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2014 Food & Wine Issue



"Wet on Wet,"
a smoking
cocktail invented
by mixologist
Martim Smith-
Mattsson,
is featured
in *L.O.V.E.*
FOODBOOK.
Written and
shot by the
French-American
food artist and
photographer
Emilie Baltz, this
award-winning
volume features
original food and
beverage recipes
inspired by love.

PLAYING WITH OUR



CULINARY DESIGNERS,
CHALLENGING THE WAY WE THINK
ABOUT WHAT WE EAT

BY AMY SERAFIN

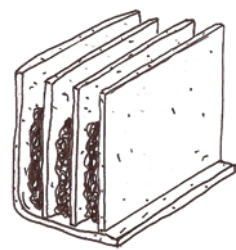


A FRENCH FRIEND'S DAUGHTER RECENTLY CHANGED HER major from chef to culinary designer. Which is noteworthy, considering that a decade ago this was not even a real job description. Even now she finds it a difficult concept to explain. The discipline is vast: everything from the design of food products to utensils, novel ways of serving food, even performances around the act of eating. Culinary design can mean chocolate record albums that produce sounds linked to emotions, a meal of airy dishes served in a hot air balloon or even chicken meat grown from stem cells.

In a sign of the times, Italy's MART museum last year hosted "The Food Project. The shape of taste"—perhaps the first time a national art museum has celebrated the field. But hasn't food design always existed, unrecognized as such?

Already in the 19th century, Antonin Carême considered pastries to be the noblest branch of architecture, building cakes to look like Turkish pavilions and Roman ruins. Louis Lefèvre-Utile designed the Petit Beurre cookie in 1886 with 14 little teeth along its length, 10 more along its width and four "ears" at the corners. The Italians have made pasta in a startling range of shapes, from *orecchiette* (little ears) to *strozzapreti* (priest stranglers), each conceived to trap sauce in a different way. Chinese peasants supposedly invented spring rolls as a way to carry their lunch to the fields. And what would Wendy's be without its famously square hamburger?

"There is a direct connection between food and design," says Marc Brétilot, one of the leaders of the current movement in France. "Many food products don't have a form, so we have had to shape them. The word *fromage* comes from *formage*." Perhaps the major difference is that today, bona fide designers—rather than marketing committees or engineers—are starting to put their signatures on products. And they often approach their work with ambitions that go well beyond mere aesthetics and function.



THIS NEW DISCIPLINE
ENCOMPASSES EVERYTHING
FROM THE DESIGN OF FOOD
PRODUCTS TO UTENSILS,
NOVEL WAYS OF SERVING
FOOD, EVEN PERFORMANCES.

BRÉTILLOT HAS A BALD PATE, A WRY SENSE OF HUMOR AND an obvious love of eating. As a young man, he studied both cooking and design, but chose to concentrate on the latter because it was more prestigious (this was before the age of the celebrity chef). He attended the Ecole Boulle at age 14 and went on to design furniture, glass objects and the like. In 1994 he became a teacher at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art et de Design (ESAD) in Reims. He was giving a class on materials and started bringing in food. "It was a good way to get the students' attention," he recalls. "Take a piece of wood or meat, they are both fibrous. What's interesting is to apply techniques to food that don't come from the kitchen." Fascinated, the school's director suggested he create a workshop for the 1999-2000 year. When the moment came to choose a name for this new program, they christened it *design culinaire*.

Brétilot's home and studio, north of Père Lachaise Cemetery, is a light-filled atelier once occupied by the sculptor who designed the fountains for the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées. And though the studio is cluttered with plaster casts and molds for pastries and other edibles, Brétilot's approach to culinary design is often conceptual, studying the relationship between food and sociocultural practices or religious rituals. He strives to make people reflect upon the act of eating while emphasizing that the result must still taste good.

One of his earliest projects, in 2002, was "Le Grand Déjeuner," a banquet where people sat at a long picnic table with a system of rails down the middle for moving platters. Underneath, chickens in a cage ate the garbage discarded throughout the meal. Later, the chickens themselves would become food. The food cycle also inspired a project he did for the 2005 Designer's Days in Paris called "Lapin Carotte," which explored the evolution of a bunny from a living thing (even a pet) to dinner. The exhibition included carrots with grooves from which real rabbit tongues emerged, as though the vegetables were sticking out their tongues. "Our society is more and more detached from the production of our food," he says, by way of explanation.

But Brétilot also has a practical side. He notably designed a cocktail party tray for chef Pierre Gagnaire, who had asked him to come up with a system for waiters to serve petits-fours without being assaulted by the first people they encounter when they enter a crowded room. His solution, the "Plateau-canne," is a round porcelain tray attached to a beechwood stick so a server

Profile



MARC
BRÉTILLOT

WHO:
A culinary design
pioneer and mentor
to a generation.

