Appetizing Foods

The Creation of an Appetizing Image

by

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Abstract

Many scholars have acknowledged the various technologies that have led to the art of photography as we know it today. However, there is a gap as scholars have not fully addressed the various styles and categories of photographic practices that exist in today's society. This paper responds to the topic of food photography, and the styling methods used to create the appropriate look for each image. Specifically, this project examines past and current trends, as well as various styling methods that are incorporated into various works in order to create a more appealing image. Through this project, I will argue that different styling approaches, both natural and artificial, are used to make a dish appear more appetizing than it may be in reality. By examining several styling approaches and considering different impacts that may affect the amount of styling that can be done, this paper will shed a new light on food photography and what it truly takes to create an appetizing image.

Appetizing Foods

Food photography is a type of imagery that individuals tend to see on a day-to-day basis, typically in advertising and editorial formats. Throughout the past several decades, food photography has evolved to conform to current trends, as well as to appeal to the ever-advancing digital age in order to bring us the most appetizing representations of food. In this paper, I will address several different topics within this evolution such as sub-categories within food photography, past trends, and styling methods that were used to create a series of five images.

French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce has been credited for composing the still life that gave way to food photography. In his 1832 image (figure 1), Niépce composed a still life that consisted simply of a bowl, a goblet, and a piece of bread (Glyda). Following this was a stunning image created by William Henry Fox Talbot in 1845; an image (figure 2) that focused not on a still life, but rather focused an attention solely towards food. It is also in this image that we can see a vague idea of food styling in the tilt of the pineapple (Turshen).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, food photography gained a bad reputation due to an extensive use of food manipulation. A 1968 lawsuit was filed against Campbell's for advertising an image of Chicken & Stars with marbles being used to manipulate the soup. A competitor of Campbell's sued the company after noting the usage of marbles to provide an illusion that the star noodles and vegetables were floating on the soup's surface rather than sinking to the bottom as they tend to do in reality (Custer).

Following this lawsuit, many consumers no longer trusted the products in advertisements out of fear that they were paying for a product that was not being properly portrayed. In an effort to regain the trust of the public, new laws and limitations were introduced to prevent the false advertisement of food and beverages. Though these stipulations were more intensive at first, increasingly companies have become less stringent over the years (Custer).

A common rule was that any modification done to "beautify" a food or a dish must be edible, such as the use of vegetable oil instead of glycerine (Glyda). An example of these more intensive measures was the insurance that the product being photographed must include the same amount of ingredients that the customer would receive. This could be perceived as an advertisement for pizza, in which case the image must have a specific number of pepperoni, ham, vegetable, et cetera slices that would match the exact number that would come on the pizza inside of the box (Custer).

One stipulation that we continue to see in food photography today is the usage of the actual product being advertised. For example, if a brand is advertising chocolate milk, then it must be chocolate milk that is being photographed. Substitutions such as chocolate drink or milk with a chocolate flavoring, such as chocolate syrup, cannot be used in its place. The same rule applies if we were photographing a bowl of ice cream. If we are focusing on advertising the ice cream's toppings, then the image must consist of that brand's toppings. In this situation however, the ice cream could be made artificially from a combination of cake frosting and confectioner's sugar as the ice cream is not the focus of the advertisement. In the case of advertising for restaurants, the

same rules apply as the ingredients for the food or dish must be used for the image as well; otherwise, it could be perceived as false advertisement.

These conditions for food photography are not something that only the photographer should consider as the food stylist should consider these stipulations as well. A food stylist is an individual brought in to help style food for an image. A food stylist is not always utilized in food photography, however it is helpful to have a food stylist for larger-scaled productions.

The term "food stylist" was originally coined in the mid-1950s as more and more home economists were being utilized for styling food. Prior to this period, most, though not all, food advertisements were illustrated. With the decline of illustrations and the increase of photographic advertisements for food, the food stylist quickly became a new norm in the photography industry (Glyda).

One of the biggest topics that both the photographer and the food stylist should consider is what the final image should portray. Regardless of the product, the dish or food should always portray a sense of freshness. If the product is a larger or more elaborate dish, then it is likely that the dish should provide a "home cooked" appearance in order to appear more appetizing for the viewer (Glyda). The photographer should always take into consideration the camera angle that will best display the product, the appropriate lighting in which to capture the product's detail, and the framing of the product within the image in comparison to any other dishes and/or props (Custer).

