Prototyping

Design Kitchen

Food design in practice and in principle.

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The central character of the animated film, Ratatouille, is a rat who goes on to become one of the best chefs in France. It's a classic Disney saga of the underdog winning against all odds who believes in his idol's motto that "Anyone can cook". Anton Ego, the villainous hard to please food critic, is the character who makes the best of chefs drop dead - literally! A Chicago-based food columnist once deployed the character's name as a pejorative verb, asking New York Times critic Pete Wells on Twitter whether it was cynical "to Anton Ego" Guy Fieri's old Manhattan establishment.

For most of the film, Ego is the villian with a coffin shaped office with a selective taste. But things take a turn, when Ego samples some very good Ratatouille prepared by a talented rat. That dish transports Ego back to his childhood, reminds him of his mother's cooking, and ends up eliciting a follow-up critique, which he reads out loud for the audience:

> *But there are times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defense of the new. The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations. The new needs friends. Last night, I experienced something new: an extraordinary meal from a singularly unexpected source. To say that both the meal and its maker have challenged my preconceptions about fine cooking is a gross understatement.*
>
> *They have rocked me to my core. In the past, I have made no secret of my disdain for Chef Gusteau's famous motto, "Anyone can cook." But I realize, only now do I truly understand what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist; but a great artist can come from anywhere. It is difficult to imagine more humble origins than those of the genius now cooking at Gusteau's, who is, in this critic's opinion, nothing less than the finest chef in France. I will be returning to Gusteau's soon, hungry for more.*

While working on this thesis I had my supervisor and faculty 'Anton Ego' my work in the best way. The names on the right have had a bold impact on the outcome of this thesis and the creative confidence in my practice. These people were true friends of all my new ideas that have steered my career trajectory towards an enjoyable direction. Bonne Zabolotney's guidance transformed me from my toughest critic into a confident and unafraid maker of things.

My parents unconditional support and the way they challenged my perceptions of 'perfect work' freed me up to truly explore my potential. This thesis is an extraordinary part of my creative journey and I am beyond excited for you to savor it. *Bon Apetit!*

–
Soumya, Food Designer

Bonne Zabolotney

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how visual communication can be used to celebrate, discuss and brand humans' playful and precarious interactions with food. Cooking up a niche visual design practice driven by food is a challenging task because food experiences are complex and constantly evolving. For someone who comes from a rich, diverse and geographically vast country like India, there is a scope for abundant inspiration but with a set of challenges. The existing discourse around food lacks literacy — specifically visual literacy. There is constant 'food exchange' happening globally but the rapid scale of that has led to lost narratives and mixed up meanings. This thesis explores a design practice that reflects on humanity's deep connections with food. It's a deeply personal practice that uncovers and reveals the wonder of food as constructed by humans. It aims to create a body of visual work that enlightens, educates and entertains. Concentrated communication design-based studio explorations, on a personal and commercial scale, inform the exercise to represent my interactions with food visually. My design research methods include photo analysis, case studies, observation and personal reflection through making. The thesis sets guiding principles/systems to capture what design can do for food and vice-versa. My studio projects explored ways to revitalize our connection to the foods we eat. My research culminates in a practice that I call Culinarian Design. This practice focuses on experiences of edible artifacts reflecting on themes of culture, culinary living, and nostalgia.

Visual Design Food People Evocative Object Order in Chaos Culture Identity

INTRODUCTION

Food and design as an intentional practice

Your morning begins with breakfast, fueling up with a hot cappuccino while walking to work, sharing stories with friends over lunch breaks and spending supper time with your family. Food occupies a seemingly mundane position in all our lives (Bell & Valentine, 1997). However food is more than just an ordinary resource for sustenance. Food, much like parts of design, is visual, functional, tangible and has taste. It dictates and reflects our personal being, social structures and the future of the world. While food shapes identities, cultures and society; design revamps them from time to time. My research combines food and visual design as an intentional practice to explore food as an evocative, social, cultural, political, personal and place based object.

Growing up in an Indian household, my childhood was full of food experiences that are indelible memories. My hometown, New Delhi, is known for its rich culinary past and present. It's a city where streets are branded with the name of food businesses they house (Parathe vaali gully)[1], generations of a family keep running a food business to preserve their occupational heritage and tell stories of survival (Khan chaha, Haldirams)[2] and where every home kitchen houses centuries of tradition, order and relationships in the form of food. Visual design parallels food culture in the way that it defines cities, social structures, and personal stories. It extensively and meticulously communicates, preserves, and nourishes those interactions fueled by food.

Before finding my way to Vancouver, I lived in the same city as my parents, working in a design studio for three years on briefs that weren't challenging or intriguing, but paid the bills. Life was comfortable but it also felt monotonous. To combat this monotony, I made a list of things I liked and food was a recurring theme. I gravitated towards food when I was sad, happy or stressed. A lot of key moments were around food. A lot of my best early visual design work[3] was also food-inspired. I was keeping a journal recording my travels through food moments. But it wasn't intentional yet. I wasn't seeing food through a designer's eye.

Fig 1. The street signage reading 'Parathe Wali Gali' in Suburban Delhi, India

Fig2. A packet of 'Haldiram's' Indian snack food, Bon Apetit

The world experienced and documented a shift in relationships to food as COVID confined people to their homes. Banana bread, dalgona coffee and sourdough starters were not only trendy instagram reels but a chapter in recent human history that emphasized food as a comfort zone, area of discovery, delight and gave a new meaning to survival. We collectively witnessed an exploration of food as more than just a subconscious daily chore. My mother, who hated cooking, started innovating in her kitchen, just like an artist[4]. Her focus shifted from only nourishing her family, to presentation, newness and creating capture worthy moments through her cooking to make isolation eventful. That was the beginning of me intentionally capturing food moments through visual design media like photographs and illustrations.

There are so many food moments, big or small, that make us who we are. There are varied ways to think about food or think through food. There are even more ways to engage with it – through making, growing, reading and designing with food. How does one design through/for and with food? This thesis offers a design praxis that integrates food into design and vice-versa. It's a gastronomic adventure of how food culture and identity meet in a big stew. It's gonna be fun, insightful and full of conversation to accompany you in the kitchen.

Fig 3. My early visual - food - design work

[4] *My mother's quaratine 3 ingridient Mango sorbet recipe:*

Ingredients;
4 heaping cups frozen mango
1/4 cup honey or sugar
2 Tbsp fresh lime juice

Instructions
Place frozen mango in a food processor and pulse until you achieve small shreds. Scrape down the sides and add the honey and lime juice. Mix again until food processor begins to run smoothly, scraping down the sides as needed. Once there are very few mango pieces visible, leave the processor on for at least 1 minute to achieve the creamiest consistency!
Enjoy immediately! Alternatively, for a firmer sorbet, transfer to a sealed container and place in the freezer for 2-3 hours, or until ready to serve.
Keeps in the freezer for up to 2 weeks!

INTERSECTIONS OF FOOD AND DESIGN

What can design do for food?

When I started thinking about the intersections of food and design, I began by first breaking down the role design plays in our world. Design allows us to uncover interesting insights and solve valuable challenges through experimentation and research. It allows us to capture conversations and moments into visible and functional artifacts. Design enables communication and interaction. It invites users, thinkers or makers to address any or food related issues in a tangible way. Designers can use food as a familiar and relatable tool to record human lives, make them better and elevate the world's culinary futures. [4]

Albert Fuster states that design can promote food to be understood as culture and, doing so, to enhance the meaning of our lives and our traces on the world (DFID, 2018). As a visual communication designer, not only do I find expressing my ideas through food natural, I am also curious about exploring how food enables communication. In enhancing the meaning of our lives - food dictates our choices, lifestyles, how we relate to others and how society functions. Design is the sourdough starter for those implications of food. It enables, influences and enhances the meaning of food in our lives and how we relate to our environments.

Fig 4. Mind mapping multiple roles of a designer

Design is a tool of communication, a technical process and an act of creativity. It dictates lifestyles, collective futures and strives to make everyday life better. Throughout my design career, I have observed that aesthetics play a materialistic role in everyday life, but also in design and food production. One role of design is also to elevate the aesthetics of our everyday interactions. In her thesis, Carolyn Voigh writes, “Where taste is expressed as a register of the aesthetic quality of the bourgeoisie, food is seen as a communication artifact, a cultural process, a particular expression of class, manner and lifestyle (Carolyn Voight, 1996)." Her inquiry about contemporary associations about “good taste” and “good living” help me see food and design as parallel disciplines. It grounds my thinking to further explore how elements of the process of design, visual design in specific, can compliment food and shape our food futures. In the complicated and sometimes conflicting spaces of ‘good aesthetics/taste” and a culturally respectful creative practice, I am navigating my way around reflecting on food as a design discipline. Take for example, the usage of copper as a culinary metal. My mother drinks out of a specific copper vessel, saying Ayurveda recommends eating out of bronze vessels and storing water in copper ones. Copper specifically, as it aligns the chakras in the body by positively charging the water. Ancient Egyptians also stored water in copper and used it to construct water pipelines, cooking utensils and cutlery. Modern scientists have also recognised the bacteria killing powers of the metal. Today, it has come to be branded as the shining new accent metal of choice in modern kitchens – for its durable quality, neutral and warm tones. Design has somewhere leaked into the narrative of copper and bronze, springboarded off the ancient knowledge of the metal’s healing powers in relation to food and crafted a new narrative of expression of class, manner and lifestyle.

In “Deciphering a Meal”, Mary Douglas writes, “ if food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed” (Douglas, 1972). In India, where I come from, how we cook and eat is code for seasons, events, social hierarchies, ideas of purity and holiness and in recent times personal wellness. Food provides structure at a personal, social, political and economic level. We structure our day around meals and plan diets from time to time to meet our goals. Families have food as a planned event - varying from sweetmeats [5] at a festival to a simple 'Saatvik' diet during mourning periods [6].

Fig 5. The widely famous 'chappan bhog' or 56 sweetmeats made for relgious occasions in Hindu culture

Fig 6. A sattvic diet is meant to include food and eating habit that is "pure, essential, natural, vital, energy-giving, clean, conscious, true, honest, wise

Humans practice division of class and gender through the lens of food. Politics embodies food as identity. Bread and tea have caused national riots and unraveled whole economies and empires. Clearly, food is one of the basic organizational structures upon which society is built and based.It’s an expression of culture. In his book, Sorting Things Out - Classification and its Consequences, Geoffrey C. Bower pens down how to classify is human, how it shapes our worldviews and social interactions (Bowker & Star, 2000). He references a definition of infrastructure[7] (Star and Rohleder 1996).

Embeddedness: Food culture is embedded. It is an integral part of the societal systems.

Transparency: It’s transparent to use, basic rules govern the act of cooking and eating (although they may be culturally diverse) but the premise of cooking and consuming don’t need to be re-invented.

Reach or Scope: Food isn’t a singular event in the timeline of the world. Food has an important “temporal dimension,” more so than, say, clothing. “Food can develop its sequence and display its structure over time more quickly than clothing.” (Passariello, 1990)

Learned as part of membership: Food is encountered as a community (family, professional, or friends). What you know about food is knowledge handed down to you by the members of your community. Strangers learn about your food to learn about your identity and you become a participant in a new community everytime you encounter food differently.

Links with conventions of practice: Food as an infrastructure follows conventions of a practice specific to where it is situated locally at the time of an encounter. An example of this is the rigid belief on not consuming alcohol or garlic and onion during certain holy days in the Hindu culture. Or the craft of brewing authentic soy sauce passed down from ancestors to the only surviving business in Japan.

Embodiment of standards: Food is modified with scope and often by conflicting conventions, and plugs into new infrastructures in a transparent and standardized fashion. Take for example reinvention of classic recipes or even the practice of molecular gastronomy - both involve understanding existing infrastructures and modification using new techniques but maintaining the standard of flavors and source structures.

	Dimension	Definition
1	Embeddedness	Infrastructure is "sunk" into, inside of, other structures, social arrangements and technologies
2	Transparency	Infrastructure is transparent to use, in the sense that it does not have to be reinvented each time or assembled for each task, but invisibly supports those tasks
3	Reach or scope	This may be either spatial or temporal—infrastructure has reach beyond a single event or one-site practice
4	Learned as part of membership	Strangers and outsiders encounter infrastructure as a target object to be learned about. New participants acquire a naturalized familiarity with its objects as they become members
5	Links with conventions of practice	Infrastructure both shapes and is shaped by the conventions of a community of practice, e.g. the ways that cycles of day-night work are affected by and affect electrical power rates and needs
6	Embodiment of standards	Modified by scope and often by conflicting conventions, infrastructure takes on transparency by plugging into other infrastructures and tools in a standardized fashion
7	Built on an installed base	Infrastructure does not grow *de novo*: it wrestles with the "inertia of the installed base" and inherits strengths and limitations from that base
8	Becomes visible upon breakdown	The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks

Fig 7. Defining Infrastructure

Built on an installed base: Food is handed down as a family heirloom, interpreted and re-interpreted continuously, discovered through experiments in modern kitchens or other times, re-invented with advancing technology . But the base for these experiments and its evolution remains constant. Everything related to food was once invented by someone, and we're continuously creating new stories that will eventually become 'history' in future. Chefs turn back to their mothers and grandmothers kitchen for the basics and rely on building their practice over a universal set of basics.

Becomes visible upon breakdown: Food culture becomes visible upon breakdown. Imagine all farmers of the world one day stop growing vegetables. How will we run our households, communities and countries? What happens when a flood causes a break in the supply chain and you can't find your favorite ice cream brand in stores for months? Or your mother gets tired and refuses to cook anymore and all the men in the family are forced to learn how to cook? In Hindu mythology, Goddess Parvati and God Shiva are said to maintain the equilibrium of the Universe. The Goddess took care of all the material needs of Earth like food. However, her consort belittled her as he believed all material possessions to be "Maya"- an illusion. This rift caused Parvati to withdraw from the world in order to prove the importance of her work. This plunged the world into darkness and hunger. To end the sufferings of subjects the Goddess was reincarnated as Goddess Annapura[8] (the Hindu deity of food and nourishment). In modern times, the Farmer's Protests in India during COVID to repeal the government laws that would leave them at the mercy of corporations, was a historical movement that showed how food can unite people across the globe and unravel governments. These and many other such examples illustrate normally invisible quality of food as visible infrastructure.

Is fixed in modular increments, not all at once or globally: Food culture cannot be uprooted, modified or updated in a standardized fashion or all at once. Food means different things with every changing latitude and longitude. Change in food culture takes careful considerations of other systems (tradition, politics, economics, personal taste etc) involved.

Fig 8. Goddess Annapurna as depictied in regional Hindu visuals.
Annapurna is a combination of two words- 'Anna' meaning food and 'purna' meaning 'filled completely'. Annapurna is the goddess of food and kitchen. She is an avatar of Goddess Parvati who is the wife of Lord Shiva. She is the goddess of nourishment and never lets her devotees stay without food. She is also considered to be the goddess of Kashi in Uttar Pradesh. Kashi or Varanasi is called the city of light as the goddess does not only provide nourishment to the body, it provides nourishment to the soul in the form of enlightenment. She gives us the energy to attain knowledge.

As illustrated above, food culture meets the definition of an infrastructure. And infrastructures require maintenance and membership, in which design and a designer play an integral role. What is the designer's role in the embeddedness of food culture? How does visual design assist food in being a part of different social arrangements? - It is by designing signages, by branding food cultures, ideas and traditions - visual design helps to socially situate food. Different techniques and processes support and assist and amplify concepts related to food. Design can help revive distorted food stories and reverse the disappearance of culinary traditions (Pallavi, 2020). This thesis is an exploration of those design techniques and processes to tell and reflect on all food stories.

What can food do for design?

