



palate pleasures

Food lingo - aka menu descriptions that just don't make ANY SENSE AT ALL...

Ever looked forward to a lovely night out at a new restaurant, looking forward to a night savouring delicious delights with scintillating company?

The decision of venue is unanimous, and with anticipatory glee you ring to make a booking, hoping that it's still possible to snag a table. Somehow you squeeze your party into this devastatingly popular place. Appetite and thirst in hand, you arrive on time and ready to immerse yourself fully into this new culinary gem.

Seated at a pretty darn good table you relax, knowing that the hard work has been done - all the tricky negotiations of deciding where, when and how are in the past. The babysitter arrived, the dog has been fed, your friends who are joining you are just as happy and excited to be here as you are. Now you can relax ...

The waitperson hands you a menu, you barely glance at it while much excitable catching up conversations ensues. Drinks arrive, your stomach growls a little - it's time to see what's on offer and make those such very pleasurable decisions as to what to eat.

You gleefully peruse that sensory delight, commonly known as the menu. It might be cloth, leather bound, or printed on wedding-invitation grade paper.

Whatever it's made of, you feel like your grubby little hands will somehow taint its printed perfection and blaspheme it's bible-like status.

But you are hungry! And its contents are, after all, what you came here for.

Let's see - what to have for an entree? Number one 'flame kissed, chilli infused, panko encrusted, hand caught eastern king prawns with Idaho horseradish, heirloom compost and Meyer lemon gratin', or what about 'shaved fennel a la greque, green olive jelly, radish sprouts, goats curd with a taro chip'. Hmmm ... images of deliciousness do not rapidly spring to mind.

Mouth isn't watering, actually. In fact, where there was delightful anticipation there is now confusion - anxiety even. What the hell are those things? Are they even food?

And then there are the adjectives used to describe the way such alien food-forms are

prepared - Compost? Hello ... not remotely appetising connotations, in fact quite the contrary!

And then there's deconstructed - no, it's not advanced literary theory but foodstuffs taken apart and put back together again. Or perhaps 'unctuous' - really just a way to let you know that what you're about to eat is basically a heart attack on a plate.

Oh and my personal favourite 'caramelised' - if you really want to know, it is burning a substance using sugar. Or there's just plain old blackened - it actually just means burnt. Plain and simple ...

What on earth possesses those who create menus to strive for such acrobatic linguistic feats?

After all, a menu merely acts as a vehicle to define a selection of available foodstuffs at a given establishment. And for the most part, they are handed out to the general public whom, in the majority of cases, we can assume, lack an encyclopaedic knowledge of food terminology - unless the restaurant is willing to provide a glossary of terms, then why bother? So why make it infinitely more complicated than it needs to be?

At best, you'll have a diner who has to ask their server 15 questions in order to suss out what's actually on offer. At worst, a customer who doesn't want to seem clueless in company and orders with no idea what's on the way.

It seems counterproductive to alienate customers this way, when the experience could have been so much more seamless and uncomplicated.

Thankfully, there does appear to be a backlash against this in the upper echelons of the restaurant world. Elaborate sentence constructions appear to be thinning out considerably and are being replaced by the nouns that matter. E.g. 'Fennel soup, Julienne of Apple, Truffle oil' No 'on a bed of', 'with this, with that, shaved, pounded or infused'

Just ingredients and essential basic terminology regarding methods of preparation is the order of the day ...

Oh and by the way, saladini is just green salad leaves, for all of you who were wondering.

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