Another consideration that both the photographer and the stylist should keep in mind is the portion size if the product is meant to convey a single serving. It is crucial to understand that a portion size for one country may not necessarily be the same size for

another country. For example, it is typical to see larger portions being represented in America in comparison to European countries. Viewing a smaller-than-average-portion also takes on different perspectives; the smaller dish may appear cheap and skimpy to some while appearing expensive and luxurious to others. This is important to keep in mind when determining the target audience for the image as well (Glyda).

Aside from determining what the image is meant to portray, the photographer and stylist must also consider the format in which these images will occur. Three of the most common formats are editorial, recipe, and packaging (Glyda). Though these three categories do have aspects that tend to overlap, it is crucial to note the smaller details that set each category apart, and that will help to provide a proper layout and overall mood for the image.

The first category, editorial, is arguably one of the most recognized ways in which we see images of food. In this case, the food is typically shot within a lifestyle or environmental setting, and is oftentimes what we see while flipping through magazines or browsing the internet. In this case, the image is set up to create some form of a road map for the viewer, leading their eyes around the image (Glyda).

This roadmap is set up in a way that allows the main subject to be in focus while items such as props, other foods, and ingredients may be positioned around the primary subject, but perhaps slightly blurred to prevent any distractions that could potentially take away from the key focal point. The key light for this map will often be set up on the left side of the image, therefore creating the brightest highlight on the left-hand side. This is done as a way to help read the image from left to right, just as we would tend to read text (Glyda).

When photographing from an editorial perspective, it is important that both the photographer and the food stylist take into consideration how and where the image will appear. The image may need to be set up and framed in a particular manner depending on if it will be used online or in a magazine, featured horizontally or vertically, and if any text will appear over the image. They should also consider any look or mood that the client may be going for, as well as current trends so that the image will not feel outdated (Glyda).

Photographing from a recipe perspective tends to overlap quite a bit into the category of editorial images, oftentimes even being listed as a sub-category for editorial by some professionals. This is especially true when considering the images shot for magazines such as *Taste of Home* or *Food Network Magazine*; this is where the division line between the two categories becomes quite tricky. From what I have gathered, this tends to boil down to a simple factor: the amount of styling that is used when setting up the image. Alongside these magazines, we can also find recipe images inside of cookbooks and restaurants.

Images captured within the "recipe" category tend to be less styled than those produced strictly for editorial works. This is typically because these recipe images are essentially being used as a guide for cooks, both in-home and professional. The dishes depicted are what most cooks expect to see as the end result. In this case, you would not want to put a great amount of styling into the dish as it will soon become false advertisement for the recipe (Glyda).

When photographing from a recipe perspective, the key aspect to consider is that these images should resemble the dish's final outcome as closely as possible. To do so,

it is common that the stylist will take extra time to recreate the dish themself, carefully

following the recipe to ensure that it is made properly. Should the food come out in an

undesired manner, the recipe may be altered or occasionally rewritten altogether to

achieve the recipe creator's desired outcome. It is important to also note, however, that

the recipe will not be altered just to create a more appealing image for the

photographer; this is a choice that is finalized only by the recipe's creator (Glyda).

The third and final category studied was one that also consists of very little food

styling: packaging. The primary reasoning behind this is the idea of advertising, and the

prevention of false advertising. It is important to provide a truthful representation of the

product on the food's packaging, as it is the first thing we see when looking for a

product to purchase. It can also influence the consumer's choice, as he or she will look

at this packaging to determine what is inside and how the product will be consumed.

Capturing the images for a product's packaging can be both tedious and

time-consuming. Typically a photographer will capture several images of the product

from various angles and various choices of cropping to provide variations in the images.

This is done in the case that an image must fit into a specific layout in which it will be

depicted on the packaging. Some layouts may be more challenging than others,

bringing odd shapes and sizes into play. It is important that the photographer asks the

client for the packaging layout so that they are able to capture the best images to work

within the frame (Glyda).

Alongside the packaging layout, the photographer and food stylist should also

consider any client needs for the image: specific props, ingredients, or other elements

that they wish to appear in the image. The client may wish to have a specific "look" for

the image that will help it to fit in with other products from the brand. It is also important to note any logos, branding, or product information, such as nutrition information, that may be displayed over the image as this will help the photographer to properly frame the product within the image (Glyda).