WHAT:
An often conceptual
approach
that examines
the relationship
between food and
sociocultural practices
or religious rituals. Yet taste
is never left out
of the equation.



Marc Brétilot, a leader of the French culinary design movement, brings the sensibility of a conceptual artist to his intriguing creations. **Clockwise from left:** "Black Mulâtre Blanc" uses a light bulb and melting chocolate to explore temperature, flavor, aroma and texture; "Antidote" presents finger food with healing virtues; the droll "Lapin Carotte" riffs on the age-old relationship between carrots and rabbits; "Glace Punk" gives a scoop of vanilla ice cream a raw-beet Mohawk. **Opposite:** Brétilot's reinvented Grand Millefeuille has been La Grande Epicerie's best-selling pastry since 2004; its vertical presentation makes it easier to slice.



can hoist it over his head. Brétilot also created pastries for La Grande Epicerie, including an oversized “Millefeuille vertical” turned on its side and therefore easier to slice, a best-seller since its introduction in 2004. At Le Laboratoire, David Edwards’s experimental space for art and science in Paris’s 1st arrondissement, Brétilot has been working with Edwards to produce Le Whaf, a carafe that turns liquids into inhalable (and low-calorie) clouds of flavor. You can buy it online or at the Labstore, or else try a hit at the newly opened Coutume Lab bar.

TODAY THE PROGRAM BRÉTILLOT STARTED in Reims is one reason many young French people are choosing culinary design as a career. (The trend is also taking off in places such as Holland, Spain, Italy and Belgium.) In 2011, the Lieu du Design in Paris hosted the exhibition “Food + Design” featuring a decade of creations by Brétilot’s disciples—tattoos for shellfish, salt rocks “cryocrushed” with spices, grimacing pasta thimbles for kids to put on their fingertips and dip into sauce. Julie Rothhahn created pacifiers filled with vegetable powder for the French seed producer Vilmorin; when mixed with formula, they introduce baby to the taste and benefits of green beans or broccoli. And Delphine Huguet’s “Chocolat Digestion” is a broken dark chocolate plate for offering as a reconciliation gift

Profile



STÉPHANE BUREAUX

WHO: Industrial designer who applies his talents to chocolate as well as chairs.

WHAT: A focus on shape and texture—baguettes with built-in handles, candy bowls made of cotton candy. And a couple of bold, futuristic ideas for projects inspired by sustainability and smart nutrition.

Stéphane Bureaux is sometimes considered the “mad scientist” of culinary design. **Opposite:** “Le Clou” is held together with spicy chocolate “nails.” The futuristic “Oh J’M,” still in the conceptual stage, is a genetically modified citrus fruit combining elements of an avocado, a banana, a pomegranate, a carrot and an orange, and containing all the components of a balanced meal. **This page:** “La Carotte en Tiers,” whose three hues are derived from different colored seeds.





“IT IS NOT UNREASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT THE FOOD INDUSTRY CAN PRODUCE THINGS THAT ARE BEAUTIFUL, TASTE GOOD AND HAVE ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS.”

of American tourists in Reims, a typical French *petit déjeuner* with baguette, yogurt, strawberries, pieces of chocolate and so on, except that she arranged it to look like a geometrically perfect French garden.

If intelligently designed food products are still difficult to find on the shelves, it might be because Big Food has been slow to integrate design professionals. But there are signs of change: One of Brétilot’s activities is consulting for industrial food companies, and he recently helped Kraft think about new shapes for Milka cakes and cookies. All such suggestions must go through marketing departments, however, and by the time products reach supermarkets, the designer’s input has usually been watered down.

Delphine Huguet also collaborates on product development, taking part in workshops alongside engineers and marketing teams. A few years ago, she participated in brainstorming sessions that led Florette, a company that packages lettuce, to add fresh herbs directly to salad sold in plastic bags. She says it represented a real innovation in how the product was offered to the public. And yet it was a far cry from the inventiveness of the “Fum-Fum” food smoker she created for the appliance company Gaggenau. Made from a hollow maple tree trunk sliced into horizontal segments, it slowly consumes itself as it smokes fish or meat. Unfortunately, it never went past the prototype stage.



TÉPHANE BUREAUX WAS A typical industrial designer of everyday objects such as bicycles and telephones when he discovered food in 1999, at about the same time Brétilot was creating his course in Reims. Bureaux was redesigning a pastry shop in Nancy, and the owner suggested he come up with a pastry design, too. The result was the Pavé Gruber, a square cake with a tree-like motif, inspired by Art Nouveau.

