

IHM,KOLKATA
Department of Food Production
PRE MODULE GUIDED READING (PMGR)

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A HISTORY OF MODERN FOOD SERVICE

The value of history is that it helps us understand the present and the future. In food service, knowledge of our professional heritage helps us see why we do things as we do, how our cooking techniques have been developed and refined, and how we can continue to develop and innovate in the years ahead. An important lesson of history is that the way we cook now is the result of the work done by countless chefs over hundreds of years. Cooking is as much science as it is art. Cooking techniques are not based on arbitrary rules that some chefs made up long ago. Rather, they are based on an understanding of how different foods react when heated in various ways, when combined in various proportions, and so on. The chefs who have come before us have already done much of this work so we don't have to. This doesn't mean there is no room for innovation and experimentation or that we should never challenge old ideas. But it does mean a lot of knowledge has been collected over the years, and we would be smart to take advantage of what has already been learned. Furthermore, how can we challenge old ideas unless we know what those old ideas are? Knowledge is the best starting point for innovation.

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THE ORIGINS OF CLASSICAL AND MODERN CUISINE

Quantity cookery has existed for thousands of years, as long as there have been large groups of people to feed, such as armies. But modern food service is said to have begun shortly after the

middle of the eighteenth century. At this time, food production in France was controlled by guilds. Caterers, pastry makers, roasters, and pork butchers held licenses to prepare specific items. An innkeeper, in order to serve a meal to guests, had to buy the various menu items from those operations that were licensed to provide them. Guests had little or no choice and simply ate what was available for that meal.

In 1765, a Parisian named Boulanger began advertising on his shop sign that he served soups, which he called *restaurants* or *restoratives*. (Literally, the word means “fortifying.”) According to the story, one of the dishes he served was sheep’s feet in a cream sauce. The guild of stew makers challenged him in court, but Boulanger won by claiming he didn’t stew the feet *in* the sauce but served them *with* the sauce. In challenging the rules of the guilds, Boulanger unwittingly changed the course of food service history.

The new developments in food service received a great stimulus as a result of the French Revolution, beginning in 1789. Before this time, the great chefs were employed in the houses of the French nobility. With the revolution and the end of the monarchy, many chefs, suddenly out of work, opened restaurants in and around Paris to support themselves. Furthermore, the revolutionary government abolished the guilds. Restaurants and inns could serve dinners reflecting the talent and creativity of their own chefs, rather than being forced to rely on licensed caterers to supply their food. At the start of the French Revolution, there were about 50 restaurants in Paris. Ten years later there were about 500.

Another important invention that changed the organization of kitchens in the eighteenth century was the stove, or *potager*, which gave cooks a more practical and controllable heat source than an open fire. Soon commercial kitchens became divided into three departments: the rotisserie, under the control of the meat chef or *rôtisseur*, the oven, under the control of the pastry chef or *pâtissier*, and the stove, run by the cook or *cuisinier*. The meat chef and pastry chef reported to the *cuisinier*, who was also known as *chef de cuisine*, which means “head of the kitchen.”

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CARÊME

All the changes that took place in the world of cooking during the 1700s led to, for the first time, a difference between home cooking and professional cooking. One way we can try to understand this difference is to look at the work of the greatest chef of the period following the French Revolution, **Marie-Antoine Carême** (1784–1833). As a young man, Carême learned all the

branches of cooking quickly, and he dedicated his career to refining and organizing culinary techniques. His many books contain the first systematic account of cooking principles, recipes, and menu making.

At a time when the interesting advances in cooking were happening in restaurants, Carême worked as a chef to wealthy patrons, kings, and heads of state. He was perhaps the first real celebrity chef, and he became famous as the creator of elaborate, elegant display pieces and pastries, the ancestors of our modern wedding cakes, sugar sculptures, and ice and tallow carvings. But it was Carême's practical and theoretical work as an author and an inventor of recipes that was responsible, to a large extent, for bringing cooking out of the Middle Ages and into the modern period.

Carême emphasized procedure and order. His goal was to create more lightness and simplicity. The complex cuisine of the aristocracy—called *Grande Cuisine*—was still not much different from that of the Middle Ages and was anything but simple and light. Carême's efforts were a great step toward modern simplicity. The methods explained in his books were complex, but his aim was pure results. He added seasonings and other ingredients not so much to add new flavors but to highlight the flavors of the main ingredients. His sauces were designed to enhance, not cover up, the food being sauced. Carême was a thoughtful chef, and, whenever he changed a classic recipe, he was careful to explain his reasons for doing so.