Regardless of which category an image of food will fall into, the photographer should work to keep up with the current trends of food photography and styling so that the photographer is not capturing an image that could be viewed as "outdated" or "boring." It is truly fascinating to see just how far we have come since the beginnings of food photography. It is also interesting to see just how many trends have either remained the same or have made a reappearance throughout the past few decades.

Beginning with the 1950s, many photographers were continuing to shoot images in black and white. Hot lights were being used to light these products with overhead angles commonly being used to capture the food. Because food was being fully cooked prior to photographing, inconsistencies tended to result. One image of a dish may not resemble a second image of the same dish, as foods cook independently of one another and each contains its own imperfections. Though it was not common, home economists began their first attempts at food styling during this time (Custer).

In reference to setting up the shot, we tend to see food being positioned either on a tightly-stretched tablecloth, or on a natural surface such as sand, wood, or marble. Everyday dishes were being used to hold these foods, with the eating utensils typically being placed on one side of the plate. It was also common to see side dishes or other foods within the image as well (Custer).

In the 1960s, art photographers began to take more of an interest in food

photography as more money was being put towards food advertising. This led to more "creative" shots; images that would focus more on unusual representations of food. This new approach would tend to include an introduction to close-up shots and mood lighting within the studio (Custer).

More home economists were becoming employed as food stylists during this period, allowing the images to evolve into more casual and "styled" appearances rather than the previous styling that caused the food to appear as impersonal. Food continued to be photographed on surfaces that were natural with the introduction of surroundings that would be unrelated to the food. Other images would include colorful appliances in the background, along with more decorative plates on which the food was being placed (Custer).

With the 1970s came a shift over to more textured looks along with graphic layouts and the continuing of overhead angles that we had seen in the past. In the later 70s, we see photographers using more dappled lighting in images, along with the introduction of a soft-focus on food (Custer).

Food manipulation became more prominent in the 70s with the increase of various styling methods: the tucking in of the ends of pasta noodles, the "perfect slice," and the increased usage of vegetable oil to create a distinct luster. We also see an increase in the use of undercooked foods during this time as well (Custer).

Food was placed on surfaces such as ceramic tiles, solid fabric, and seamless Formica during this period. Whole table settings were being photographed with the increased use of other foods and accessories within the image. Utensils also faced a new role as photographers often photographed foods with the utensils either holding or

piercing the food in some way (Custer).

By the 1980s, many photographers were shooting with large-format cameras, continuing the use of mood lighting that we had seen being introduced in the '60s, along with the increase of sunlight being imitated within the studio. Action shots, such as drips, became popular as well as the capturing of delicate and gourmet foods. Photographers continued to increase their use of overhead angles while also focusing on capturing the food within a tighter crop (Custer).

Though we do see a smaller amount of background foods and accessories, what props we do see have become almost equally as important as the food itself. This was made possible by the introduction of the prop stylist. It is this decade in which we see a larger variety of props. Pottery and earthenware is used to hold food, along with elegant plates. Textured and patterned surfaces have come into play as well, with other shots focusing on more of the "chef" look that featured a stainless steel surface (Custer).

In the 1990s, photographers showed an increased usage in both selective and soft focuses. The use of strong light and shadows began to be depicted more in images, as well as the use of natural light. More casual propping was utilized, as well as the stacking of plates and bowls. This helped to influence the look of a more casual dish, aimed towards the population of home cooks, as photographers began to stray away from the look of a "perfected dish." (Custer)

The use of digital means became popularized by photographers in the 2000s. This included the increased use of a digital camera, the ease of photo retouching through digital software, and a new mode of file handling and delivery methods. Photographers continued the use of studio lighting while focusing on images with a

tighter crop and a small area of focus. We also see an increase of viewing the horizon line in images rather than most images being shot from an overhead perspective (Custer).

Textured and patterned backgrounds returned, along with the importance of propping. Solid white surfaces became popular as more photographers aimed for a clean and natural look. The primary focus of the image was to simply make the food appear to be as mouth-watering as possible (Custer).

Within more current trends, we continue to see a use of the lighter surfaces and natural lighting to give a more "light and airy" feel, but we also can see this contrasted with the use of darker surfaces and mood lighting. We often see food being photographed within a studio, with the key light coming from the side to give texture to the product. Overhead angles are still popular, though we do tend to still see the horizon line in some images. Conceptual approaches have also become popular for art photographers that focus on food as well (Custer).