Food like good design is pure joy; It makes me happy to be in the world. It has drama, textures, worlds and nuances, sensations and characters. It has a rich visual character. It uses form, texture and color to invoke emotions[9]. Food is itself an act of design (Maffei & Parini, 2010). Here I would like to also quote Wendell Berry, who says,
Eating (food) is an agricultural act

And Micheal Polan, who adds:
It is an ecological act
It is a political act.

A plate of food embodies ideas in an aesthetic form which is material and physical, and has its own specific technical and productive relationship with its users and society. To think about food as an intentional act means engaging in a discussion of our society's collective and individual identity. This analysis of food related behaviors of the world can be insightful and inspiring for the creative process of design. Hence it calls for research, discovery and expertise. Every individual has a unique and personal idea of the relationship with food. As a visual designer, I strongly feel the need to study, research and document these associations. It can help designers point out knotty problems in areas like world hunger, lost histories and authentic representations of culinary stories. Design can facilitate a discourse for understanding larger food systems, local food economies and food waste. And lastly it can enable and disable conditions and traditions related to food like gender roles, economic disparities and personal identities.

Fig 9. A fun excercise for the reader

Create a list of foods that connect you to your family or home. Choose one of the foods from your list and quick write a memory about that food: Who makes it? When and where is it eaten? Or write a favourite memory connected with the food. When you are finished, close your eyes and remember the smell, sound, and taste of the food. Write a poem from these various memories and feelings (adapted from Christensen, 2006).

In "Food as an Art Form" (1974a), Douglas continues to present food in (at least) its **double role as nourishment and symbol system.** She suggests that **food is in fact an "applied art."** To analyze it successfully we must distinguish its nutritional from its aesthetic components. She raises questions of comparison between food and other applied arts, such as clothing and architecture, and suggests that the tension between form and function in somehow of a different nature regarding food. **Food has an important "temporal dimension,"** more so than, say, clothing. "Food can develop its sequence and display its structure over time more quickly than clothing. Like the fruit fly which is so useful in genetics because of the speed of its reproductory processes, food is very well adapted to this kind of analysis" (p. 84).

In this brief quote, Douglas states three meaningful complexities about our relationship with food. To begin with, dialogue and coquetry has existed between art and food since earlier periods. There have been great artists in history, such as Leonardo da Vinci or Gioachino Rossini, who have been cooks with extraordinary creativity. Artists have constantly flirted with and philosophized on the subject of food. Food, because of its moldable nature, and cooking has been used in diverse ways by visual artists and designers. In the 20th century several artists such as Janine Antoni, Joseph Beuys, Allan Krapov, Antoni Miralda, Alicia Rios, Martha Rosler, Daniel Spoerri, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Rirkit Tiravanija, used cooking, food and the act of eating as a means of plastic and/or conceptual representation. I see food as an act of creative thinking. Of creating an order. A designer likes to build order out of chaos. Food is not just a physical material that ceases to exist post consumption. It is a complex, tangled subject within which a designer can play multiple roles [10] (The Food & Design Manifesto, 2018). Within the food universe, designers can function as observers to point and address problems , serve as a link between professionals in the field to solve them and become experts in the shared realms of food and design. Food is a window into human behaviors, societal structures and superstructure of culture. The process of design can hugely benefit by building on insights provided by this window.

Secondly, food clearly plays a double role - as nourishment and as a symbol system. One definition of visual design is also a symbol system that communicates and denotes the complexity of cultures and schools of thought. What lies at the intersection of the two worlds is my practice - A food design practice. My studio, The Design Kitchen, explores food as a collaborative and intertwined element and concept to a visual communication practice. It stretches the boundaries of food as more than just inspiration subject matter and explores making with it, through it and for it. The aim is to keep interrogating spaces of food, culture & identity to carve out a niche communication design practice.

At last Douglas mentions the temporal dimension of food, which is beautifully documented in visual art by the memento mori paintings of rotting fruit depicting concepts of human mortality. Food as an infrastructure can be studied over time to understand the consequences of its being on humans and to design for the evolving nature of the culinary world. Food waste, for example, is a subject where design can work to unknot problems by studying food from a time based perspective.

These theoretical frameworks ground my thinking towards what the disciplines of food and design can do for each other when and if integrated into an intentional and intersection practice. My studio practice explores this integrated food design practice in the personal, commercial and experiential spaces.

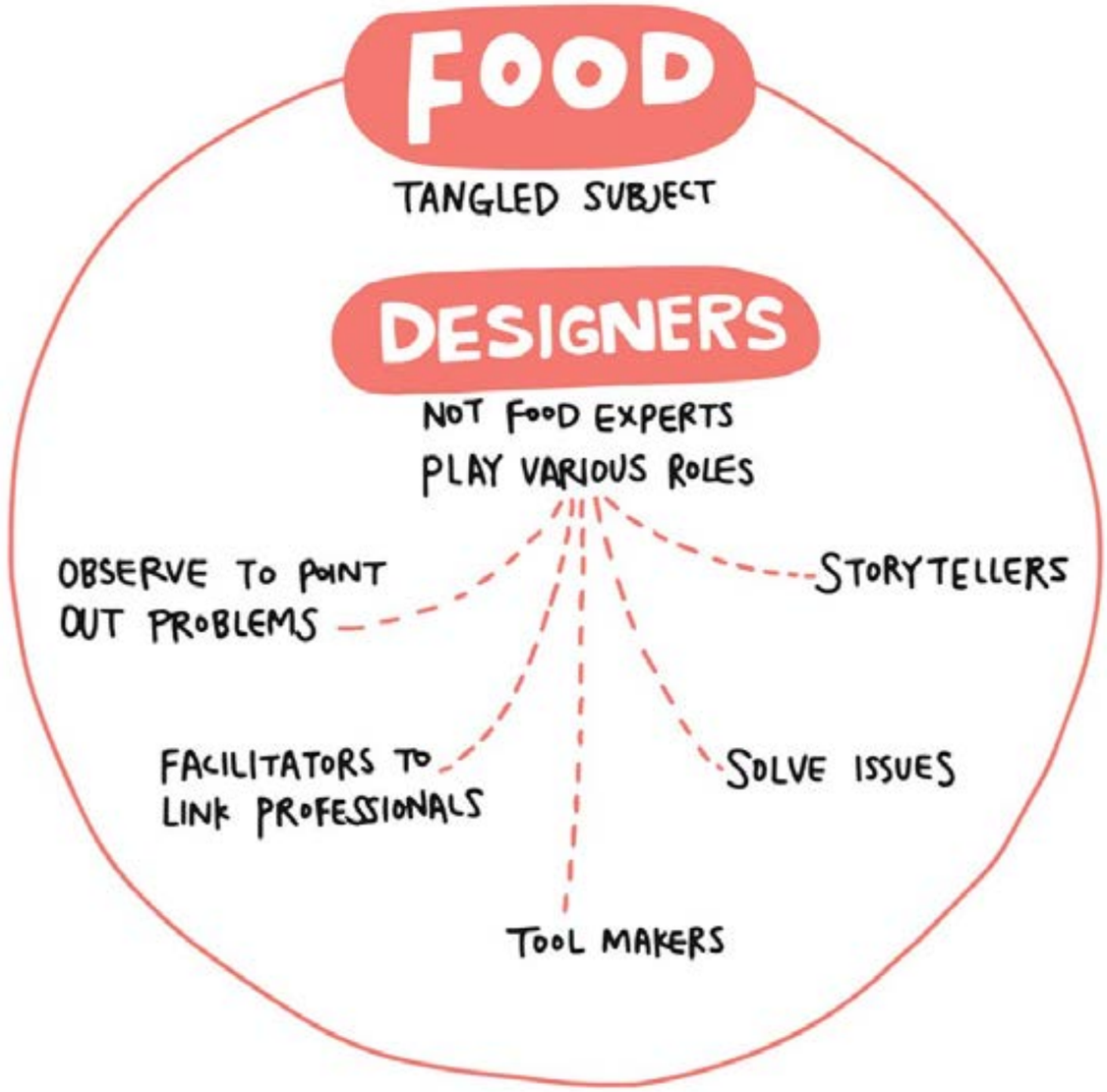


Fig 10. Mapping the role of designers in the tangled subject of food.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Objectives

The intersections of design and food have many applications; planting design in the sphere of food can affect the way people look at and experience food, which can influence the way they value it. Design thinking functions on the processes of observation, ideation and expression. What happens when we are able to apply design thinking to the tangled and vast subject of food? Heston Blumenthal's material investigations combine playing with science and food and give birth to new gourmet food pairings, Andy Warhol uses food as inspiration in his works like the Campbell Soup Can paintings to comment on mass production and consumerism and contemporary sustainable businesses are working actively with food waste to create new products like leather, crockery and even skincare. It is clear that food as a topic has a vast scope for a designer to play varied roles in. I am intrigued by the possibility of combining my passion (food) and my professional skills as a visual communication designer to create impactful narratives and experiences. I aim to explore typography, photography, illustration, styling, publication design and elements of interaction design to create experiences that facilitate how we relate to food and our environment.

Apart from a professional practice, this is also a personal journey of discovering food as a material and a part of daily living. As with pens, paints and paper, food can be equally utilized as a tool and medium of expression to affect the way people look at and experience food. I remember stories from my first ever art mentor about how in an ancient time, artists used food materials to create pigments for painting. Turmeric was used to create shades of yellow, coffee grounds were (and still) are used for the color brown and purple dyes were extracted from red cabbages and blueberries. As one of my first projects, I experimented with creating my own food dyes using food waste in my kitchen. This action was a visual stimulus for me to think about my associations with the food I knew as more than just an edible artifact. I began to look at it as an object that had a visual, olfactory, gustatory and tactile character. While extracting color from coffee I could smell the 'Filter Kaapi' of Bangalore from my early college days, the yellow from the turmeric brought back vivid memories of my mother painstakingly feeding me 'Haldi Doodh' (Turmeric milk) to help heal a fractured bone and the saffron left subtle orange stains on my fingers and the evoked smell of my nani's holiday special 'Kheer'[11]

Fig 11. Kheer (Rice Pudding)

Ingredients (4 servings)
½ cup + 1 tbsp basmati rice
1 tsp ground cardamom
½ tsp ground cinnamon
Scant ½ cup superfine sugar
3 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
3 tbsp unsalted pistachios

Step 1
Place the rice, spices, sugar, milk, and cream in a large saucepan and set over a medium-low heat. Bring to the boil –then turn the heat down to a whisper and cook for about 30 minutes, stirring frequently to make sure the rice doesn't stick and burn. When the rice is nearly done, it will start to bubble and burp more furiously and will need more attention from you. When the rice is tender, take it off the heat and spoon into a serving bowl. Allow to cool, then cover and chill in the fridge until cold.
Step 2
Just before serving, grind a tablespoon of sugar, the pistachios as finely as you can, using a mortar and pestle or electric spice grinder. Sprinkle and serve.

"Epistemologically, an attention to food, place, and identity is an acknowledgement of embodied or somatic and visceral knowing that underscores its importance and possibilities for its use both in and out of curriculum studies. It is a celebration of, and attunement to, the everyday experiences in our lives. An attention to food, as an evocative object, is an obvious link or "way in" for studying about place and identity"(Hurren & Hasebe-Ludt, 2011). This quote forms the basis of the knowledge of my practice. It provides the ways of igniting a food-design practice, inspirations, and external forces which prompt me to look at food as an evocative object.

Here Wanda Hurren and Erika Hasebe-Ludt refer to the place of food in education and curriculum, the pleasures and paradoxes of food, how food is linked to local and global movements and how food is linked to our ever changing identities. Their inquiry into food as an evocative object piqued my interest in recording my interactions with food and reflecting on my culinary culture influencing my sense of self and identity. I started using photography and writing to document my daily meals as an immigrant in Vancouver, illustrations to reflect my daily musing through food and typography to create evocative emotive images using food. This reflective making fed the beginning of my intentions to fabricate a practice based on food, culture and visual design. I began to see opportunities in terms of storytelling, merchandising, branding, advertising and all other forms of visual communication to function as a living memory of our food experiences and cultures. As Hurren and Hasebe-Ludt quote Madhu Prakash who says,

"Every place on our diverse earth has its own special and distinctive soil whose particular and peculiar tending explains the fabulous diversity of every one of the earth's millions of "local cultures." The health of local soil has always depended on the shared stories people have told each other— keeping them alive with daily telling and neighborly talk— he living memory that is the "stuff " and "soil" of every local culture."

I believe that visual communication design has the potential to function as more than just an aesthetic tool in the context of preserving the 'living memory' of our 'local cultures' in the sphere of the food we consume and the soil it comes from. Speaking of diversity on Earth, I have lived and eaten on many lands on Earth. The gustatory experiences that come with travel and a near-nomadic life have given me a taste of various food cultures. Within my family, my parents come from two different states and bring to the table nourishing stories and food from their terroir. Terroir is a term that refers to how certain places produce certain identifiable qualities in wine and agricultural produce, to the climate that makes particular types of this produce prosper there and nourish its human and other inhabitants and give it a distinctive taste or flavor based on the natural conditions of soil and topography (Barber, 2006). Amy Trubek has explored different ways of seeing how the definition of terroir is taken up in the agricultural and culinary worlds. She notes that, "the broader definition of terroir considers place as much as earth. According to this definition, the people involved in making wine, the wine-making traditions of a region, and the local philosophy of flavor are all part of terroir (Trubek, 2009). Thinking about this humanist definition of terroir in the context of my food encounters directed me to reflect on what has influenced my food identity. What and who influences my personal terroir?

My mother was brought up in a strict vegetarian household, where she learned how to make the crispiest Aloo parathas, fragrant dals and tart tomatoey Punjabi curries. My father on the other hand introduced me to the flavors of Rajasthani food on our annual trips to his hometown and also introduced me to eating meat which is a taste he probably developed in his bachelor days of living away from home. After I turned 18, I studied and worked in different parts of India which widened my knowledge of the culinary diversity of my country. Having grown up with avid travelers, I was also fortunate to travel across the globe and develop a taste for the cuisines of the world. These food experiences have shaped my current identity and how I see the world. I have seen cultures, gender roles, communities, corporate and personal identities being expressed through food. Food is the medium and visual design is the lens for how I see and capture these lived experiences. Food is a medium of discourse to understand how our world is structured. Food combined with design helps us to make links – with our histories, environment and with others. That practice can help us live better, tell stories well and create a literate food culture for the future. My objective with this thesis is to figure out principles on which the said visual food literacy can function and thrive into a viable commercial and personal practice.

Literature Review

Connecting theory to practice

Being a visual designer I took the call of mapping out the literature that informed my research and methodology. The following section maps out the core concepts of five readings that introduced me to many theories that I have referenced throughout this document. These theories have opened up a multitude of avenues where my practice can explore the many intersections of design, visuals and food.

The readings in order of the appearing visualisations are:

1. Consuming Geographies - We Are Where We Eat [12]
David Bell and Gill Valentine

2. Anomalies, Analogies and Sacred Profanities: Mary Douglas on Food and Culture. [13]
Phyllis Passariello

3. Deciphering a meal [14]
Mary Douglas

4. Delicious: The Evolution of Flavour and How It Made Us Human[15]
Rob Dunn and Monica Sanchez

5. Bringing Curriculum Down to Earth The Terroir That We Are[16]
Wanda Hurren and Erika Hasebe-ludt

The literature enabled me to make connections between theoretical frameworks and my practice. And see food as a historical, cultural, functional and social artefact. The principles that emerged as a result of my research were based on the writings visualised in the coming pages.