Beginning with Carême, a style of cooking developed that can truly be called international, because the same principles are still used by professional cooks around the world. Older styles of cooking, as well as much of today's home cooking, are based on tradition. In other words, a cook makes a dish a certain way because that is how it always has been done. On the other hand, in Carême's *Grande Cuisine*, and in professional cooking ever since, a cook makes a dish a certain way because the principles and methods of cooking show it is the best way to get the desired results. For example, for hundreds of years, cooks boiled meats before roasting them on a rotisserie in front of the fire. But when chefs began thinking and experimenting rather than just accepting the tradition of boiling meat before roasting, they realized that either braising the meat or roasting it from the raw state were better options.

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ESCOFFIER

Georges-Auguste Escoffier (1847–1935), the greatest chef of his time, is still today revered by chefs and gourmets as the father of twentieth-century cookery. His two main contributions were (1) the simplification of classical cuisine and the classical menu, and the reorganization of the

kitchen. Escoffier rejected what he called the “general confusion” of the old menus, in which sheer quantity seemed to be the most important factor. Instead, he called for order and diversity and emphasized the careful selection of one or two dishes per course, dishes that followed one another harmoniously and delighted the taste with their delicacy and simplicity. Escoffier’s books and recipes are still important reference works for professional chefs. The basic cooking methods and preparations we study today are based on Escoffier’s work. His book *Le Guide Culinaire*, which is still widely used, arranges recipes in a simple system based on main ingredient and cooking method, greatly simplifying the more complex system handed down from Carême. Learning classical cooking, according to Escoffier, begins with learning a relatively few basic procedures and understanding basic ingredients.

Escoffier’s second major achievement, the reorganization of the kitchen, resulted in a streamlined workplace that was better suited to turning out the simplified dishes and menus he instituted. The system of organization he established is still in use today, especially in large hotels and full-service restaurants.

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MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Today’s kitchens look much different from those of Escoffier’s day, even though our basic cooking principles are the same. Also, the dishes we eat have gradually changed due to the innovations and creativity of modern chefs. The process of simplification and refinement, to which Carême and Escoffier made monumental contributions, is still ongoing, adapting classical cooking to modern conditions and tastes.

Before we discuss the changes in cooking styles that took place in the twentieth century, let’s look at some of the developments in technology that affected cooking.

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Development of New Equipment

We take for granted such basic equipment as gas and electric ranges and ovens and electric refrigerators. But even these essential tools did not exist until fairly recently. The easily controlled

heat of modern cooking equipment, as well as motorized food cutters, mixers, and other processing equipment, has greatly simplified food production. Research and technology continue to produce sophisticated tools for the kitchen. Some of these products, such as tilting skillets and steam-jacketed kettles, can do many jobs and are popular in many kitchens. Others can perform specialized tasks rapidly and efficiently, but their usefulness depends on volume because they are designed to do only a few jobs. Modern equipment has enabled many food service operations to change their production methods. With sophisticated cooling, freezing, and heating equipment, it is possible to prepare some foods further in advance and in larger quantities. Some large multiunit operations prepare food for all their units in a central commissary. The food is prepared in quantity, packaged, chilled or frozen, then heated or cooked to order in the individual units.

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COOKING IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