Wider frames are being used to create these images, allowing for props and the dish's ingredients to be seen more so in the shot (Custer). Many stylists and photographers are leaning away from the traditional use of bowls and plates, and are shooting more products within cookware. For example, we may see images of cupcakes still in the pan or positioned on a cooling rack; a dish photographed inside of a skillet or casserole dish.

By utilizing the ideas behind current trends, alongside studying the different food styling techniques that I had learned both during my research and throughout various photography courses, I decided to create a series of five images that would explore food

styling first-hand. Throughout this project I had photographed five different foods, styling them each to varying degrees. Each image was shot not in a studio, but on the coffee table of a college student's apartment. The only professional light, being either a Profoto B1 strobe or a Phottix speed lite, was used as a key light for each image. Fill light was incorporated through the use of a white pop-out reflector and natural lighting from a nearby window.

For the first image (figure 3), I studied pasta and how to style it in a way that would appear most appetizing for any lover of Italian cuisine. I decided to photograph the image from a top-down perspective, with a key light coming in from the top left of the frame. This lighting allowed for the pasta's texture to stand out rather than have the noodles appear flat. We can see the brightest highlights on the tomatoes that have been positioned to surround the pasta, leading the viewer's eyes from left to right. To the right of the frame, a white reflector is bouncing fill light onto the dish, specifically enhancing not only the pasta but also a delicate highlight that we see on the rim of the bowl.

This image took a fair amount of styling to get the look that I had aimed to achieve. I began by cooking the pasta al dente so that the pasta would be easy to move around for styling, but not too soft so that it would easily break. I then took care to tuck in the ends of noodles to create a look of longer pasta, even though this particular spaghetti was the shorter "pot size." Next, I used fresh mozzarella that had been heated and stretched to give the appearance that it was melted within the pasta. Sauteed tomatoes were then placed on top of the noodles and cheese in a small, central pile with a few stray tomatoes lying closer to the edges of the bowl for subtle detail. Lastly, a combination of glycerine and water was brushed onto the surface of the noodles to

provide an appearance of the noodles being freshly made, even though they were dry and had sat for roughly an hour before the dish was photographed.

The next image was one that featured a cupcake (figure 4); an image that was meant to appear as simple, yet as elegant as the dessert itself. This image took an entirely different approach with a mood that appeared "light and airy" rather than the pasta's "dark and moody" approach. The lighting here is high-key, with the camera angled to look down onto the cupcake. The key light is coming from the left of the frame, with natural fill lighting coming from a window on the right-hand side of the image. My goal was to create texture within the frosting, but to have the other props blurred enough to prevent any distraction from the primary focal point.

For the cupcake, I baked the cake portion a day before, and made two different buttercream frostings for the topping. As a way to create variation in the image, I combined the two frostings for a multicolor effect. When it comes to modifications, nothing has been done to "beautify" the cupcake. The only food modification that has been done within the image was a small bit of hairspray that had been sprayed onto the blackberries to make them appear fresher.

The third image is that of a Beef n' Cheddar from Arby's (figure 5). As someone who had worked at Arby's for more than a year, I was inspired to create an appetizing image of a sandwich I had sold and made on a daily basis. There was no general "look" that had been intended for this image; just a clean image of a sandwich. The camera angle looks into the ingredients of this sandwich from a straight-on perspective in comparison to the images previously discussed. The lighting for this image was slightly different as it was the only image for which the speed lite was used. The light was set

up to cast light onto a large reflector set up in front, and to the left of the sandwich. The light bouncing off of the reflector was able to beautifully light the image as a smaller reflector was used to add slight fill light on the right-hand side.

To create this image, I began by gathering the ingredients needed from a local Arby's: three ounces of roast beef, a cup of melted cheddar, a cup of red ranch, and an onion bun. I toasted the bun slightly with the use of a heat gun to get the same amount of toastiness you would typically find on this sandwich, but with less of a flattened bun. Then, I began to assemble the roast beef, taking care to tuck away any rough edges and to hold them in place with T-pins. This was a bit of a challenge considering that the slicer at this particular location had been malfunctioning, therefore creating a rougher appearance and even tearing the beef in some places. The top bun was then placed on top, held up in the back by a cosmetic sponge to provide the sandwich with the appearance that the top bun was straight.