“Back then, designers didn’t work with food,” he says. “The term ‘culinary designer’ didn’t even exist.” He does mention a few early exceptions, such as the “Cerise sur le Gâteau” cake that Yan Pennor’s designed for Pierre Hermé in 1993, a triangular chocolate cake with lines in gold leaf. Prior to that, in 1987, the French company Panzani hired designers and architects to come up with new pasta shapes—such as the “mandala” tube with a yin-yang motif by Philippe Starck.

But Bureaux says these examples are few and far between. He believes that chefs should always work with designers because they



Opposite: Rob McHardy’s “Bloody Yoshi,” featured in *L.O.V.E. FOODBOOK*, offers a sexy take on the Bloody Mary.

This page: Robert Truitt, one of Food & Wine’s Best New Pastry Chefs of 2013, was inspired by an internship at the legendary El Bulli to create his “Gâteaux Cala Montjoi,” a scale model of the Catalan hills made exclusively of ingredients from Catalonia.

have two completely different skill sets. “Chefs think they can do everything all by themselves. It doesn’t shock anybody when a designer works with a woodworker to create a chair, but there is no equivalent in cuisine.”

Bureaux’s starting point is generally shape and texture—a baguette with a built-in handle, a candy bowl made of cotton candy—yet he has also come up with two mad-scientist projects, both still in the concept stage. In 2010 he proposed meat grown from stem cells. “I thought, what will we eat tomorrow? Will we still raise cows that pollute even when we don’t have enough water?” He consulted a specialist to verify that synthetic meat was scientifically possible, then designed a series of clear containers and packed them with a pink material resembling tissue and labeled them “chicken muscle,” “beef muscle” and “pig lard.” The implication was that one day, real stem cells would propagate as sheets that you could pile together and cook in butter. (Three years later, a scientist at Maastricht University grew a hamburger using a similar method.)

In 2012 Bureaux followed this up with “Oh J’M”—a play on the French term for GMO and the expression *j’aime*. He imagined a fruit genetically modified to contain all the nutritional value of a balanced meal. The skin would be like that of a citrus fruit but would have the easy-opening properties of a banana. The flesh would have the texture of an avocado and the flavors of carrot and orange, and the “seeds” would be giant pomegranate seeds and almonds. Describing the concept on his website, Bureaux writes, “It is not unreasonable to believe that, if well monitored, the food industry can produce things that are beautiful, good and essential.”

In New York City, a designer named Emilie Baltz offers another perspective on the field of culinary design. Born to a French mother and an American father, she splits her time between the U.S. and Paris. Her career path meandered from screenwriting to photography and industrial design before leading to food.

Baltz’s reputation got a boost in 2009 after she wrote a blog post for the design site Core 77, making “gourmet” recipes out of snacks found in office vending machines. A publisher called and asked her to write a book on the theme. It became “Junk Foodie: 51

Delicious Recipes for the Lowbrow Gourmand,” with recipes such as a Twinkie Napoleon, made from layers of squished Twinkies and crushed potato chips—as bizarrely crunchy, sweet, salty and satisfying as any Napoleon in a Parisian pastry shop. (One can only imagine what Carême, its inventor, would say.) The book was a parody project as well as a nod to her hybrid roots.

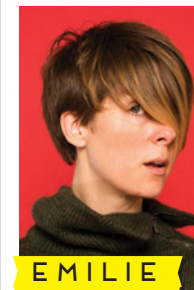
Fascinated by the idea of food as a multisensory experience, she has come to see her role as something more profound than just designing form or flavor. “It’s about designing taste,” she says. “How you taste depends on sights, smells, sounds, feelings. If a dish is meant to be nostalgic, how do I translate nostalgia? In the background music, the lighting, the scent of the room, the chair covers?” Recently she made a 60-foot-long spandex table for a dinner given for dance professionals. Her design turned the food into a participant, gently bouncing on the fabric surface as though it too were dancing.

Today her activities include the creative direction of restaurants—designing logos, menus, brand identity and so on. One particularly spicy client is Play, a bar in New

York’s Museum of Sex that opened in October. It’s an experiential space for lounging, checking out the steamy books in the library and imbibing drinks such as a viscous concoction that you lick off a dish that has the texture of skin.

Last summer Baltz and Brétilot teamed up to teach a one-week workshop on culinary design in French and English at the ESAD in Reims. It was such a success that the school plans to offer it again next summer. Which just goes to show: Playing with your food is no longer taboo. It can even be a form of sustenance. **f**

Profile



EMILIE BALTZ

WHO: French-American photographer, food artist and deep thinker.

WHAT: A special interest in how everything in the environment—from lighting to sound to emotion—determines one’s experience of taste. By designing the environment, she designs taste.

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