All these developments have helped change cooking styles, menus, and eating habits. The evolution of cuisine that has been going on for hundreds of years continues. Changes occur not only because of technological developments, such as those just described, but also because of our reactions to culinary traditions. Two opposing forces can be seen at work throughout the history of cooking. One is the urge to simplify, to eliminate complexity and ornamentation, and instead to emphasize the plain, natural tastes of basic, fresh ingredients. The other is the urge to invent, to highlight the creativity of the chef, with an accent on fancier, more complicated presentations and procedures. Both these forces are valid and healthy; they continually refresh and renew the art of cooking. A generation after Escoffier, the most influential chef in the middle of the twentieth century was Fernand Point (1897–1955). Working quietly and steadily in his restaurant, La Pyramide, in Vienne, France, Point simplified and lightened classical cuisine. He was a perfectionist who sometimes worked on a dish for years before he felt it was good enough to put on his menu. “I am not hard to please,” he said. “I’m satisfied with the very best.” Point insisted that every meal should be “a little marvel.” Point’s influence extended well beyond his own life. Many of his apprentices, such as Paul Bocuse, Jean and Pierre Troisgros, and Alain Chapel, went on to become some of the greatest stars of modern cooking. They, along with other chefs in their generation, became best known in the 1960s and early 1970s for a style of cooking called **nouvelle cuisine**. Reacting to what they saw as a heavy, stodgy, overly complicated classical cuisine, these chefs took Point’s lighter approach even further. They rejected many traditional principles, such as a dependence on flour to thicken sauces, and instead urged simpler, more natural flavors and preparations, with lighter sauces and seasonings and shorter cooking times. In traditional classical cuisine, many dishes were plated in the dining room by waiters. Nouvelle cuisine, however, placed a great deal of emphasis on artful plating presentations done by the chef in the kitchen.

Very quickly, however, this “simpler” style became extravagant and complicated, famous for strange combinations of foods and fussy, ornate arrangements and designs. By the

1980s, nouvelle cuisine was the subject of jokes. Still, the best achievements of nouvelle cuisine have taken a permanent place in the classical tradition. Meanwhile, many of its excesses have been forgotten. It is probably fair to say that most of the best new ideas and the lasting accomplishments were those of classically trained chefs with a solid grounding in the basics.

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New Emphasis on Ingredients

Advances in agriculture and food preservation have had disadvantages as well as advantages. Everyone is familiar with hard, tasteless fruits and vegetables that were developed to ship well and last long, without regard for eating quality. Many people, including chefs, began to question not only the flavor but also the health value and the environmental effects of genetically engineered foods, of produce raised with chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and of animals raised with antibiotics and other drugs and hormones.

The public has benefited greatly from these efforts. Today, in supermarkets as well as in restaurants, a much greater variety of high-quality foods is available than there was 40 or 50 years ago. Many chefs have modified their cooking styles to highlight the natural flavors and textures of their ingredients, and their menus are often simpler now for this reason.

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International Influences

After the middle of the twentieth century, as travel became easier and as immigrants arrived in Europe and North America from around the world, awareness of and taste for regional dishes grew. Chefs became more knowledgeable not only about the traditional cuisines of other parts of Europe but about those of Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere.

Many of the most creative chefs have been inspired by these cuisines and use some of their techniques and ingredients. For example, many North American and French chefs, looking for ways to make their cooking lighter and more elegant, have found ideas in the cuisine of Japan. In the south western United States, a number of chefs have transformed Mexican influences into an elegant and original cooking style. Throughout North America, traditional dishes and regional specialties combine the cooking traditions of immigrant settlers and the

indigenous ingredients of a bountiful land. For many years, critics often argued that menus in most North American restaurants offered the

same monotonous, mediocre food .In recent decades, however, American and Canadian cooks have rediscovered traditional North American dishes. The use of ingredients and techniques from more than one regional, or international, cuisine in a single dish is known as **fusion cuisine**. Early attempts to prepare fusion

cuisine often produced poor results because the dishes were not true to any one culture and were too mixed up. This was especially true in the 1980s, when the idea of fusion cuisine was new. Cooks often combined ingredients and techniques without a good feeling for how they would work together. The result was sometimes a jumbled

mess. But chefs who have taken the time to study in depth the cuisines and cultures they borrow from have brought new excitement to cooking and to restaurant menus. Today chefs make good use of all the ingredients and techniques available to them. It is almost second nature to give extra depth to the braising liquid for a beef pot roast by adding Mexican ancho peppers, for example, or to include Thai basil and lemon grass in a seafood salad. In the recipe sections of this book, classic dishes from many regions of the world are included among more familiar recipes from home. To help you understand these recipes and the cuisines they come from, background information accompanies

many of them. Cooking and cooking styles continue to change. Technology continues to make rapid advances in our industry, and men and women are needed who can adapt to these changes and respond to new challenges. Although automation and convenience foods will no doubt grow in importance, imaginative chefs who can create new dishes and develop new techniques and styles will always be needed, as will skilled cooks who can apply both old and new techniques to produce high-quality foods in all kinds of facilities, from restaurants and hotels to schools and hospitals.

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Source: Professional Cookery

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