After building up the roast beef for the sandwich, the finishing touches were then added. Using fine-tipped sauce bottles, I carefully added the red ranch and cheese sauces to the sandwich. A piece of a small, wooden dowel was then used to move the sauces, creating careful drips and piles of sauce. Finally, any onions that had previously fallen off of the bun were then placed back onto the top, providing the final touches that would complete the sandwich.

The next image created was my personal favorite, a whole chicken (figure 6). Styling this chicken was well beyond my comfort zone as I had no prior experience with styling meat until this project. For the lighting and camera angle, I followed an approach that resembled that of the spaghetti's almost identically. Similar to the pasta in being

such a lightly-colored subject, I thought that a darker background and pan would be the best approach to the chicken as well.

To style the chicken, I began by thoroughly cleaning the bird and then stuffing it with aluminum foil so that it would appear plump rather than sunken in. In the sink, I poured boiling water over the chicken that immediately tightened larger portions of the skin. The chicken was then moved into a roasting pan and pinned so that the wings would stay in a particular position and to close any larger, more visible holes. The chicken was then cooked for about fifteen minutes to finish tightening the skin and to begin giving the chicken its golden color.

Following the cooking, I created a mixture of browning sauce, dish soap, and honey to brush onto the chicken. This is what provided the chicken with its golden color. After applying a thin layer of this mixture, I then added dried rosemary and proceeded to add a second layer of the browning mixture. The chicken was then gently removed from the roasting pan, and placed into the skillet in which it was photographed. Lemons were added to the dish, as well as a fresh piece of rosemary that had been pinned onto the chicken.

The final image of the series was a simple slice of bread (figure 7), with the loaf in the background. This image was one of the simplest of the five, yet one of the most challenging as I made the attempt to approach this from a different perspective. I continued the use of the darker background as I had before, but strayed away from the top-down angle that I had used in prior images. The lighting was also a bit different as it was lit from behind, the strobe angled at a reflector positioned at the front and to the right of the bread. The reflector positioned the light towards the smaller portion, creating

texture within the bread's pores while still lighting the interior of the larger loaf in the blurred background.

The bread was not baked at home, but purchased from a restaurant instead. The bread was meant to be dry, therefore there was no need to add artificial aspects to indicate that it was moist. Crumbs that had fallen onto the surface were not a hindrance, but instead were welcomed to show off the bread's texture.

As I conclude, I would like to mention that there are still several conversations that could be had on the subject of food photography. One conversation that is often brought up is the topic of "ethics" and its place in food photography and styling. Briefly, I do think that in cases such as editorial work, it is okay to style a dish more so than in the case of an image created for packaging or advertising. I argue this as a consumer hoping to purchase the product depicted on the packaging rather than purchasing a misrepresentation. When it comes to an editorial image, I am not purchasing the dish being featured, therefore I find it a bit more acceptable to style the food to a certain length.

Other conversations we could have would perhaps discuss the different means of food photography in terms of professional images in comparison to those of amateurs. This is an interesting perspective that I feel could have several different opinions and approaches from the varied perspectives of multiple generations, especially when taking into consideration the rise of social media.

Regardless of the image, or the food depicted, styling will always be taken into consideration as a part of its creation. Food styling is a form of art that is here to stay as

we continue to find new approaches to food "beautification," and new means as to how

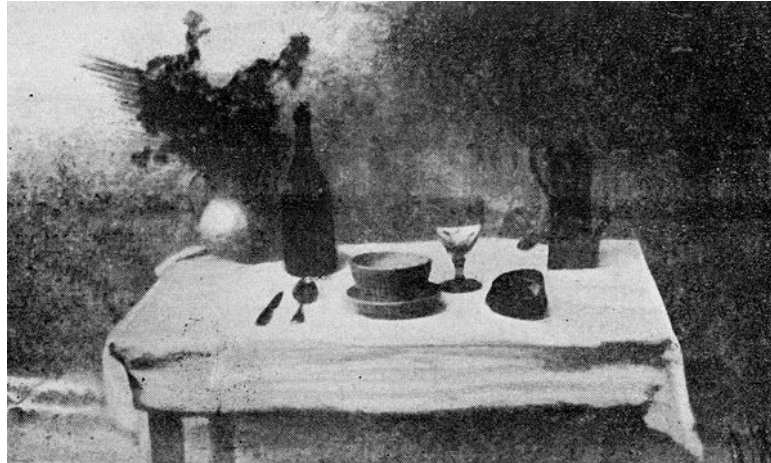we can create a more appetizing image.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

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