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Haute plates 美味新境界

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From ancient Rome to modern-day San Sebastián, the presentation and plating of food have been an integral part of the dining experience. 從古羅馬到今日的聖塞巴斯蒂安，菜式的呈現方式及擺盤藝術成為體驗美食不可或缺的一部分。 **By Chris Dwyer**

美味新境界 Haute plates



This page: Dong Zhenxiang's "Mang Zhong" Shrimp with Garlic Paste

Opposite: Elena Arzak's Red Egg

本頁：董振祥的溫州芒種蝦皮

對頁：Elena Arzak的紅蛋料理



THIS PAGE: SARA SANTOS/ARZAK; OPPOSITE: DA DONG

The old saying rings true, “You eat with your eyes first,” and every cook knows that the way in which food is presented – including what it is served in, or on – plays a key role in making the mouth water. From the Southeast Asian curries that have been delivered on waxy banana leaves for millennia to the newspaper-wrapped fish and chips of 1950s England, plating is the final act in gastronomic theatre – the canvas on which chefs’ creations dazzle, surprise and please.

“Sight is one of the first senses experienced while eating, so plating is very important in the overall success of a dish,” says Maria Nguyen, founder and editor-in-chief of The Art of Plating, an award-winning digital platform “devoted to the exhibition of gastronomy as a form of high art”. Nguyen’s website and Instagram feed feature carefully curated selections of beautiful plating from the world’s most influential chefs and food enthusiasts.

While appreciating artistry, Nguyen believes nothing should be superfluous on the plate. “From a visual perspective, great plating is that initial ‘wow’ factor when the plate comes to the table,” she says. “Does it make the guest excited to dive right in? The plating should be thoughtful, with a clear reason why each element is there. Elements shouldn’t be there for colour or just because they’re pretty – they should be there for flavour, texture and aroma.”

It wasn’t always this way, of course. A generation ago, when a sprig of parsley was the only garnish a cook seemed to need, plating wasn’t part of the cultural lexicon. There are reasons why the tide has turned since then, most notably social media, but history tells us that the importance of plating has risen and fallen with the times.

If we look back 2,000 years, grand Roman feasts were the apex of culinary expression and gustatory orgies lasted days. The more rare, ostentatious and expensive the dishes, the more powerful and influential the host. In medieval times, food was often brightly coloured and decorated to mask its less-than-appealing taste and freshness, while flamboyance was the order of the day at 16th-century English banquets, where peacock vied with stuffed camel.

The first traces of what we now call haute cuisine emerged in 18th-century France, thanks to a drive to make the culinary arts a defining part of the nation’s cultural identity. The most famous name to embrace the challenge was the world’s first celebrity chef, Marie-Antoine Carême of Paris. And when it comes to plating, the influence of Carême cannot be underestimated. He was the first chef to incorporate architecture and the natural world into his work, taking ideas from history books to turn food into ancient ruins or pyramids.

Another Frenchman who made great advances in the presentation of cuisine was Auguste Escoffier. The 19th-century chef developed methods that allowed dishes to be finished in the dining room, empowering people to choose what to eat and have it served on individual plates: the definition of à la carte.

Following the lead of Carême and Escoffier, careful arrangement of colours, textures and ingredients grew in importance in fine dining, and this is best illustrated in the Modernist Cuisine movement of the last 20 years. Here, science and the use of ingredients more at home in laboratories have resulted in the creation of new flavours, textures and experiences, allowing chefs to

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Richard van Oostenbrugge’s Glass Apple; Dong Zhenxiang’s Geoduck Clam Fillets with Fresh Pepper;

對頁左上圖起順時針: Richard van Oostenbrugge的蘋果甜品; 董振祥的鮮花椒燴象拔蚌; Daniel Humm的鴨肉料理; Jacques Decoret的甜品

Great plating is that initial ‘wow’ factor when the plate comes to the table. Does it make the guest excited to dive right in?

好的擺盤讓人一看到端上桌的菜立刻發出『哇!』的讚嘆。食客可會因此而興奮地大快朵頤?

