”, and that a diner’s experience of the very same ingredients can be significantly enhanced (or diminished) simply by changing the visual layout of the food elements of the dish.

- *Plating Manifesto: The Art and Science of Plating*

Charles Spence Betina Piqueras-Fiszman, Charles Michel and Ophelia Deroy

20 May 2014. It is well known that people serve themselves more, not to mention eat more, when dining from larger bowls and plates than from smaller ones. But what about the other visual qualities of the plateware? Does the colour, shape and finish also influence a diner’s behaviour? How important are these extrinsic visual properties, or even the visual arrangement of the elements on the plate itself, in terms of modulating a diner’s eating behaviours and experiences? At a time when so much is known about the influence of the colour of individual food products on taste and flavour perception, and when so many modernist restaurants are using an increasingly eclectic range.

REASERCH METHODOLOGY

I have collected the primary data by visiting restaurants and a passing a questionnaire to them.

I have collected the secondary data by interviewing a food photographer and stylist by asking her questions about it.

I also collected relevant data from the internet and from articles for the research project.

DATA ANALYSIS

Are professional food photographers and food stylist hired by your restaurant?

As per the survey all the restaurants except one of the restaurants have professional food photographers and food stylist hired which shows us restaurant owners are well aware of the impact that food photography and styling have on consumers which makes hiring professional help very important.

Do you feel that the presentation of food is as important as its taste?

According to the survey 6 out of 8 restaurants feel that the appearance and presentation of food as important as its taste because of the visual impact that the presentation of the food leaves on the consumers.

Do consumers give dining feedback on social media by uploading pictures of food consumed by them?

According to the survey 100% of the restaurants say that the consumers give dining feedback on social media platforms which shows that consumers are actively engaging in clicking photographs of the food because they like to share their experience with the help of photographs which helps other guests to choose their restaurant.

Do you think that sales of the restaurant are affected by the quality and frequency of pictures uploaded on social media?

According to the survey all the restaurants feel that the sales of the restaurant are affected by the quality and frequency of pictures uploaded on social media which shows that food photography and food styling play a major role in the marketing of the restaurants as they determine the sales and have the power you increase or decrease it.

Do consumers often ask for a specific dish on the menu after seeing a picture of it?

According to the survey most consumers do ask for dishes that they have seen pictures of before either on social media platforms or on websites or magazines etc because pictures have a visual impact on the consumers which leaves them wanting to try out what they have seen which is great for marketing.

Are guests willing to pay a little extra for food that looks good and is presented in a different manner?

According to the survey 75% of the restaurants say that consumers are willing to pay extra for food presented in a different manner which shows us that the consumers give equal importance to taste as well a presentation and that it is very important for restaurants to present their food in an attractive and fancy manner to make sure that the consumers are satisfied.

Are dishes which are presented in an innovative or creative manner priced higher?

According to the survey 6 out of 8 restaurants do not charge their dishes at a higher rate If they are presented in a creative or innovative manner because all dishes are mostly presented in a creative manner because if restaurants don't keep up with the presentation trends, they may lose their customers to their competitors.

Do you think that standardization in plating is important?

According to the survey 100% of the restaurants feel that standardization in plating is important because it is very important to give similar service and satisfaction to all customers to make sure that they the restaurant meets their expectations that they came with so that they feel like coming back again.

Do you have professional help to handle the social media accounts of the restaurant?

According to the survey 7 out of 8 restaurants have professional help to handle their social media accounts which shows that the restaurant owners are aware of the benefits of having social media accounts and pictures being posted on it.

INTERVIEW WITH FOOD PHOTOGRAPHER AND STYLIST

In the interview with the food photographer and food stylist Sam Mutha I asked her questions like:

What started your interest in food photography?

What do you think makes a good food image?

How many restaurants are you a food photographer for?

What kind of gear do you use?

Do you consult a food stylist/art director or do you prefer to do the styling yourself?

What kind of props/ elements do you use to make the photographs more attractive?

Do you have presets and filters that you like to use to edit pictures?

What are the tricks to make ugly food pretty?

What is the biggest tip when it comes to food styling?

What is the most challenging part of your job?

This interview helped me to get the basic data for my project and gave me the base through which I could collect more data as it helped me get a clearer idea of what food photography and styling is.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations

- My research area was limited to restaurants in Pune.
- I could interview only one food photographer and food stylist to collect the data for my research project.

Conclusion

It was very informative to work on the topic “importance of food photography and food styling”.

The researcher has come to the following conclusions:

- Food photography and food styling are integral parts of marketing strategies of restaurants and restaurant owners and management are aware about how essential it is to create an overall appeal so that consumers are satisfied by their experience so that they become repeat guests
- Through this project one of the most important things that we have understood is that consumers first experience through sight and then they are prompted to react according to what they see
- Food photography conveys a great deal when used correctly and appeals to the consumers emotions. A

beautifully executed food photo will make the consumer stop, look and feel and in turn want to consume the product.

- It is also understood that food photography is one of the most difficult commercial photography as it involves a lot of creative research, careful planning and artful execution to go into producing a perfect shot, it often requires a plethora of professionals like photographers, food stylists, chefs, art directors and primarily the restaurant owners in order to explain to all these people what his vision for the products and how he would want it to be perceived in the market.
- To sum it up it is truly said that “you eat with your eyes first” and a well-executed photography is required to eat with your eyes first. The researcher personally believe that good food deserves good food photography.

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