Fig 12. Consuming Geographies - We Are Where We Eat
David Bell and Gill Valentine

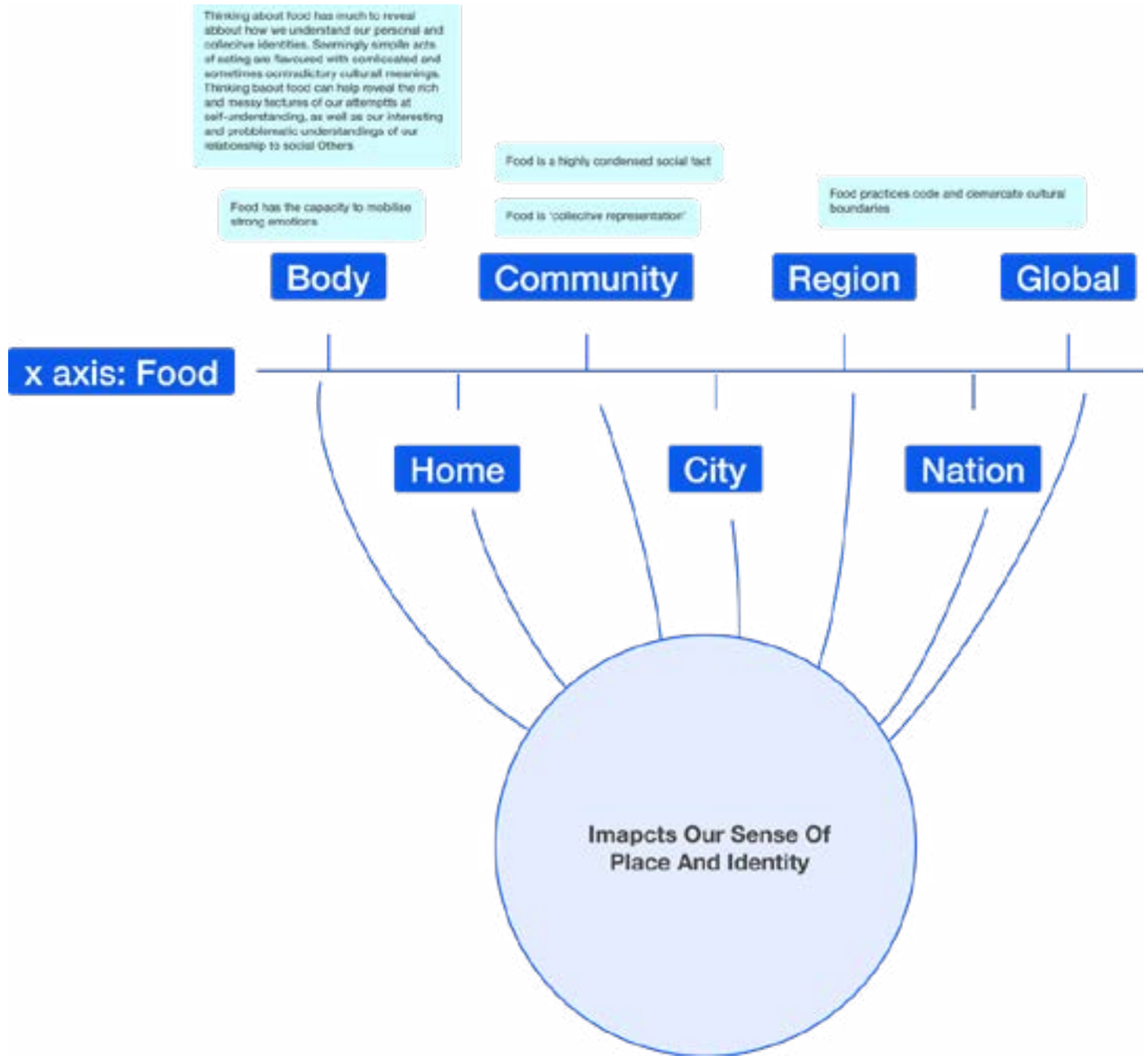


Fig 13. Anomalies, Analogies and Sacred Profanities: Mary Douglas on Food and Culture.
Phyllis Passariello

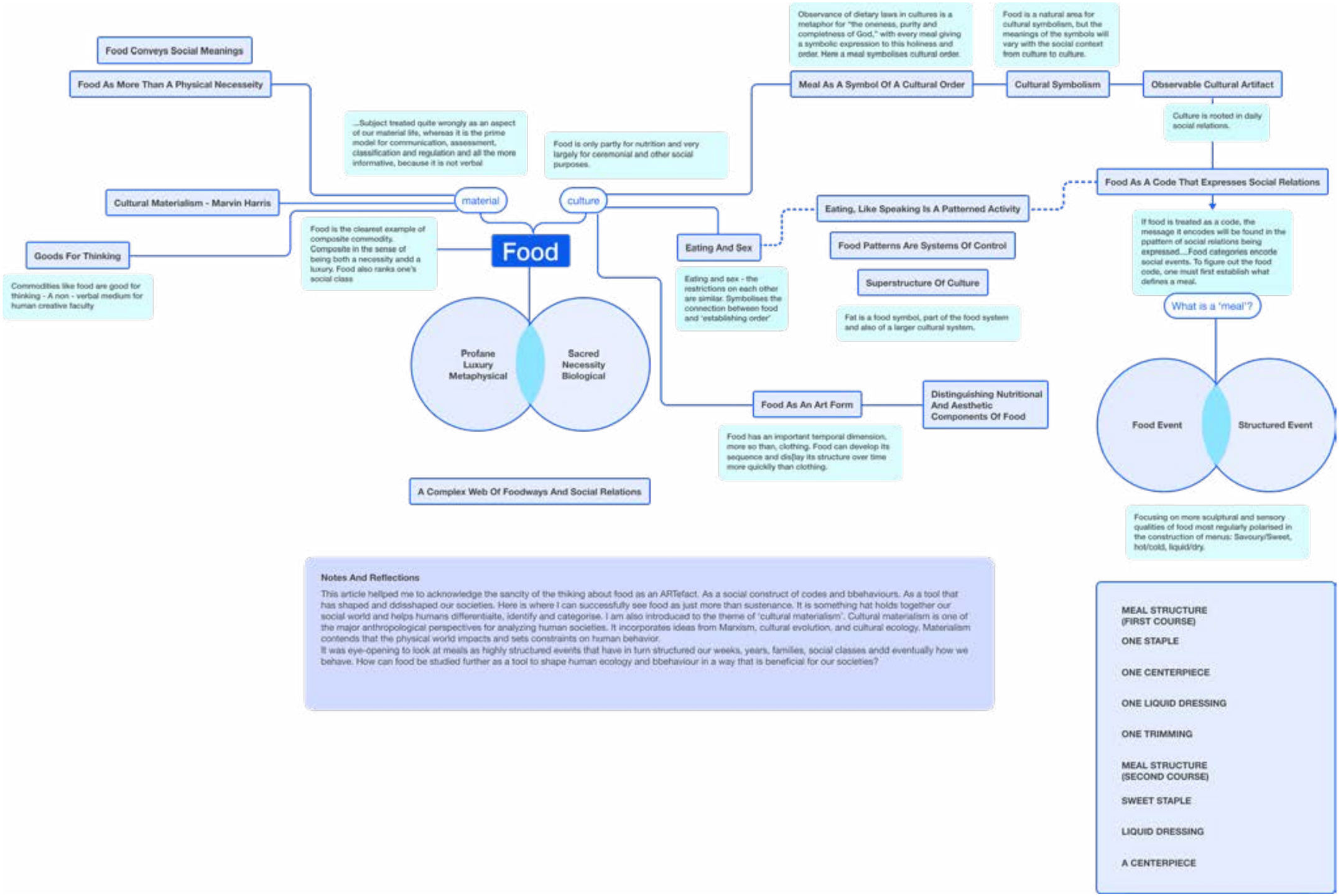


Fig 14. Deciphering a Meal
Mary Douglas

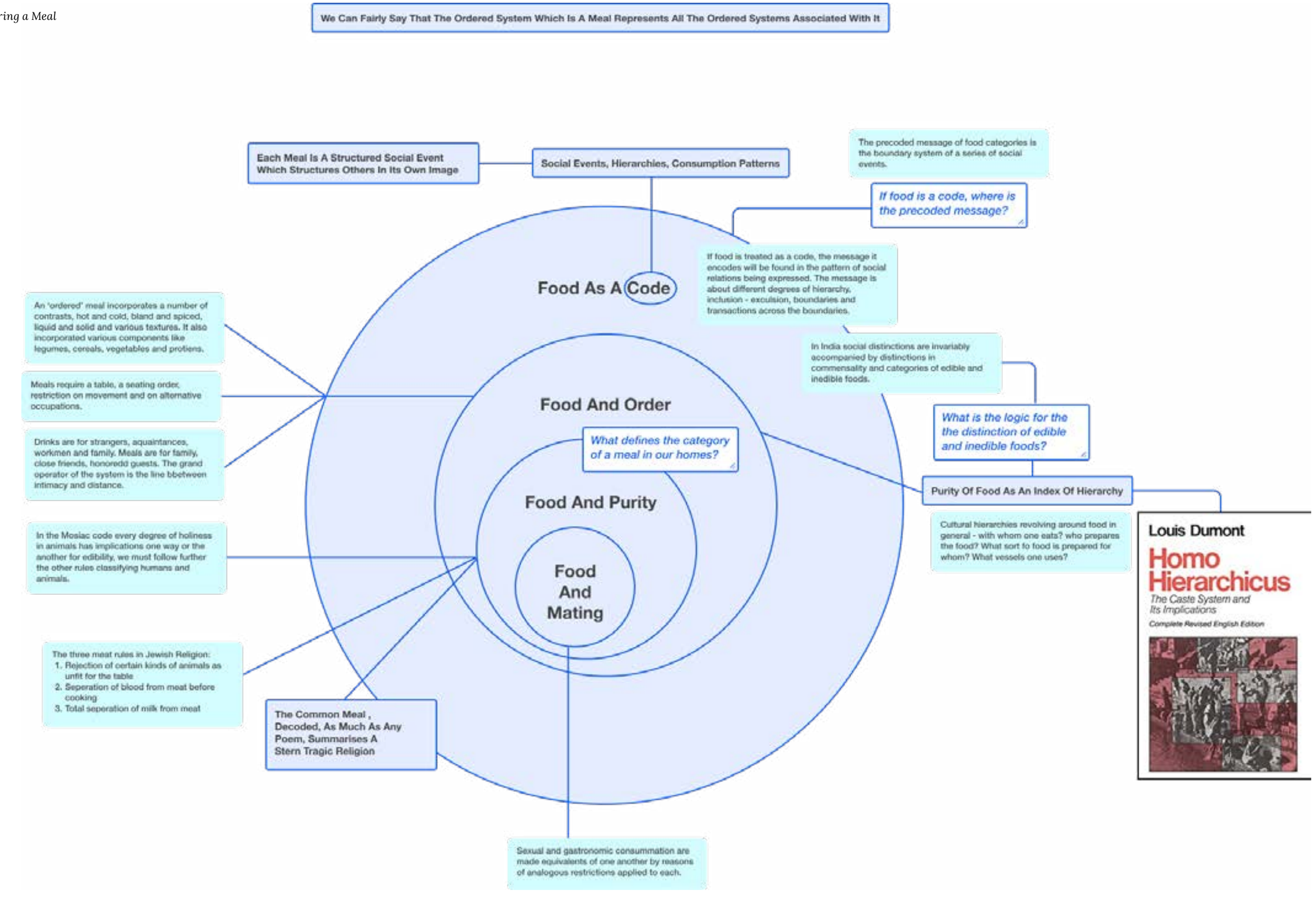


Fig 15. Delicious: The Evolution of Flavor and How It Made Us Human
Rob Dunn and Monica Sanchez

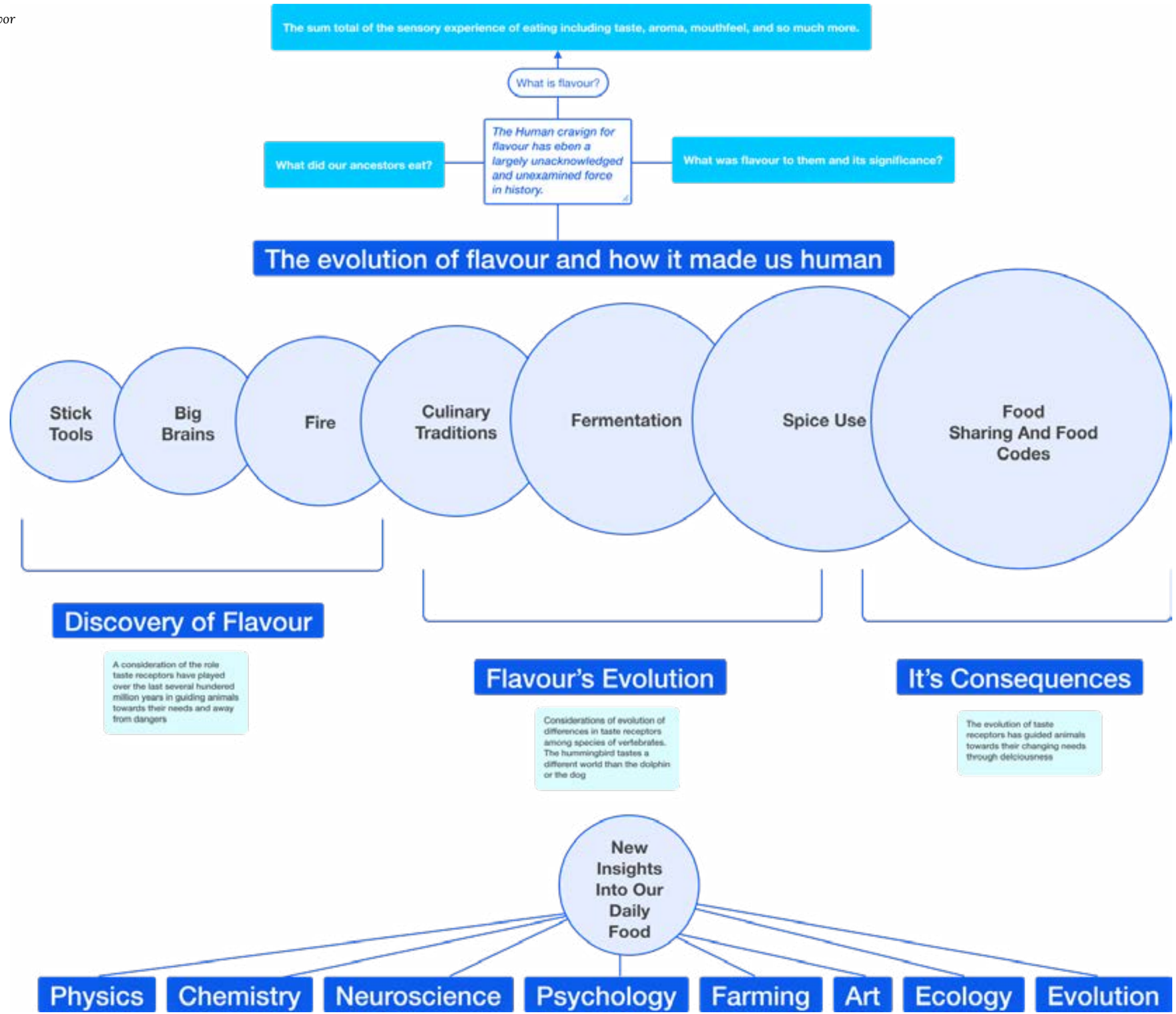
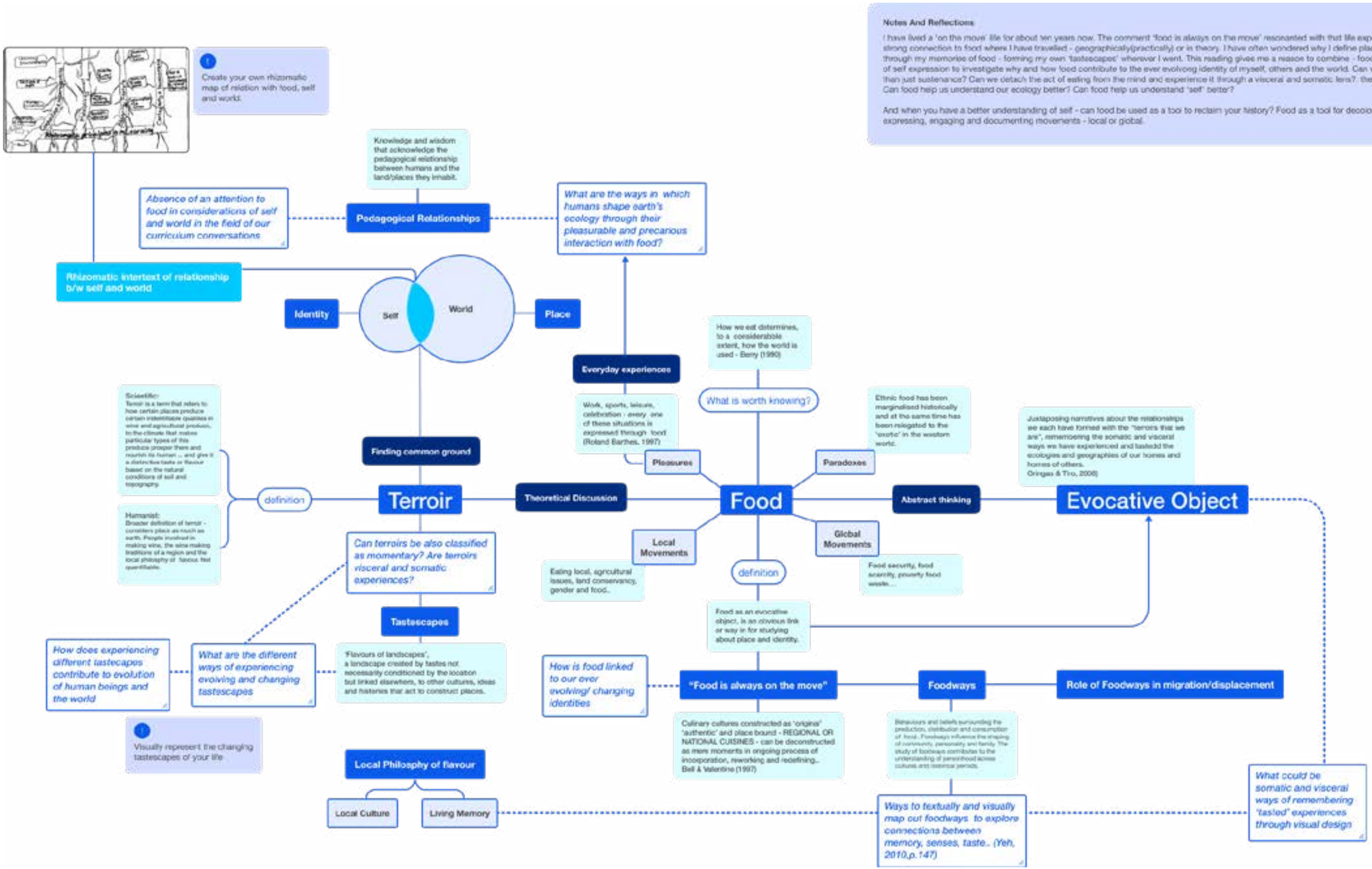


