

Taste My Words

“Imagination is a magnifier that transforms appetite in desire.” – Paul Pairet

(Oops, that’s me – incredible...next, we’ll do a column on strange coincidences.)

For those who did not read the previous column introducing the importance of the reputation in building ‘psycho taste’ – and, frankly, if this is the case, you should not be proud – ‘psycho taste’ is the vision of what taste might be before tasting it.

The external factors building this preconceived idea are extremely versatile, and have little relation to taste: the reputation of the restaurant, the quality of the reservation, the uniform of the service staff, the tone of the maitre d, the décor, the popularity of the place, your company, the chef’s late column for *Shanghai Talk*, your own mood, your appetite, the weather, your socks (see previous column), the socks of the maitre d – for the same reason that his wife might have found them the same morning rolled under the bed, and that he should not do that again because she already told him about this a hundred times, and she knows a friend that has asked for and won a divorce for smaller matters (a Brazilian string in the pocket of her husband’s tuxedo).

Anything really that can influence your

spatio-temporal perception of the T time you will ingest your first bite can build up psycho taste. And yes, the wing of the Osaka butterfly might play its role too.

You might think I tend to exaggerate, and that not much could modulate the taste that you will ultimately ingest – food is so real, so material, so tactile, so palatable, so unspiritual. But think again: the taste you have developed from the womb is mostly cultural, it is imprinted in your memory and will trigger your imagination until confronted by reality.

In a 1973 episode of *Double Exposure*, the infamous Inspector Columbo sorted out a very awkward murder involving salty caviar coupled with ice-water-subliminal-images-cuts (yes!) inserted in a video projection that will lead the victim to get a drink (no?)...it’s something you must see for yourself, as it will only get worse with more explanations.

I am not sure if much is proven about the real influence of subliminal images on behaviour, but I know that this episode is key to my deep belief on the psychological dependence of taste and, more specifically, of the influence of imagination on taste.

And, now, say “Tomato!”

Okay, let’s start again, but this time, when I ask you to say ‘tomato’, please say ‘tomato’; don’t just read it as you just did.

You have to understand that there’s nothing subtle about me writing, I am not on a second degree mission, I am in carrot and potatoes, remember? I

am tangible, real, grounded; I am a chef incidentally writing.

So, please, stick to the words, eventually try a “yes, chef” and shoot!

We start all over again. At the top, you will say “tomato!” Say it clearly, at a slow pace, on an “I love you” mode; really mean it...

Ready? “T O M A T O...”

Well done! Now focus...CLING! 3D.

Picture the tomato, just about 20cm ahead, red and shiny. For those who picture green, that’s a pea, and I can’t help and would suggest you give up on this column.

Now, taste it!

Yes, you can. You might need to retrieve all my speech about the grounded chef at this stage, and try to bite the picture of the tomato. You should feel the knack of the skin, the gel of the pulp, the floury meat then the fruitiness of the juice; sweet-sour, the intrinsic taste: tomato. Do you sense the

activation of the saliva on the tongue?

It’s now official, your imagination can not just see but also taste, feel texture, gauge temperature. You can ‘eat words’ through their mental images stored in your own taste memory database.

This database is cultural by essence, a strong, indelible patrimony that grows

from your first bite and then develops through experience, education, curiosity, diversity and, eventually, interest and focus. You know what you’ve eaten much more intimately than you might imagine. You have experienced food with all your senses, it went through you, and there is not much that could delete the good or the bad – it’s a built-in RAM, and any food you ever ingested has shaped your likes and dislikes without asking for your consent.

If you say ‘bugnette’, chances are that if you are not Catalan, you won’t taste much. This cultural difference does not imply that you will not like bugnette but that you just do not know yet, and in the meantime, won’t be able to picture bugnette, anticipate its taste and build your expectation.

The more experienced you are, the more taste becomes relative to your imagination:

It is the discrepancy between this taste you expected and the reality that will rate your taste experience: it is better than, not as good as... and add new values to your taste bank.

You should, here, believe a specialist: imagined taste is generally better than reality, if not, I should not be forced to do so many tests and adjustments before finally confirming that a dish is what I envisioned.

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