– Maria Nguyen

西方有句頗有道理的古老諺語:「先用眼睛品嚐美食。」每位大廚都知道表現食物的方式,包括使用的食材和餐具,都扮演了讓人垂涎的關鍵角色。從東南亞人於千年前已開始用芭蕉葉盛裝咖喱,到1950年代英國人用報紙包裹炸魚薯條,擺盤始終是美食劇場的壓軸好戲,這是廚師揮灑創意的畫布,滿載驚喜和喜悅。

得獎數碼平台The Art of Plating的創辦人兼總編輯Maria Nguyen說:「當我們進食時,其中一個最先受到刺激的感官體驗是視覺,因此擺盤攸關一道菜是否成功的重要因素。擺盤的作用在於展示美食,達至如高級藝術的形式。」Nguyen為她的網站和Instagram精選世上最具影響力的名廚和美食愛好者所創作的優美擺盤。

除了欣賞充滿藝術感的擺盤,Nguyen認為一道菜的盤內不該有任何多餘的東西。她說:「從視覺角度來看,好的擺盤讓人一看到端上桌的菜立刻發出『哇!』的讚嘆。但食客可會因此而興奮地大快朵頤?擺盤應該考慮周詳、面面俱到,能夠清楚看出盤內每個元素存在的原因。這些元素不該單純為了顏色或僅是漂亮,應該根據味道、口感及香氣而挑選。」

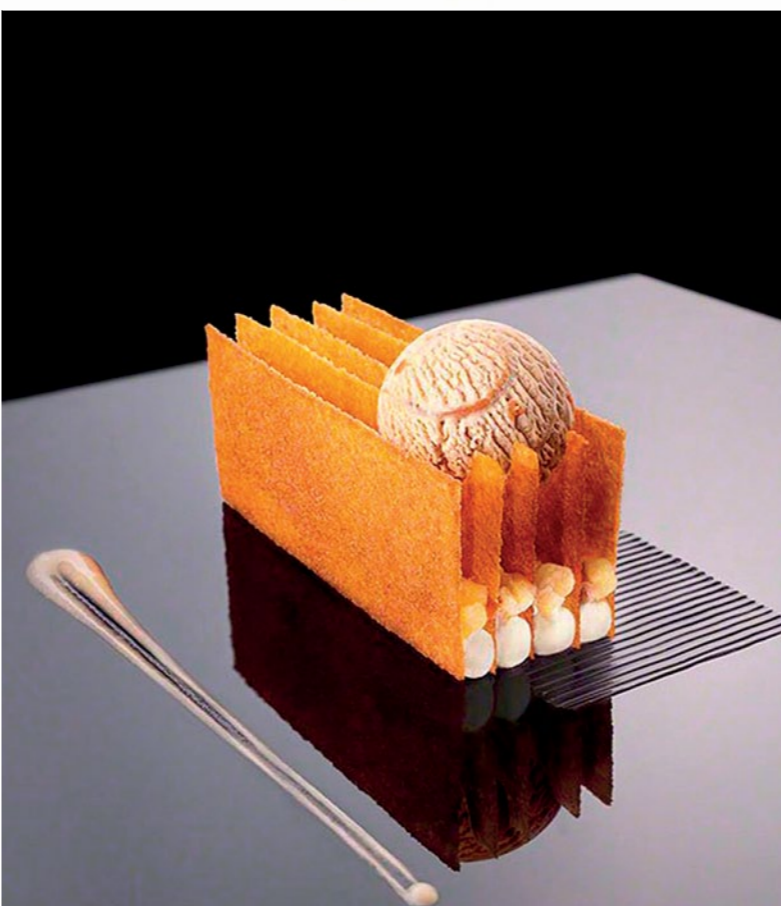
當然,以前我們對菜式並沒有這麼講究。上一代的廚師只需要一小根歐芹做為裝飾,擺盤並非飲食文化的詞彙之一,追根究底,這種潮流的出現主要還是因為社交媒體,但歷史告訴我們,擺盤的重要性總是隨著時代而起伏。

回顧2,000多年前的羅馬盛宴,眾人狂歡飽餐美食數日,實為餐飲史上最極致的景況。菜式愈罕見、鋪張和昂貴,愈能彰顯主人的權勢及影響力。到了中世紀時期,味道不討喜或不夠新鮮的食物往往會用鮮豔的顏色來掩飾;16世紀的英國盛行炫耀誇耀的風氣,宴會桌上可以見到孔雀和肚子填滿餡料的駱駝。