Fig 16. Bringing Curriculum Down to Earth
The Terroir That We Are
Wanda Hurren and Erika Hasebe-ludt



QUESTIONS

While engaging with all the mapped out literature, my deep dive into the world of food began with continuously making, capturing and thinking about food. This led me to observe that design can capture gastronomic moments that speak powerfully about mankind's pleasurable and precarious interactions with food. As I began to unpack and understand the concepts of terroir, food, cultural materialism and evocative objects, I began to wonder what conversations about food and place within the context of cultural identities can reveal about people, their terroir and their lifestyles.

As my work began to explore the ways that food can be 'represented' through the lens of design I directed my practice towards exploring the following:

What principles can a food design practice that preserve cultures and tell unique stories be based on?

How can visual communication be used to decode the structures hidden behind food codes?

What values can food-inspired design function on and add to the way our world functions?

It emerged that the intent of my practice was to uncover how visual design can enable us to think about food as more than just sustenance. The strategy to begin my research and deep dive into Culinarian design was to start considering food as therapy, food as wit, food as conversation, food as play, food as order, food as chaos, food as relationships, food as identity. The possibilities were endless and that's what made the exploration of my food design practice riveting – creatively and intellectually.

METHODOLOGY

Perspectives/ I see food/ See through food

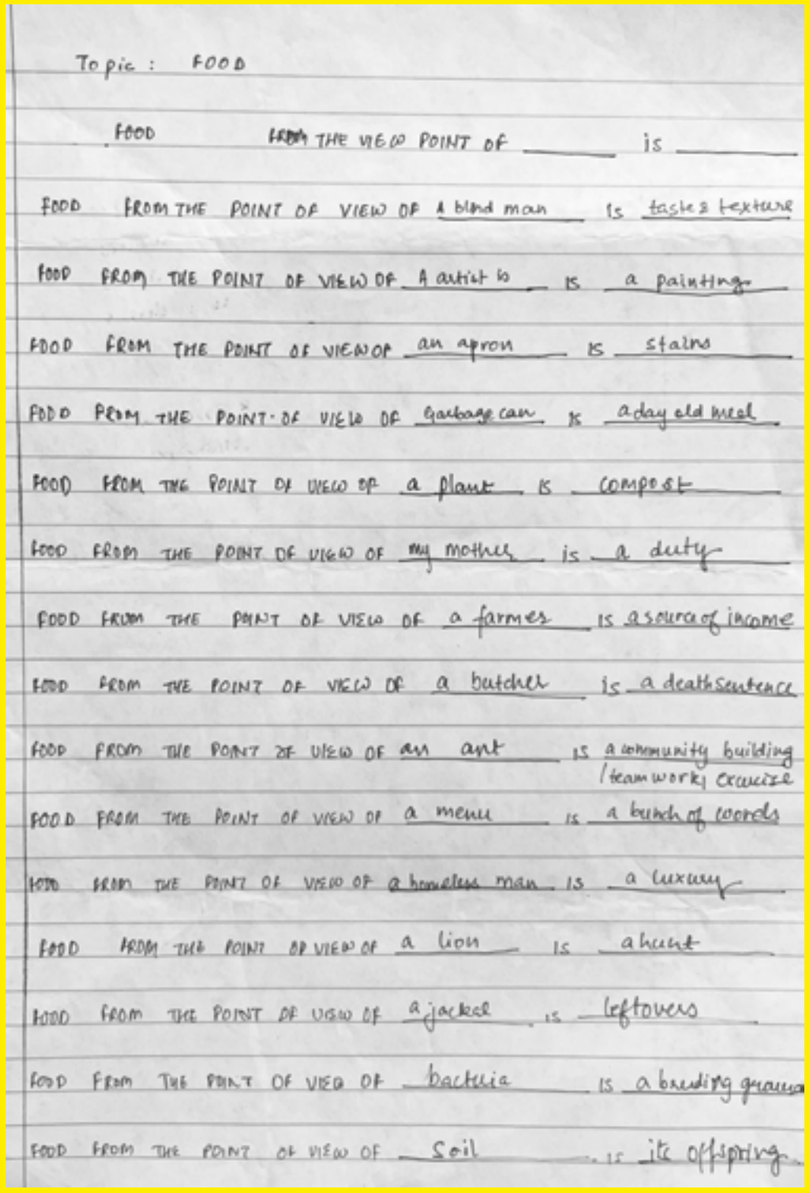


Fig 17. 'Point of View' excercise

In 2018, in a summer residency at School of Visual Arts in New York, under the guidance of Richard Wilde, I was introduced to a variety of visual literacy exercises. One of those exercises was called 'The Point of View'(Wilde & Wilde, 2000). As a visual designer this proved to be a great brainstorming tool, where you frame a topic from different points of views in a single sentence. I decided to apply it to the topic of food.[17] This was the beginning of me exploring 'food as more than just sustenance' and it proved to be a springboard to really engage with the subject. It gave me a glutinous insight into seeing food as more than just a means to survive. How does my mother see food? How does a landfill or a garbage can see food? What is food for an ant? What is it for an apron? As illustrated, food can be seen in a multitude of ways. Every being -living or dead-embodies food in a different way. It not only varies in taste but also encodes different cultures. So many points of views and one artifact, means there is scope for more than one way to design with, through and for food. And design can really help decode, communicate or even change what food stands for in its various contexts. This food design practice is focused towards developing cognition and metacognition towards our daily conscious and subconscious food interactions. Design can capture and mold the way we associate with food. It does so by capturing moments, moods and context in which food functions at a bodily, local or a global level.

Take for example Andy Warhol's silk screened portrait of Campbell's soup can. It is a realistic depiction of the iconic, mostly red and white Campbell's Soup can silk screened onto a white background. Why is an inelegant can of soup such a popular icon of modernism? Why document a soup can as a series of visuals? What does the portrait communicate? When the art critic G. R. Swenson asked Warhol in 1963 why he painted soup cans, the artist replied, "I used to drink it, I used to have the same lunch every day, for twenty years. Several stories mention that Warhol's choice of soup cans reflected his own avid devotion to Campbell's soup as a consumer. He was thought to have focused on them because they composed a daily dietary staple. Through his simple and realistic depictions of soup cans and coca-cola bottles Andy Warhol captured a modern food culture through pop art. Some even say it was his way to comment on the American capitalist culture. My take away from when I first saw the portrait at a gallery in Prague was simple - it was a pop culture icon painted in its most simple recognizable form. It told a personal story of the artist's relationship with a food item, it was an attempt to represent how 20th century American grocery aisles looked and probably a comment on the future food culture of canned food. Contrasting against Caravaggio's sensual baskets of fruit, Chardin's plush peaches, or Cézanne's vibrant arrangements of apples, the mundane Campbell's Soup Cans gave the art world a new chill visual language representing a modern food story. (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)

It all depends on how we choose to see food. George Nelson talks about visual literacy as "an ability of decoding non verbal messages." He saw this as an indispensable to our ability to think critically about our built in environment, so often referred to as "man-made" but which he wittily called "A world God never made." Nelson was quick to acknowledge this skill often confused with innate and mysterious traits like taste or talent. But he was convinced that we could learn to read images in the same way we learn to read words: through experience, exposure and practice. (Nelson et al., 2017)

Food, like design, has a rich visual character. Food from every kitchen, land and culture encodes a message within it. It can be an expression of care, gender roles, a commentary on the economic and political structure of the land or just a cultural story. Nelson talks about thinking critically about our built in environment and I see myself applying these principles of visual literacy to food. Although provided by nature, food as it exists today is "man-made", in the sense of the messages it encodes. It is a social product and a social fact. The way designers represent this social product can have a huge impact on how our food futures. Design can aid in developing a visual literacy around the subject of food through 'experience, exposure and practice.' How might a food-design practice embody those principles? Andy Warhol's simple act of recording his experience, exposure to modernity combined with his practice of commercial illustration and process of repetition is a solid example of design recording a food image that could be read in so many ways; that represented different cultural ways of knowing and told multiple stories.

If food is a ‘social man made product’, then how can design contribute to capturing moments that speak powerfully about identity? While on a weekend trip to Lonsdale Quay, I chanced upon the exhibit - “Feast for The Eyes: The Story of Food in Photography”. It accelerated the change in perspective towards food in my brain that had been set in motion since coming to Canada. Across commercial and artistic practices, the photographs expressed the formation of radical or stereotypical ideas, communities and identities through food. It inspired me to think about food as a social product and an extension of my aspirations. Walking around the exhibit opened the doors for me to explore how to combine design and food to record experiences and tell stories through my work in visual design.

Food People

Thinking about experiences and exposure in context of Nelson’s quote, pushed me to reflect upon my experiences with food. When did it all start? How did food inspire me? Am I food literate? What was the moment where I related to food as an expression of my identity? One action I did to answer these questions was to start recording my daily interactions with food through styling, photography, typography and illustration. I saw my work represent food as an extension of my life experiences; my identity. In a broader social context, food was an artifact with which I not only defined myself but also others and my surrounding environment. I also began actively reading and observing how food writers and critics wrote about their food experiences. Ardently began to follow articles in magazines like Bon Appetit[18], food content on NYT cooking and watching shows like Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat on Netflix. The common denominator or a pattern in the way these authors or presenters talked about food was the mention of taste or flavor. All of these people were flavor seekers. In seeking flavor, they were also discovering stories of terroir, personal connections to food and cultural food anecdotes that contributed to their evolving palates. Bon Appetit’s podcast ‘Food People’ asks this question- What makes you a food person? I think the human quest for flavor makes me a food person. That I can relate to the most powerful, impactful and defining moment of my being through food, makes me a food person. From living with my parents in Delhi to landing my dream projects with food business in Vancouver, the journey of tasting different food cultures, learning to care about far more than what’s on my plate and sharing stories through food culture has made me a food person. When people can define key moments of their life with food, then food becomes a medium of communication. Food people have this unique language of describing flavors, textures and aromas in a cultural and personal context. Flavor seeking is central to our biological and cultural evolution. The subject of food is a complex web science, history, anthropology and art woven into the story of what makes us human. Beyond doubt this web needs to be explored, expanded and built upon to discover new insights about our daily relationship with food.

Through the development of my food design practice, I was constantly intrigued by how food kept cropping up in every association I have with the outer world. Museum exhibits that document ancient tools, cutlery and bowls, photographs that document lavish family meals and famine, art that paints rotting fruit, brands that strive to represent food cultures and design that tries to knot out food problems in the world – all these demonstrate the story of food’s evolution into an evocative object. Our ancestors began with a very simple relationship with food - forage, share and eat what was available in its original form. They slowly began using tools to hunt and access food that would otherwise be unavailable. Then fire was discovered and that was the start of humans seeking more than sustenance from food– with fire they discovered flavor. They discovered spices, fermenting and from simply being foragers and gatherers in a few billion years humans became flavor and pleasure seekers. Discovery of fire led humans to differentiate themselves from animals through the process of cooking. Eventually cooking was also responsible for the development of agrarian societies, traditional gender roles and division of labor (Wrangham, 2021). In short, without our complex composite meals, we would still be chimpanzees tearing open raw meat and living in caves. Studying food in the light of human evolution in the book ‘Delicious’ made me think about how this transition, that was influenced by taste and other components of flavor, should be documented and studied through the lens of design (Dunn & Sanchez, 2021). As a budding food designer I find massive insight in how food writers, historians and researchers acknowledge and expand on the sweeping role of food in human interactions.

Fig 18. Shot of my snack and Bon Apetit

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Why visual communication and food?
How do I approach food design?

A great meal is prepared, presented and consumed: it lives on only in memory, and the residues of experience suffer an ignominious end. There is no score, no paint on canvas, no page of text to be repeatedly relished. Just a menu, a souvenir to prove that experience was not a phantasm. (Hamilton & Todoli, 2009)

The ephemeral nature of food contributes to the ephemerality of cultures, ideas, identities and functions related to it. Cooking, eating and relishing are performance acts that have become so commonplace in our lives that they are almost for momentary pleasure or sustenance. When a chef thinks of a meal, crafts it and presents it or when your grandmother sits with you to take you through a heirloom recipe and you re-invent it years later in your tiny kitchen – it evidences a truly creative process. What food has in common with design is an aesthetic motivation, an ambition to provide a sense of wonder similar to that found when looking at a painting, watching a Shakespearen tragedy or playing a game. Food design has an established community of practice where artists, designers, writers, scientists are engaging with and approaching the subject of food with their unique quirky intent. Across disciples and in their own unique styles, they are exploring what it means to design through food.