現代人所說的「高級料理」最早出現於18世紀的法國,這一點必須歸功於讓法國樹立烹飪藝術殿堂地位的運動。來自巴黎的馬利安東尼·卡瑞蒙(Marie-Antoine Carême)勇於挑戰烹飪藝術,成為世上第一位名廚。說到擺盤,絕對不可不提卡瑞蒙對後人的影響。他是第一位將建築與大自然融入料理的廚師,從歷史書籍汲取靈感,把食物變成古代遺跡或金字塔。

奧古斯特·埃斯科菲耶(Auguste Escoffier)是另一位在呈現食物方面取得重大進展的法國廚師。這位出生於19世紀中葉的廚師開發了在餐廳完成烹調菜式的方法,讓客人選擇自己要吃的菜式,並且用盤子分開盛裝每一道菜:這就是現代的單點菜單。

在卡瑞蒙和埃斯科菲耶的帶領下,高級料理愈來愈重視色彩、質感和食材之間的搭配,近20年興起的現代主義烹調運動,便是其中一個最佳證明。這個運動富有實驗精神,將科學與食材運用融於一爐,創造出截然不同的新味道、口感和經驗,讓廚師以卓越非凡,同時帶點匪夷所思創意的菜式,帶給食客嶄新的飲食體驗。位於西班牙北海岸的美食聖地—聖塞巴斯蒂安擁有眾多米芝蓮星級餐廳,正是體驗現代主義烹調的最佳地點。



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE ART OF PLATING; DA DONG; FRANCESCO TONELLI; MAISON DECORET

Dwyer: Haute plates ?????



From top to bottom:
Andoni Aduriz's
Tendon with Dipping
Ash; Yoji Tokuyoshi's
Calamari Full of Self;
Andoni Aduriz's
Broken Egg, Cool Yolk
and White Flowers

Opposite:
Dong Zhenxiang's
White Chocolate
with Cream Cheese

右圖上起: Andoni Aduriz
創作的筋腱與灰沾醬;
德吉洋二的魷魚菜式;
Andoni Aduriz的
碎雞蛋、冷蛋黃及白花
對頁: 董振祥的芝士與
白朱古力甜品



THIS PAGE: DA DONG; OPPOSITE: TOP AND BOTTOM: JOSÉ LUIS LÓPEZ DE ZUBIRI/MUGARITZ; OPPOSITE: CENTRE: TOKUYOSHI



trick the diner with brilliant and often bizarre creations. A few examples can be found in San Sebastián, a multi-Michelin-starred culinary mecca on Spain's northern coast.

At the edge of an oak forest just outside town, at the legendary restaurant Mugaritz, chef Andoni Aduriz's most famous dish is called Edible Stones. New potatoes are painstakingly covered in a mixture of ash made from lactose and edible clay. Aduriz aims to shock, surprise and delight diners with culinary *trompe l'oeil* – or “tricks of the eye”.

In a modest suburb a few minutes' drive away, Elena Arzak amazes diners at her family's eponymous restaurant, Arzak, which has held three Michelin stars for more than a quarter of a century. “I need my plates to allow me to interact with my diners as it's one of the most important ways to express my cuisine,” Arzak says. “Everything in the dish has to have a meaning; nothing is there just for the sake of it. You have to think of plating not only in terms of aesthetics, but also because it brings a sense of balance to the dish.”

Following a project exploring different ways of interacting with customers, Arzak came up with one of the restaurant's most extraordinary plating techniques: serving food on iPads. Seafood has been a favourite, with lobster and monkfish arranged over videos of crashing waves. “Our goal was to highlight the meaning and concept of the dish,” Arzak explains.

Of course, innovation in plating can be found across the globe, including in China, and Dong Zhenxiang – otherwise known as Da Dong, and widely regarded as one of the country's greatest chefs – bases his style on Chinese art. “Da Dong Yijing Cuisine draws inspiration for its artistic plating from traditional freehand Chinese paintings,” explains the Beijing-based chef. “I'm especially taken with the work of Bada Shanren, a noted master of freehand paintings of the late Ming and early Qing period. Simplicity and symbolic forms with intended blanks means less is more, conveying the Zen sense of nothingness, an unlimited imaginary space that is distinctive to his visual vocabularies. I'm deeply influenced by him, and that's why I leave certain space on the plate, a type of spatial aesthetics.”

This is perfectly exemplified by one of Dong's most quintessential creations: White Chocolate with Cream Cheese. “It's a dessert with three types of ingredients in white, creating three different visual textures of whiteness,” Dong says. “The dessert has eight different flavours and each shell tastes different. It's a wonderful combination of colour, composition and taste.”