Danielle Evans, founder of Food Typography, believes that food is art. She uses vibrant ingredients to craft intricate and delicious words and phrases. Her practice has also eventually branched out to wearables and everyday objects. [19]

Britney Wright, who runs the Wright Kitchen, plays with symmetry, color and gradients in food. Her food centric collages that capture vivid textures of fresh ingredients have caught the attention of brands like Samsung and American Express.

Jason Mercier creates mosaic art using food. He uses chips, cookies, beans, burger buns and candy to create celebrity portraits.[20]

Andrew Gorkovenko promotes his brand of organic teas, TripTeas, through illustrations made with tea leaves. The illustrations depict the country of origin of the teas.

Beth Galton's food photography practice explores commercial and conceptual aspects of food styling. [21]

Padma Lakshmi's book, Tomatoes for Neela, cooks up a beautiful story of a young single mother's journey through food. The recipe book celebrates and affirms how we can connect to other cultures, as well as to our own, through food.[22]

Amanda Huynh, practicing food designer, cast a condensed milk concrete Aalto jelly, after Tobias Wong's door stop from 2003. It was a not so serious re-interpretation and representation of another artist's work through food.

Clearly, visual design has a multitude of interconnected ways of playing with and understanding our food. The visual element in the world of food functions as a signifier. We don't look at the Starbucks logo and think of the iconic mermaid - we think of our coffee order, the comfort in the brewed coffee smell and the kick of the dark roast before a busy day. It is a signpost, a marker of an experience. A well styled photograph of a plate of food celebrates the ingredients, visual allure of it and legacy of a culture. An illustrated cookbook takes you through the journey of the author's life stories through food. Food is made up of a whimsical vocabulary of shapes, colors, and geometric forms and visual design tools lend themselves beautifully to document, express and celebrate the meanings hidden in those forms.

Fig 19. Danielle Evan's food typography

Fig 20. Jason Mercier's Mosaic food art

Fig 21. Beth Galton's food photography

Fig 22. Padma Lakshmi's book, Tomatoes for Neela

1. Continuous making
The first guiding principle of my practice is to continuously explore the length and breadth of the interactions of food and design. Document my daily interactions with my food, reflect on culinary traditions I encounter, play with typography and food, use illustration and food as therapeutic tools, craft a brand and identity for a local food business or design a system to promote circular food practices. The possibilities of my food design practice are endless and constitute a multitude of skills and collaborators. I see my practice as a test kitchen + studio where food is continuously being interpreted and re-presented and simply enjoyed.

2. Collaboration
That leads us into the second guiding principle of this food design practice – collaboration. My practice aims to gather and work with a community of food people to feature food, to enjoy food and each other's stories. Food is not a one person act. The basis of this practice is pluralism in the sphere of food– studying and learning from the coexistence of different interests, convictions and lifestyles. In doing so, I hope to collaborate at a table where scientists, chefs, farmers, food business owners, designers and policy makers sit together baking bread, carving meat and talking about ways to brand a new food idea or simply address food waste issues.

3. Engaging and Discoursing
The third principle of this practice is engaging in a discussion of our society's collective and individual identity through addressing the role food plays in our life. Every meal, every trip to the farmer's market, an old family recipe, tryst with a new ingredient or any new food story is a designed experience. Through design, my practice creates souvenirs out of those food experiences. I aim to celebrate the high of food by engaging with ingredients, stories and people who are involved in growing, gathering, cooking and serving. And I do so by pushing the boundaries of my visual design skills beyond the digital screens. Combining food with typography, photographic and styling tropes, illustration, branding and experience design is what constitutes my food design practice. Design and designers can play various roles in the realm of food - problem solvers, storytellers, thought provoking image makers, tool makers and researchers. As Ines Lauber from the Dutch Institute of Food Design says, "Design can serve as a bridge between problem and solution, using unconventional and innovative thinking to tell a story, make knowledge accessible, connect people or simplify complex structures. Good design can, for instance, help to understand and solve the issues created by today's food system and eating habits."

4. Respecting Terroir
The fourth principle of this practice is respect and honor for the land we eat and live on, the people who bring our food to us and the ingredients itself. How can my practice create work that honors the soul of a place, the story of its people and the history of the ingredients? Food-design is not just creating aesthetically styled images that promote consumption. This is more of research oriented practice than a demand based. The clients are carefully curated, sometimes they may not even exist and the projects are aimed towards creating new lifestyles and stimulating conversations around the history and future of our food.

5. Act of design
The fifth and the last principle of this practice is that food is an 'act of design'. Food is a material and physical concrete subject that embodies ideas in a cultural and aesthetic form. It has its own specific technical and productive relationship with its users and that makes food an act of design. Hence it is possible to imagine tracing around the world of food a broad range of possible experiences, objects, activities and ideas which in a concrete, adversarial articulate way bring out alternative or simply innovative visions. Since food has and continues to influence the way we exist – that sphere of human life needs to be understood, researched, documented and innovated with to preserve old stories and build new narratives.

Prototyping Design Kitchen

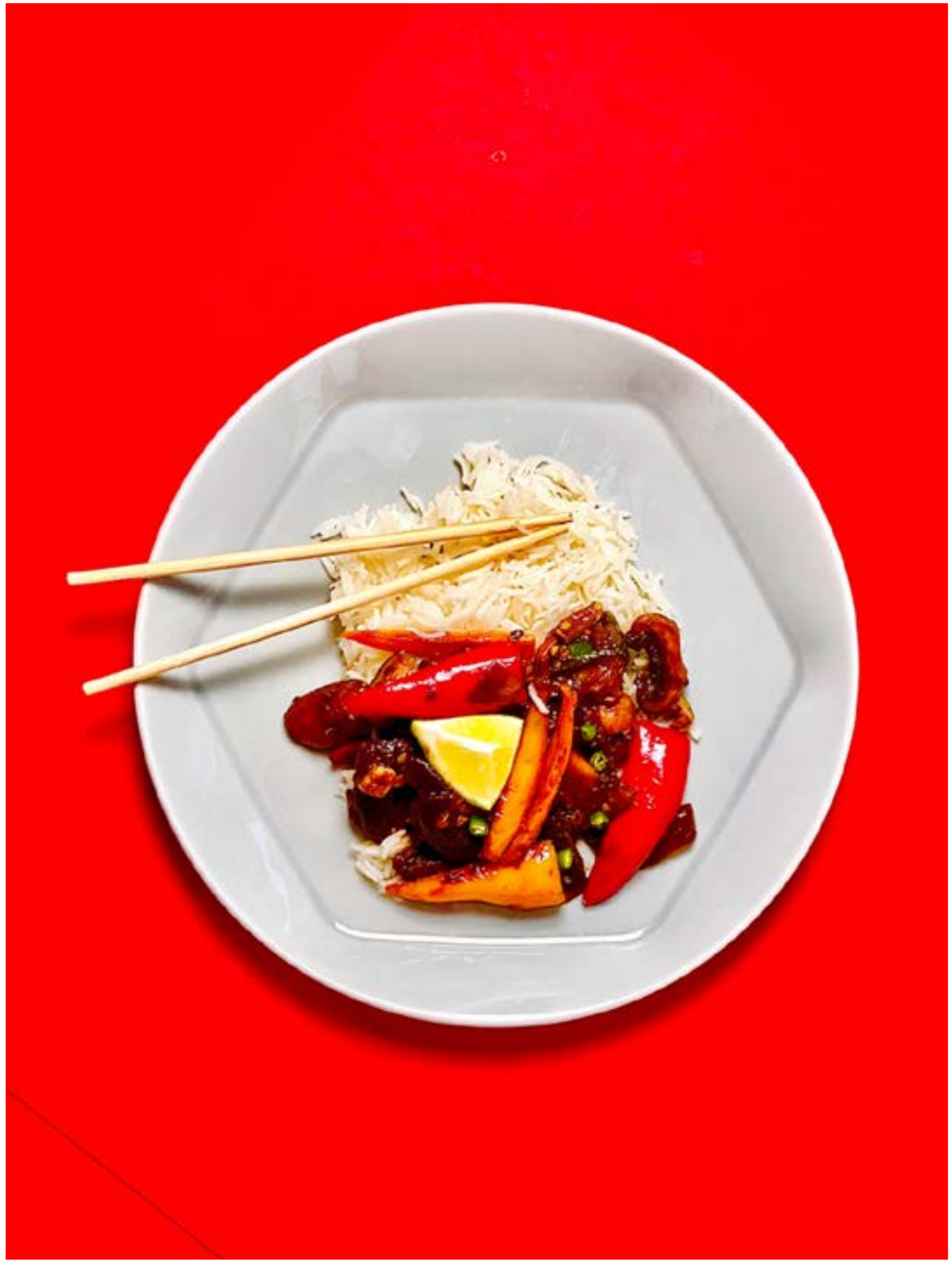
Case Studies

1. FOOD DAILY

In 1825, the French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin published this now celebrated quote in his masterpiece book Physiology of Taste: "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es" which translates to "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are."

This is not just a wisecrack, but a profound comment about the deep relationship between food we eat and us. The food we eat differs across people, lands, cultures and times. How food is cultivated, prepared and shared is influenced by various factors – historical, climatic, geographical, economical, religious and political. Food not only feeds our stomach and soul but also the structure of society. Preparing and serving a meal is almost a ritual. There is planning, shopping, chopping, cooking and presentation involved. Hours of creative and skilled effort – for a fleeting moment of pleasure. An artifact that is so deeply ingrained into all possible aspects of our lives deserves a documentation of its textural richness, cultural evocativeness and personal meanings. To begin my deep dive into my food practice, my first and ever ongoing project was to document what I eat, what I used to eat and what I could eat. The idea was to use illustration, typography and styling and photography to create rich visual documentation of food's everyday occurrence in my life. I found out how work, leisure, relationships and every aspect of life could be expressed with food. Food has the capability to mobilize actions, emotions and lifestyles. Through Food Daily, I was able to forge new associations to my food, acknowledge the old traditions and learn a great deal about my existence and relations between myself and the places I inhabit.

The methodology behind this project was to make freely, experiment with my skill set and come up with new ways to express through food. I documented the food I ate everyday through illustrations and my associations with it – people based, place based or tradition based. I used typography to play with the material aspect of food. The intent was to use food materials to create type based images that captured the visceral and somatic ways of experiencing a particular food item. In addition to that I also started studying and experimenting with styling and presenting food. Presenting food is almost like creating a painting – you not only revisit the basics of good compositions, but also have to play with color, texture and almost stage an experience involving the five senses, not just a meal. Every picture I took told a story of the moment, the terroir and the people involved in creating that tasty plate of food.

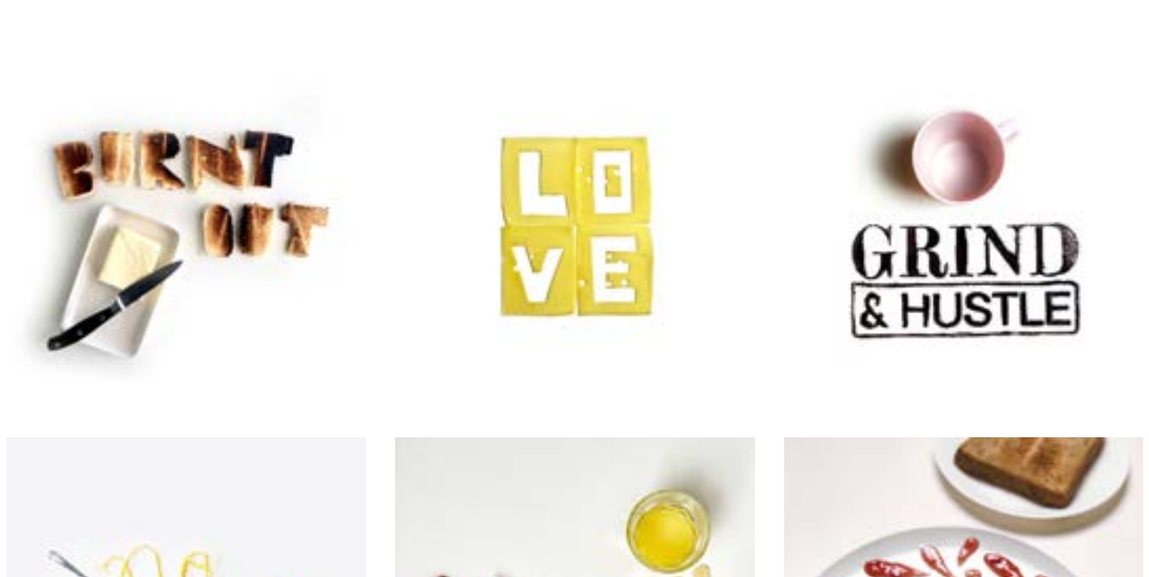


HALF
BAKED


No
Regretti

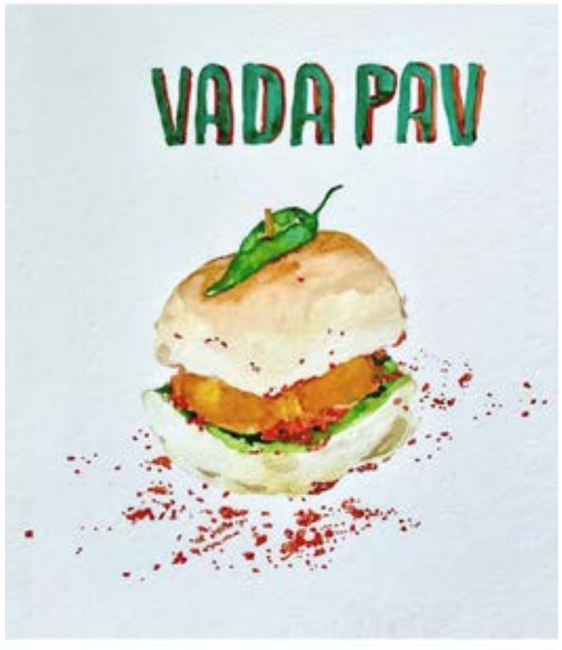

GROGGY

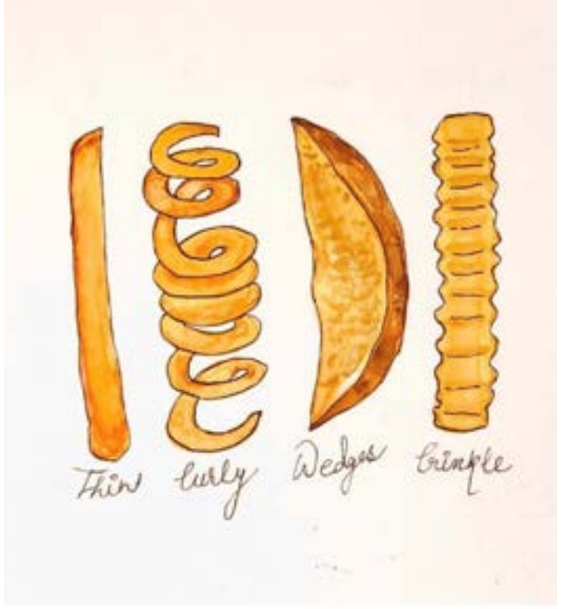

Feel
Fresh!


Feel
Fresh!

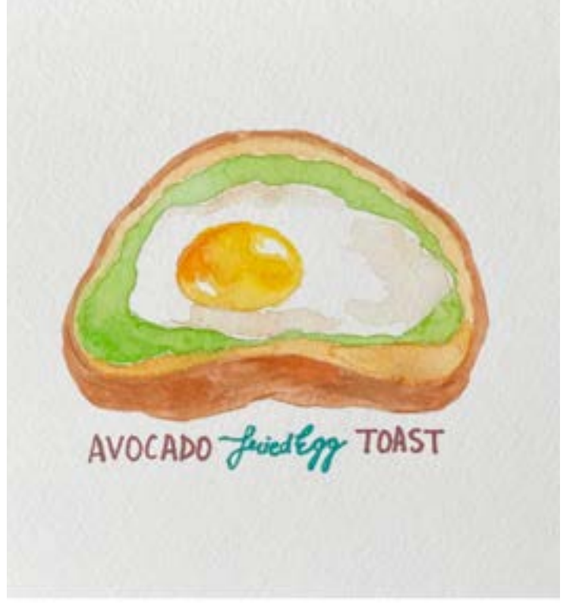

my constants
SALTED PEANUTS
OLIVE OIL
PICKLE


Coriander Powder
Turmeric
Mineral Salt
Cumin Seeds
Whole Spices


VADA PAV


Thin
Curly
Wedges
Crinkle


Cheeseburger
To-do list
- meal prep
- clean room
- Study, online
- Go on a date
- Socialise more
- travel
- & more ...


AVOCADO Fried Egg TOAST

2. INDISH FOOD TRUCK

"Culinary cultures constructed as 'original', 'authentic' and place-bound — regional or national cuisines, for example — can be deconstructed as mere moments in ongoing processes of incorporation, reworking and redefinition: food is always on the move, and always has been. (Bell & Valentine, 1997)

Food is always on the move, and always has been – this observation is an experience I have lived as a food person. My geographical trajectory has largely influenced how my taste buds have grown. I remember the cities and my lived experiences in them through the memories of the local eateries, evocative smells and the people I shared my food with. Food is a major identity marker of a city. But it isn't a static marker of identity. Within a city, this marker evolves and is redefined as people migrate, climate changes and new cultures blend in. You can deconstruct the make of a city, its history, its economy and its infrastructure through the food the city eats. When people use the phrase 'A melting pot' of cultures to describe a city, it truly is a bubbling and constantly stewing mix of food cultures that define the lives of its residents and even those who visit it for fleeting moments.

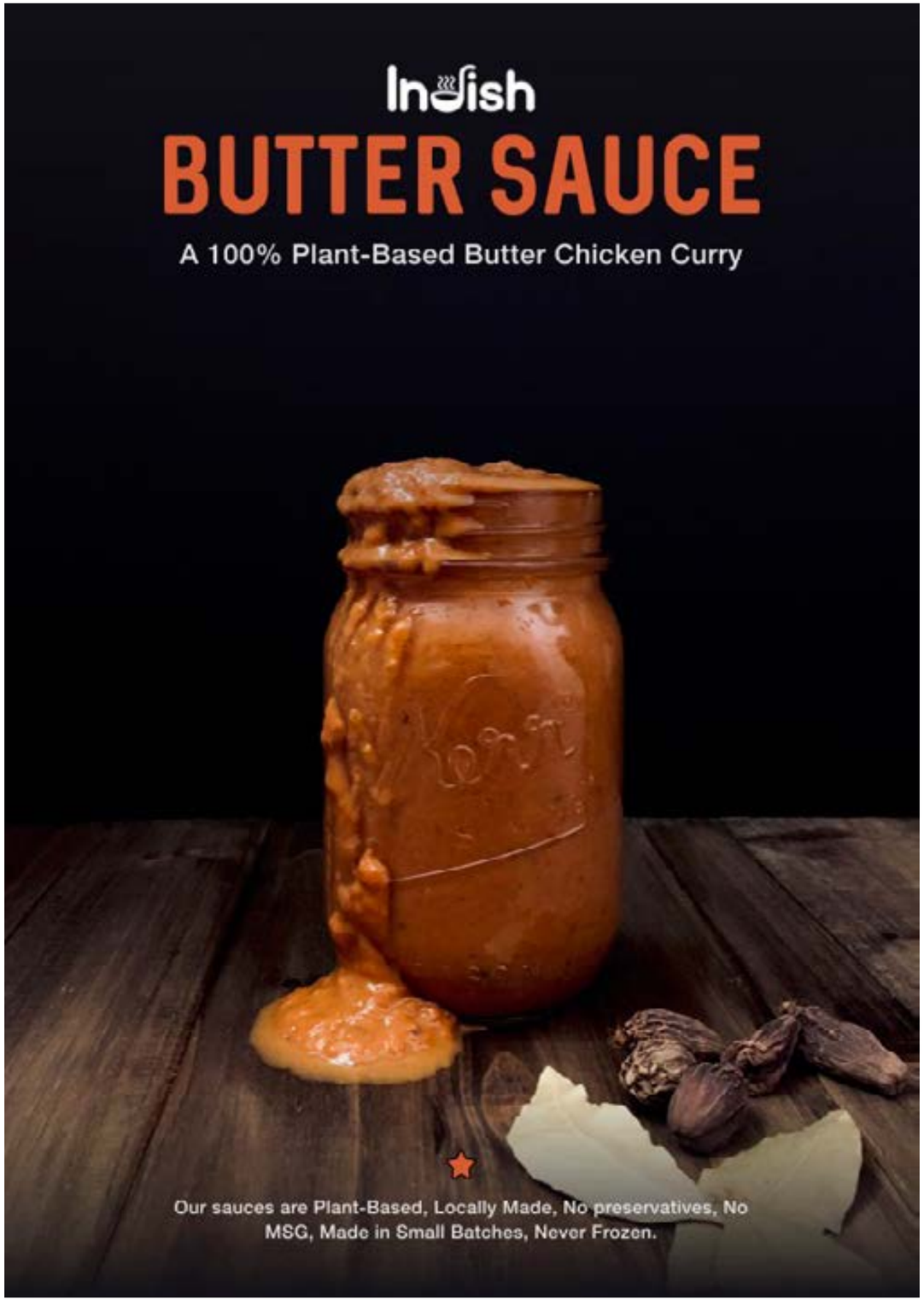
When I moved to Vancouver from India, the one thing my mother was really concerned about was my kitchen setup. She insisted that I pack a bag full of Indian spices, specific Indian cookware and handwritten recipes for what I liked to eat at home. It was almost like I was traveling to Mars. But for someone as well traveled as my mother it was still difficult to imagine that I would find our food culture easily miles away from home. But my nose has a way of finding its way to those familiar smells of toasted whole spices and bubbling Masala Chai. I came across the Indish Food Truck in Vancouver - a small business run by Indian origin entrepreneurs – reinventing heritage recipes from the grandmother's kitchen for the city's mixed population. Indish has deconstructed Indian food into three components – the base, the protein and the sauce. And further customized it to suit the vegan, nut free and healthy food lifestyles followed by the people here. Their unique treatment of Indian food culture redefines the cuisine for the modern times by combining the old with a twist of new – and hence you get the odd but tasty butter chicken poutine!

I worked and traveled around Vancouver's food scene with Indish. As I interacted with customers of Indish, I learnt a lot about how Indian food was perceived by Vancouver. We were often told to make it 'white people spicy' by a lot of consumers and it always amused me as to how race found its way into an otherwise unifying experience that food is. I worked with them as a line chef often lending my design and problem solving expertise to the business. We created pamphlets for their curries to pitch to people and broke down how their food was made and the versatility of its usage. The skills I had been developing as part of my Food Daily project came in handy as I got the chance to professionally style the food and create images that showed the versatile nature of modern Indian food. I also spent a lot of time with the head chefs documenting the recipes and process of bulk cooking. My documentation included me live sketching the food as they cooked it. Working with chefs in the kitchen made me aware of how food is as precise as design in its physical, emotional and functional aspects. Every ingredient is meticulously measured, every step in the process spells tradition and every outcome can serve multiple purposes. Working with Indish was a true lesson in the evolution of food, how people perceive it and how as a professional food designer I would approach food going forward in my practice.

Indish

BUTTER SAUCE

A 100% Plant-Based Butter Chicken Curry



Our sauces are Plant-Based, Locally Made, No preservatives, No MSG, Made in Small Batches, Never Frozen.

INGREDIENTS

Crushed Tomatoes, Water, Onion, Coconut Milk, Grapeseed Oil, Garlic, Ginger, Sea Salt, Sugar, Cumin, Cinnamon, Black Pepper, Black Cardamom, Fenugreek Leaves, Paprika, Cardamom, Bay Leaf, Cloves, Rose Water

AUTHENTIC FLAVOUR

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

NON-DAIRY

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

BALANCED FLAVOUR

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

HOW TO USE

Can be used as a tomato-based sauce just like you would use any pasta sauce. You can also use it as a stir fry sauce. Half cook any veggies or a protein, throw in the sauce and heat to finish.

DISH SUGGESTIONS

Butter Chicken | Tofu Dishes
Veggie Pasta | Lasagna
Butter Chicken | Veggie Pizza
Butter Chicken | Pork Tacos | Enchiladas
Butter Veggie | Chicken Rice Bowl
Stir-Fried Butter Veggies | Chicken Vegetable Shakshuka.
And many more.

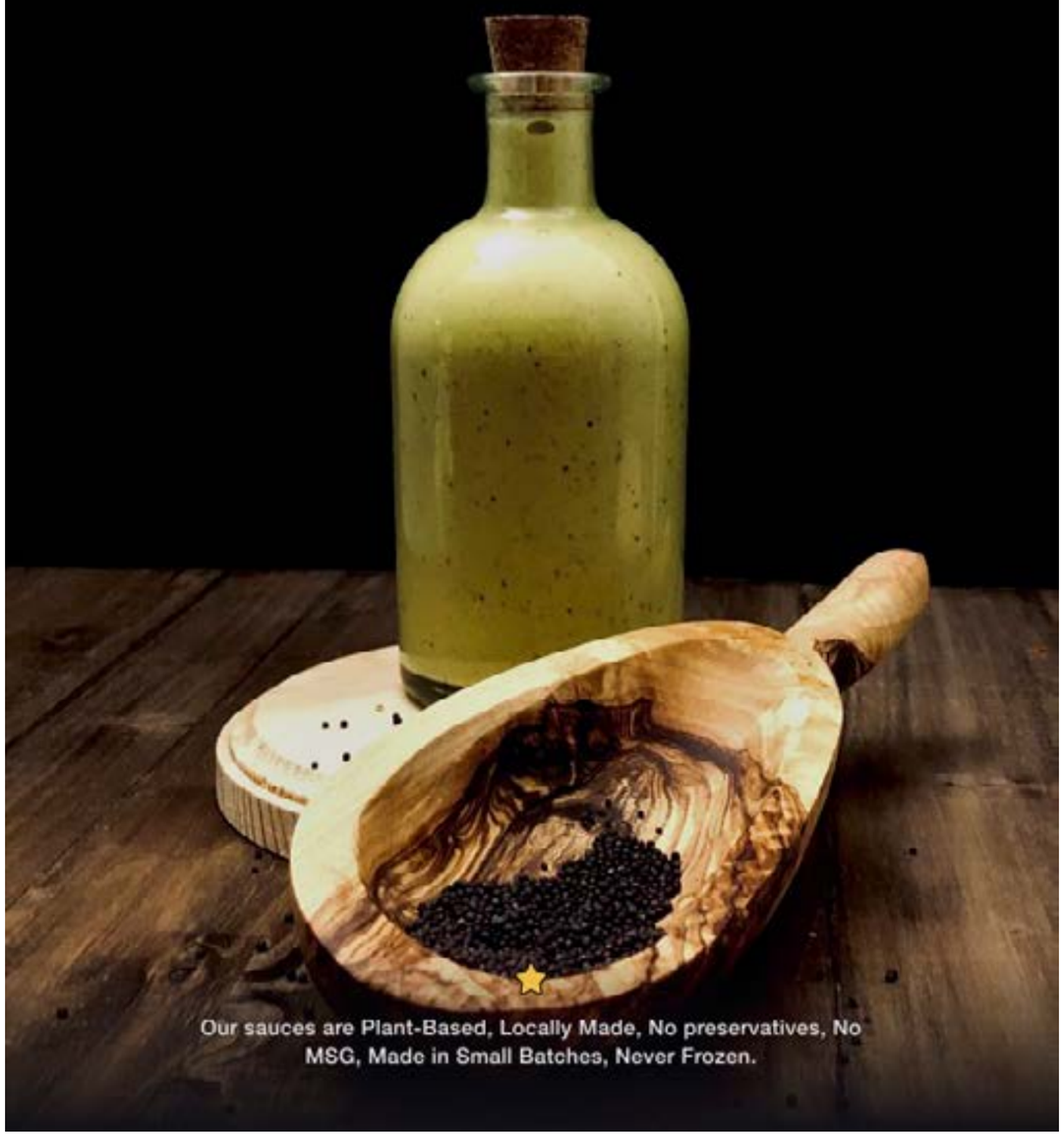
Nutrition Facts
Valeur nutritive
Per 125 ml (125 mL)
125 (125 mL)

Calories 70	
Fat / Lipides 6 g	8 %
Saturated / saturés 3.5 g + Trans / trans 0 g	18 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 4 g	
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 2 g	2 %
Protein / Protéines 1 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	0 %
Sodium 230 mg	10 %
Potassium 125 mg	3 %
Calcium 10 mg	1 %
Iron / Fer 0.4 mg	2 %

Indish

COCONUT SAUCE

A South Asia-inspired plant-based coconut curry



Our sauces are Plant-Based, Locally Made, No preservatives, No MSG, Made in Small Batches, Never Frozen.

INGREDIENTS

Coconut Milk (Coconut Milk 99.95%, Polysorbate 60), Onion, Grapeseed Oil, Less Than 2% Of: Garlic, Ginger, Sea Salt, Mustard Seed, Turmeric, Sugar, Cinnamon, Star Anise, Black Pepper, Cardamom, Bay Leaf, Cloves, Mace

COMFORTING FLAVOR

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

ORIGINAL RECIPE

Completely unique flavor and original recipe that can be used in a variety of ways to create a wow effect.

HEALTHY INGREDIENTS

Made with turmeric, coconut milk, and freshly ground spices to add multiple heath benefits to this delicious sauce.

HOW TO USE

Option 1: Cook your protein/veggies in a pan add sauce and heat for the last 5 minutes of cooking.
Option 2: Use as a sauce for stewing.
Options 3: Pour heated sauce over fully cooked items such as noodles, rice, proteins and veggies

DISH SUGGESTIONS

Veggies | Shrimp Coconut Curry
Veggie Stir-fry Sauce
Chicken | Pork Curry
Thai style Curry Stew
Laksa Style Noodle Soup
Coconut Risotto
And many more!

Nutrition Facts
Valeur nutritive
Per 125 ml (125 mL)
125 (125 mL)

	% Daily Value* / % valeur quotidienne*
Calories 70	
Fat / Lipides 6 g	8 %
Saturated / saturés 3.5 g + Trans / trans 0 g	18 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 4 g	
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 2 g	2 %
Protein / Protéines 1 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	0 %
Sodium 230 mg	10 %
Potassium 125 mg	3 %
Calcium 10 mg	1 %
Iron / Fer 0.4 mg	2 %

Indish

SPINACH SAUCE

Power-packed plant based spinach curry

Our sauces are Plant-Based, Locally Made, No preservatives, No MSG, Made in Small Batches, Never Frozen.

INGREDIENTS

Spinach, Oat Milk, Onion, Crushed Tomato Puree, Mustard Oil, Garlic, Ginger, Spices

POWER PACKED

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

SUPERFOOD CURRY

Get the traditional Indian butter chicken flavour without needing all the spices and cumbersome cooking process.

GREEN POWER, NEW FORMAT

Provide a dose of healthy nourishment in a brand new and delicous format.

HOW TO USE

Add to stir fried veggies, tofu, paneer or chicken and cook till the curry becomes hot. Add a spoonful of fresh cream or coconut cream to finish.