Perhaps most tellingly, Dong echoes something repeated by chefs the world over: that shared learning adds to the creative process. “Different cuisines and food cultures should learn from each other, and we're now trying to explore Western cooking techniques, food presentation and aesthetics to complement our own,” he says. “Da Dong Yijing Cuisine is all about colour tones and proportions, contrasts and harmonies. The layout must be in harmony and [exhibit] uniformity; be simple yet aesthetically pleasing.”

After millennia of debate, Dong may have just found a definition of perfect plating that the world can finally agree on. 🍴

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Jeremiah Stone and Fabian von Hauske's Beets Dessert; Andoni Aduriz's Poultry Royale; Christopher Kostow's Cucumber Duo; Elena Arzak's iPad dish

對頁左上圖起順時針：Jeremiah Stone及Fabian von Hauske的甜菜甜品；Andoni Aduriz的創意菜；Christopher Kostow炮製的青瓜兩吃；Elena Arzak的iPad菜式

Everything in the dish has to have a meaning, nothing is there just for the sake of it

放在盤內的一切東西必須有意義，絕不能

只是把它擺上去就算了

– Elena Arzak

富有傳奇色彩的餐廳Mugaritz坐落在聖塞巴斯蒂安鎮外的橡樹林邊，餐廳大廚Andoni Aduriz所創的招牌名菜「可食用的石頭」(Edible Stones)，顧名思義，盤中物看起來就像石頭。他在新薯外面細心塗上乳糖和可食用黏土製成的灰狀混合物，製造出有如石頭的效果。大廚善加利用錯視畫(trompe l'oeil)的原理，目的在於帶給食客震撼、驚訝和喜悅。

距離樸實鄉郊幾分鐘車程，坐落了餐廳東主Elena Arzak以家族姓氏開設的餐廳Arzak，這間連續25年榮獲米芝蓮三星的餐廳亦帶給食客驚喜的美食體驗。「我必須利用擺盤和食客互動，因為這是表達我的料理其中一個最重要方式。」Arzak表示：「放在盤內的一切東西必須有意義，絕不能只是把它擺上去就算了。對於擺盤的想法，除了視覺美感之外，還要考慮到整體平衡。」

探索過與食客互動的不同方式之後，Arzak想出了餐廳其中一個最不尋常的擺盤方式：以iPad盛載食物。舉例來說，在餐廳最受歡迎的海鮮菜式當中，龍蝦和鮫鱈魚下方的平板電腦，呈現的是波濤洶湧、激起浪花的畫面。Arzak解釋：「我們的目的是強調菜式的意義和理念。」

當然，全世界都可以找到具有創意的擺盤方式，包括中國。人稱「大董」的廚藝名家董振祥是公認中國最偉大的廚師之一，他獨創的大董中國意境菜包含了來自中國繪畫「注重留白，以少勝多」的擺盤理念。在北京開設多家餐廳的大董說：「大董中國意境菜的擺盤理念是以中國傳統寫意繪畫的技法為基礎。我最推崇明末清初的寫意畫派代表八大山人，他的畫法簡練，以無取有，看似很少，其實蘊含了豐富的思想。我受他的影響很大，因此在設計菜品時，注重留出一定的空間。留白就是一種空間美感。」

他表示近期一道名為「邂逅貝殼」的芝士與白朱古力甜品，恰可完美表達這種中國意境的擺盤理念，他說：「這道甜品以三種白色的食材：白朱古力、糖粉及芝士製成，在視覺上形成了三種層次的白色，但是每個貝殼的味道都不同，整道甜品一共呈現了八種味道。無論色彩、構圖和味道都非常美妙，達到藝術結合美味的極致成就。」

但更引人關注的是大董的理念與全世界廚師互相呼應，他認為創作過程就是不斷互相學習。他提出自己的看法：「各國料理或地方菜系都應該相互學習，相互借鑒。我們嘗試揣摩學習西方料理的技法、擺盤方法及色彩美學，希望截長補短。大董意境菜講究色調、色彩比重、顏色的對比及補色關係，看起來和諧統一、簡練乾淨又具有美感。」

經過上千年的討論之後，看來現在大董終於找到了全世界廚師都認同的完美擺盤定義。 🍴

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE ART OF PLATING; JOSÉ LUIS LÓPEZ DE ZUBIRÍA/MUGARITZ; THE ART OF PLATING; ARZAK