DISH SUGGESTIONS

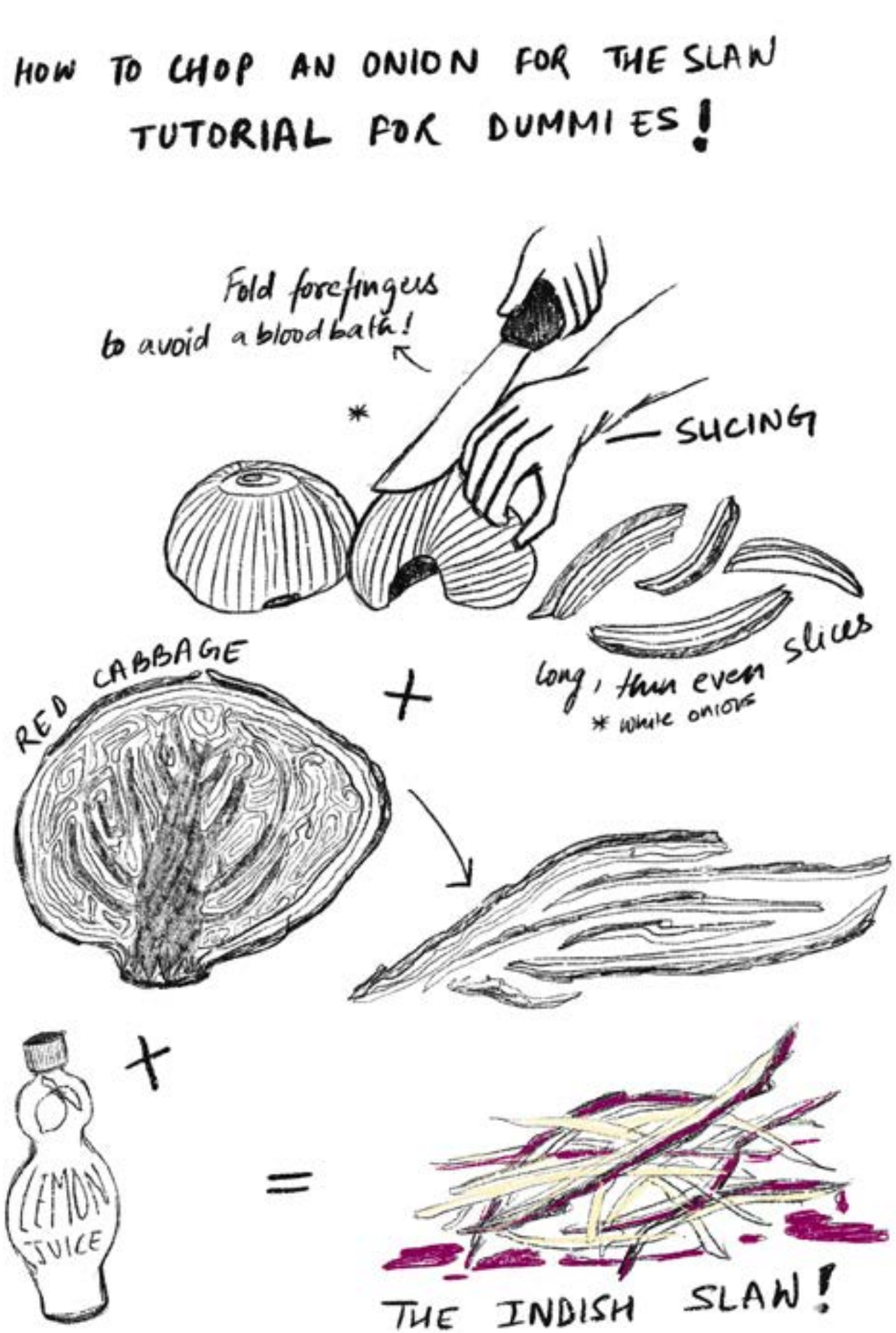
Saag Tofu and Saag Paneer
Veggie Spinach Curry
Palak Chicken

Nutrition Facts
Valeur nutritive
Per 125 ml (125 mL)
125 (125 mL)

Calories 70	% Daily Value* / % valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 6 g	8 %
Saturated / saturés 3.5 g + Trans / trans 0 g	18 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 4 g	
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4 %
Sugars / Sucres 2 g	2 %
Protein / Protéines 1 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	0 %
Sodium 230 mg	10 %
Potassium 125 mg	3 %
Calcium 10 mg	1 %
Iron / Fer 0.4 mg	2 %


EAT
well
FEED
well
KADAK
CUMIN
OATLY
#BASMATI RICE


CHICKEN
MARINADE
YOGHURT
whisk
whisk
Salt
TANDOORI MASALA
LEMON JUICE
grind!
grind!
GINGER + Peeled garlic


HOW TO CHOP AN ONION FOR THE SLAW
TUTORIAL FOR DUMMIES!
Fold forefingers to avoid a blood bath!
SLICING
long, thin even slices
* white onions
RED CABBAGE
+
LEMON JUICE
=
THE INDISH SLAW!


MINT ADDS freshness
JAGGERY
adds sweetness
Green Chutney
MINT & CORIANDER
GINGER
is for tang & spice
SALT
MUSTARD OIL
The leaves add FLAVOUR
The stalks add TEXTURE
ICE
MINT
CORIANDER
JAGGERY
ICE
GINGER
LEMON JUICE
Keeps everything fresh & green
blitz blitz!

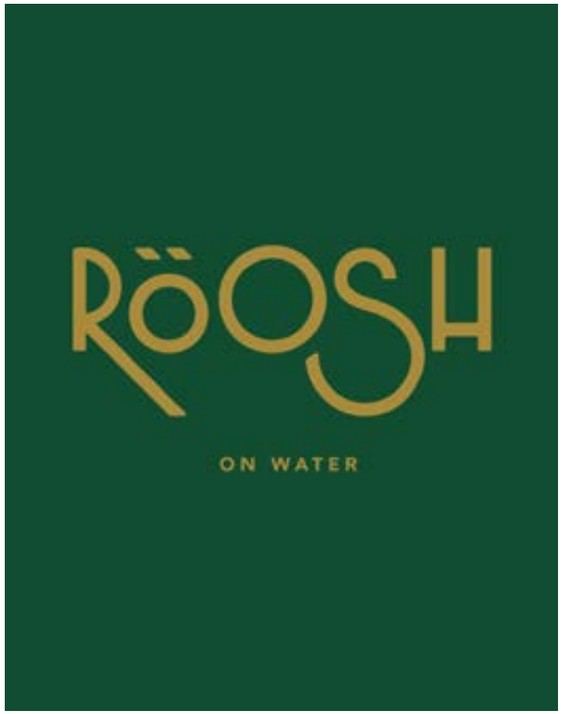
3. RÖOSH BRANDING

Röosh is a bistro located in the heart of Gastown which serves locally sourced ingredients that are topped onto a Rosti and salad base. The bistro caters to young adults who are interested in experiencing a unique format of dishes and drinks made with locally sourced ingredients. For tourists who are looking for an essence of the local food and drinks scene, the bistro would provide a unique BC-grown experience.

The bistro is located in the heart of Gastown right next to Gassy Jack Statue so it's a popular destination for walking tourists. The surrounding businesses such as LOCAL, Guilt & Co., MEET in Gastown, Six Acres all attract a young professional crowd (the mid-20s to mid-30s) that wants to have a relaxed fun evening or a night out around the historic Gastown.

My challenge here was to understand the geography of where this food and the bistro were going to be situated and create a food brand that was modern but not an eye-sore in the middle of the historic Gastown aesthetic. I explored a few Art Deco hand lettered typefaces inspired with the general signage in the area while translating modern European vibe from the cusine in the visual vibe of the brand. The other challenge was the time frame of two weeks. This client was on a timeline that would have been served better by design that cheap, fast and functional but my intent as a food designer was to create work that was quality, strong on concept and had a meaningful existence in the sea of the food brands in Gastown. This project was a learning curve in terms of translating the the guiding principles of my practice into a practical application in the real world. It allowed me to work with the headchef, the business manager, the servers and potential consumers to understand how design can function with and serve the needs and demands of all the partners while staying true to my creative process.

The result was a functioning food and beverage brand in the heart of downtown Vancouver with a custom typeface and visual langugae that resonanted very well with customers, business owners and represented the vibe and the food culture intended by the brief.



Mockups and photos from the Gastown location of Roosh

4. 36 DAYS OF TYPE

36 Days of Type is a project that invites designers, illustrators and graphic artists to express their particular interpretation of the letters and numbers of the Latin alphabet. A yearly open call exploring the creative boundaries of letterforms, where participants are challenged to design a letter or number each day for 36 consecutive days, as a global and simultaneous act showing the outcome of the ability to represent the same symbols from thousands of different perspectives. A project that aims to be a space for creation around typography and its endless graphic possibilities. (36 Days of Type, 2022)

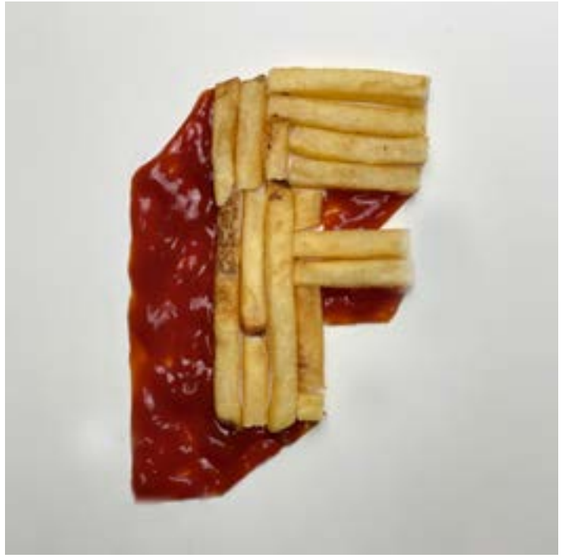
Getting to experiment with my visual design skills was one of the many motivations I had with the conception of this thesis. I did not want to limit myself to a single outcome but instead have dive deep into the possibilities of image making with food. 36 Days Of Type was an initiative that had held my interest since the last five years and I had always struggled with finding and representing my unique perspective on the project. The idea of 'representing the same symbols from thousands of different perspectives' was exciting yet daunting at the same time. Daunting because as an artist and designer you really want your work to have a special meaning, relevance and tell a story. So as I explored the various intersections of food and visual design, I not only found my niche but also the motivation to finally attempt this yearly challenge.
My take on it was to document everything I had learned about food as an artifact, a material and a story through type design. All my meals and how they had become a part of my daily living, anything new I had learned to cook and eat could all be expressed through a letter everyday. I hence turned food into an act of design where I would craft a whole meal or a dish represented by a single latin letter. Designing each letter with food and turning every food experience of mine into a symbol was a great exercise in expanding my ability to create endless graphic forms. Both as a food person and a visual designer this project made me further realize that my practice not only had a rich visual character but also had the possibility to be applied in multiple contexts and that people across the globe understood the language of food no matter who made it or where it came from.

A - *Arugula, Avo and Tomato Salad*
B - *Brioche Buns*

C - Charcuterie Board

D - Dill & Cucumber Dip

E - Eggo Waffles



F - French Fries

G - Guacamole

H - Hummus and Pita

I - Instant Noodles

J - Jam

5. FOOD GODDESSES

"Food for us comes from our relatives, whether they have wings or fins or roots. That is how we consider food. Food has a culture. It has a history. It has a story. It has relationships."
- Winona LaDuke

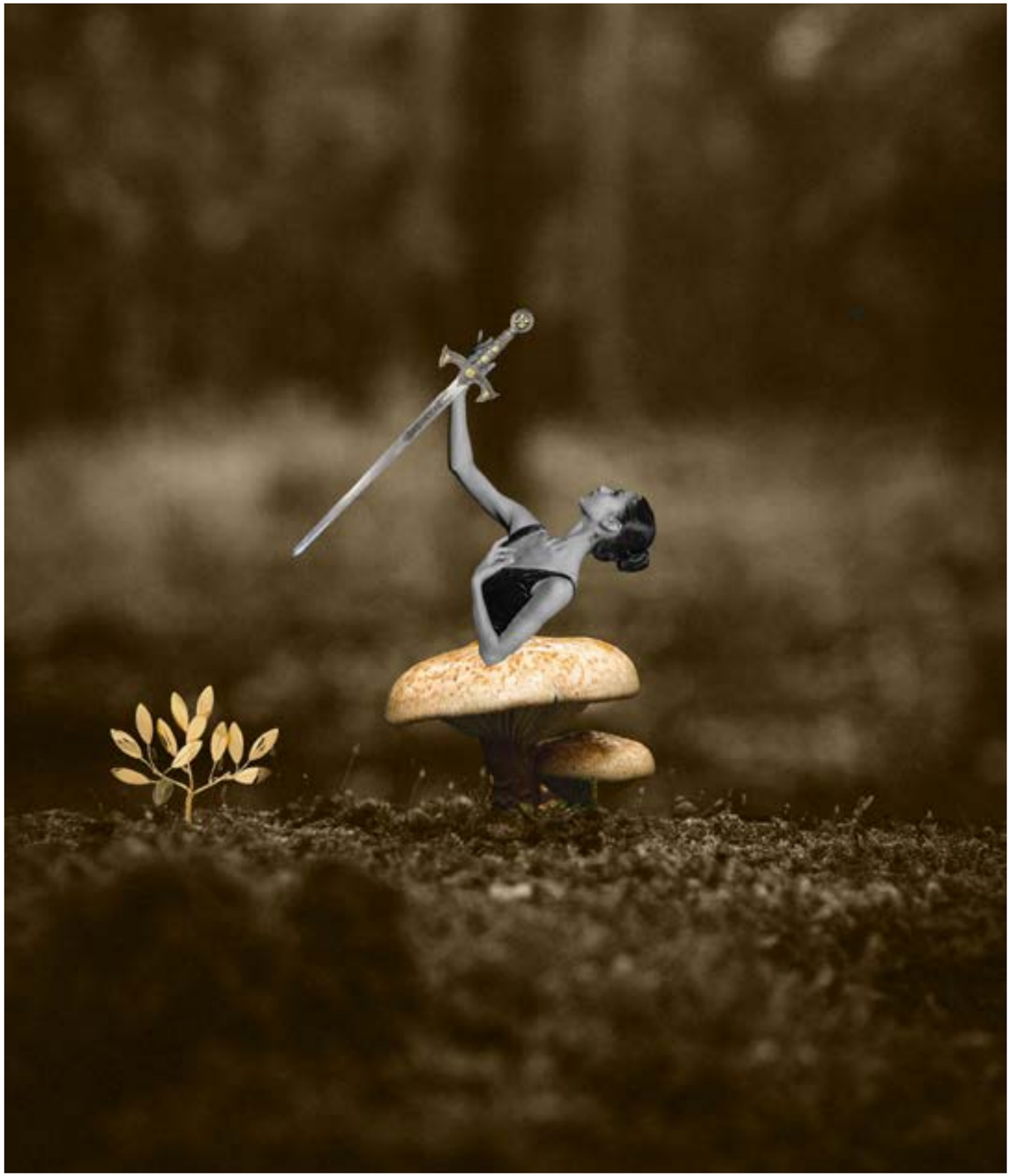
My earliest food memory is my father telling me the story of the greedy fox and camel while feeding me dinner every night when I was a toddler. He and I would sit cross legged on the floor of our house and he would patiently feed me with his hands while telling me my favorite story for the hundredth time. My mother would tell me vivid stories of her sitting on the roof with her siblings munching on crisp carrots from their farm on winter mornings in a small village in Punjab. And my grandmother would tell us in meticulous detail how a certain vegetable was pickled, why our culture considers eating meat a sin and why we use certain grains in reverence to our family gods. The way I know food is through stories, spending time with a family elder and memories. Food culture is not just made up of raw ingredients and spices but with traditions, beliefs, gender roles and people. A meal is a symbol for cultural order[45]. A meal is also a symbol for the narrative of the person preparing it, the farmers who grew the grain for it and ingredients that hold a holy or unique meaning in the culture. Celebrating food is about remembering that food is vast and showing respect for cultures. How can visual design represent food to tell unique stories and be a tool to preserve cultures?

In order to refresh, re-invograte and represent ancient food stories in a visual format I experimented with collaging and image making. After a deep research into the folktales I created a mini series depicting food goddeses from various food cultures as powerful female characters. My hope was to reinterpet the perception of women in relation to their roles as meek caregivers and cooks. The visuals create a verison of women who own their respective food cultures powerfully and gracefully.

Collage depiction of the Chinese goddess of rice and fish

Collage depiction of the modern day Hindu Goddess Annapurna.

Collage depiction of Ninkasi, the ancient Sumerian goddess of brewing who not only gave beer to the world but also was brewer to the gods themselves. She is of particular importance not only because she is female but also because she appears around 4000 BC, making her the oldest of the beer deities.



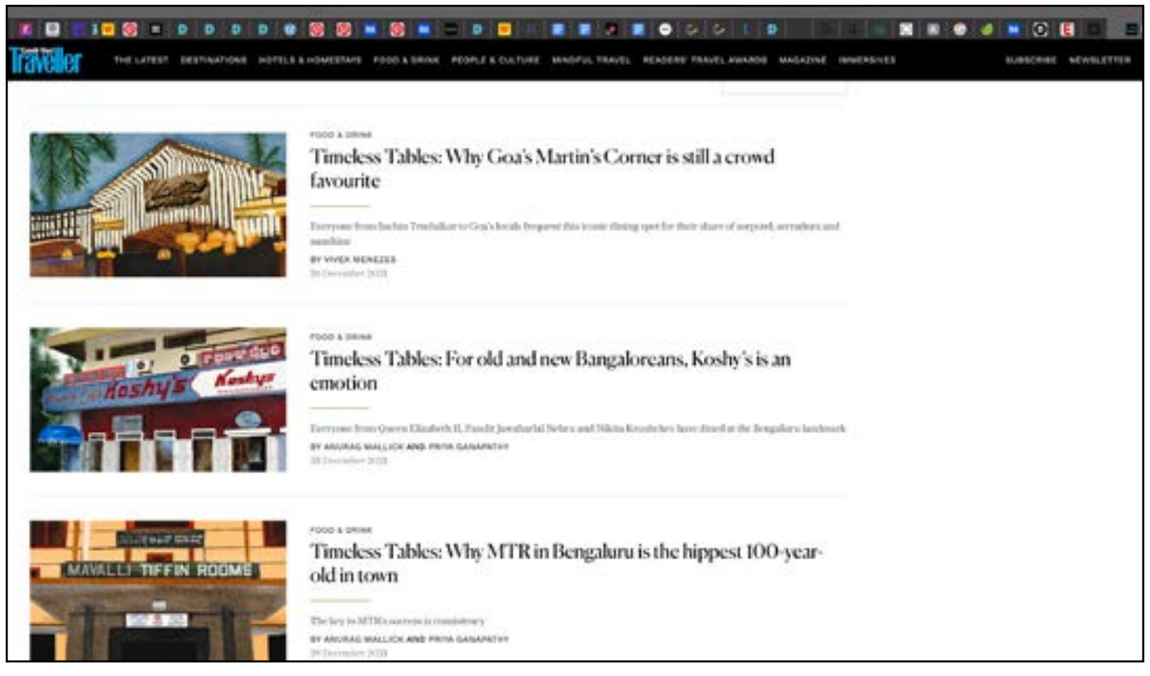
Collage depiction of Greek goddess Athena who creates the olive tree from the depths of Attica's barren earth.

6. TIMELESS TABLES

Timeless Tables is a CNT mini series that features lessons from some of the most iconic restaurants across the country to have survived the test of time(Nast, 2021).

I had the chance to illustrate for the series Timeless Tables, run by Conde Nast Traveller's digital team. The idea was to give readers a sense of the stories and people behind evergreen Indian restaurants, interesting anecdotes about the place, how it came to be, famous people that may have visited/ been associated with it and lots of flavour that brings to light why the restaurant is such a cultural icon.

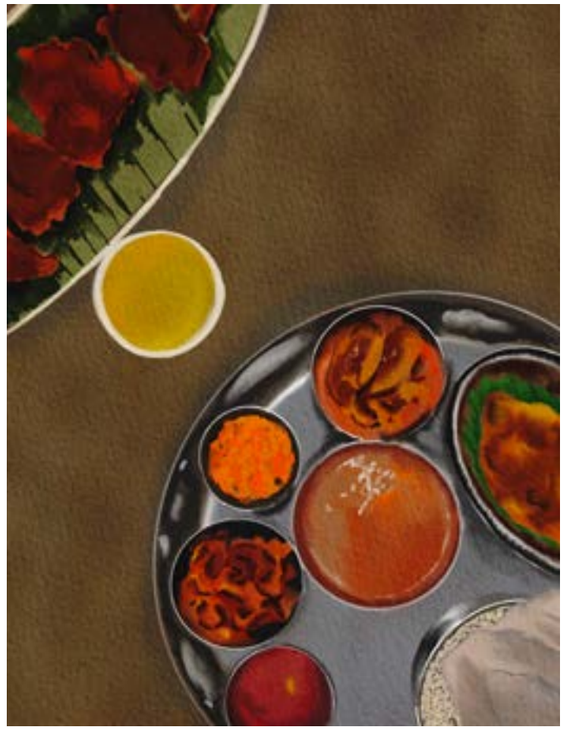
The main theme of the series pertained to how these places have stood the test of time and how they continue to stay relevant, even during a pandemic.



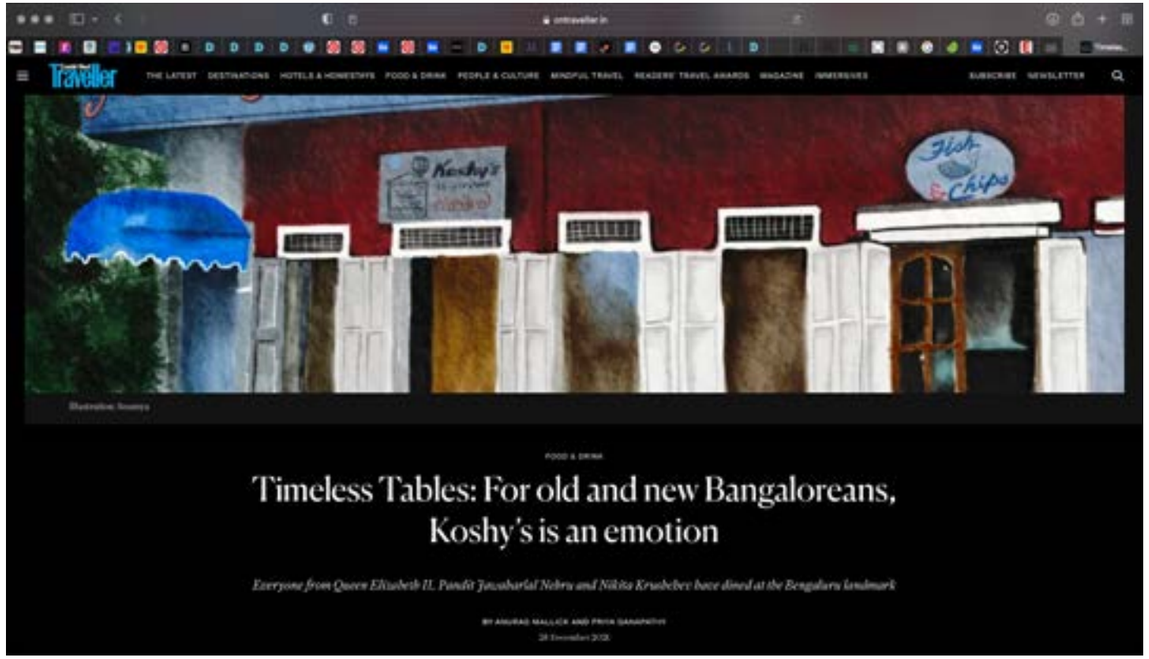
Timeless Tables as publish on Conde Nast Traveler's website


Shetty
Lunch Home


Mavalli
Corner




ಮಾವಳ್ಳಿ ಟಿಫಿನ್ ರೂಮ್ಸ್
MAVALLI TIFFIN ROOMS
MTR


Traveller
Koshy's
Fish & Chips
Timeless Tables: For old and new Bangaloreans, Koshy's is an emotion
Everyone from Queen Elizabeth II, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Nikita Khrushchev have dined at the Bengaluru landmark


Traveller
Timeless Tables: Why Goa's Martin's Corner is still a crowd favourite
Everyone from Sachin Tendulkar to Goa's locals frequent this iconic dining spot for their share of sorpotel, serradura and sunshine

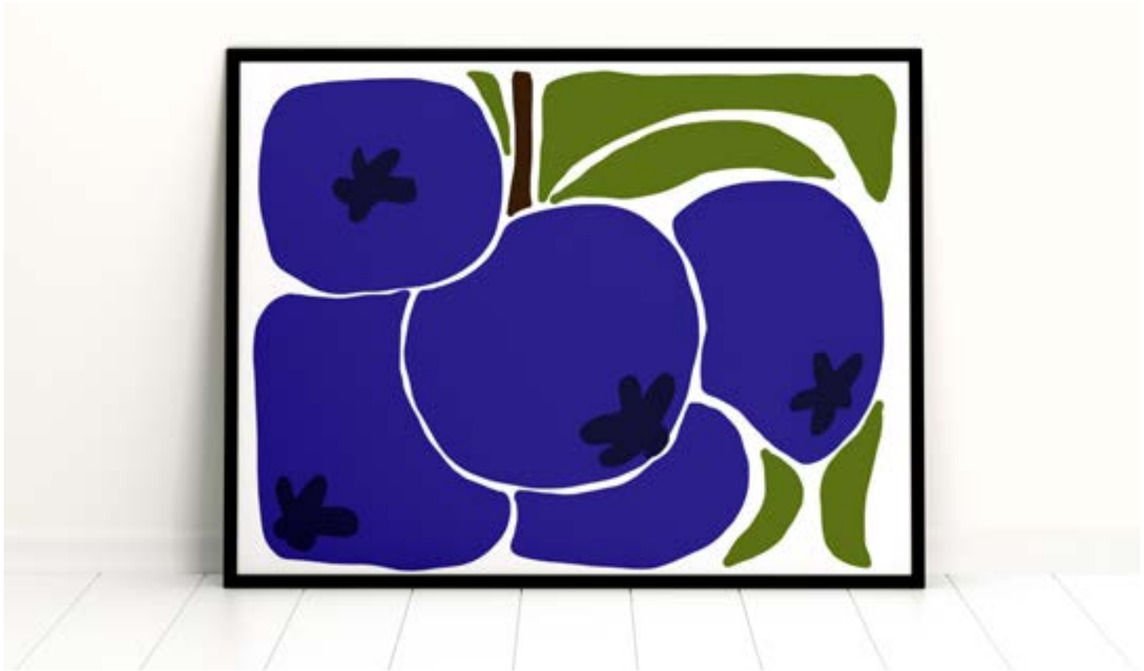
7. FOOD AS THERAPY

"It's good to see what can be done with some flowers, olive oil, technique, madness and patience, everything nature gives us and what man is capable of. It fills me with hope to see what can be achieved with desire, ideas and work. It amazes me to see what an olive can be turned into.
- Aldo Duelli

Looking for a need to concentrate and make sense while working on my thesis of food design - this series was born out of doodles during long arduous zoom classes during covid times.

My interactions with food has created a deep impact in my personal and professional life. Grocery stores are my walk in the park, I go to farmer's markets for fresh air, carefully craft meals with the produce I buy and relish documenting the food I eat in my photographs. This series is another such instance of my life where food and design collide. I had an empty canvas, a few ingredients from my recent grocery store trip and was subconsciously finding ways to not write my thesis. What was supposed be a procrastination doodle turned out to be an oddly therapeutic self reflection that helped me focus during an arduous zoom meeting. Hours later - I had found a new illustration style to work with, a new perspective towards everyday food items and a body of art prints that I could hang on my walls.

The act of re-interpreting the form of a tomato generated a sense of freedom and calmed my anxious - squirrelly brain. Akin to playing with food on my chopping board, I found a new way to play and invent with it. There was also the additional satisfaction of generating a new visual language. In the world of prim and proper food still life drawings and photographs - it was liberating to give in to fluid form of food and doodle out rich captivating visuals.



Making, Thinking and Capturing

Reflections and Future Steps

Prior to writing this thesis, I used to introduce myself as a visual communication designer. However, now I introduce myself as Soumya, a Food Designer. This work and thesis has been a journey of self discovery and of how I got to formulating a base for a generative design practice. Practicing design is the center of my universe. And food is the center of my design practice.

This journey started when I read “The terroir that we are” as part of our first reading seminar. I always had a strong personal connection with food - and this particular reading encouraged me to curiously and critically think about food as more than just sustenance. As an evocative object that was linked to our memories, geographies, histories and our individual and collective identities.

My initial work explorations opened for me a vast array of possibilities to explore within the world of food. Human’s precarious interactions with food are endless and at this point as a designer I had all sorts of questions about what was worth knowing about our civilization through the food we grew, cooked, ate and shared.

Some of my initial research questions were - Is there a world where design and food collide?
Is there a way we can show people food in a way they haven't seen before?
Can design communicate the science, wonder and meaning of food?
What are the ways in which food forms and affects our culture, social, and political identities?

All of this reflective and auto-ethnographic research made me realize that I am more than just a foodie. I am a food person. A person who thinks through, about and for food. It is a recurring theme throughout my life as I gravitate towards food when I am sad or happy. It is how I define key special moments, just like design. Food is at once sweet, sour, nutty, grassy, salty and plays like magic with all our senses. Just like design. Food like design surprises me and is filled with wonder. I look for ways to find the sweet spot between the two for my research practice.

Through mapping my research, I came to understand that food culture can be identified as an infrastructure. Food culture fits into this definition of Infrastructure from Geoffrey C. Bower’s book Sorting Things Out - Classification and its Consequences.

Food clearly plays a double role - as nourishment and as a symbol system. One definition of visual design is also a symbol system that communicates and denotes the complexity of cultures and schools of thought. What lies at the intersection of the two worlds is my practice - A food design practice.

The paradigm of Food Design is relatively recent and there isn’t a fixed definition yet. Some interpretations of the role are nostalgic, others are techno-visual. In any case, if you talk about design, you talk about styling and planning, so Food Design is the pre-ordination of everything having to do with food. To clarify: food design is tied both to industrial production and classic design (packaging, shape, colour of the food), as well as to a cultural and visual element. If, for example, a chef takes over a restaurant and decides which mood it should have, that’s also food design. It’s important not to confuse it with gastronomy and the art of garnishing dishes!

They say that if you do the thing you love, you don't work a day in your life.Through this thesis journey and research I have taken the thing I love along with the things I can do well and brought them together to create a new career trajectory. This work that I just presented was my journey of finding my creative confidence. I can do this work everyday for the rest of my life.

The intent from the beginning of this thesis was to create a generative practice as opposed to a one time design intervention. This is not a project about food. It's not just a subject matter. It's an integration of practices - I have graduated from a visual designer to being a food designer. This work can be reinterpreted endlessly. I can do this all day everyday. Everyday a new aspect of our daily living can be analyzed through my practice and I discover the various roles I can play as a designer in the tangled subject of food. When culinary traditions get so intrinsically linked to culture, identity and lifestyles– it carries with it the agency to become a tool of change and reflection.

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