



Graphic composition by Jean Cazals / StockFood

Visuell 06/2007: Trends in der modernen Food-Fotografie

Trends in modern food photography

by Nicole Fendel and Petra Thierry

Based on what was originally a documentary style, various trends and styles that can claim to be equally relevant have developed in the last few years. The latest trends are “comfort food” and “granny chic”. At the forefront as far as new trends are concerned are the English-speaking countries, from which many top photographers originate.

Up to about fifteen years ago, food photography was very documentary in nature. The dominant feature was a picture to illustrate something prepared from a recipe. In some cases, the ingredients were arranged around the dish as a design element.

New trends developed from the early 1990s, when food photography was “re-invented” in Australia and the UK. A graphic style was developed and pictures were designed and put together. Interest focused on such matters as styling, decoration, surroundings and the interplay of various colours. The props became important design elements that provided support for the message contained in the dishes portrayed. For a long time, food images without designer crockery, cutlery and glasses were almost inconceivable. The drawback of this dominant styling was, however, that a person’s attention was often distracted from the actual recipe or dish. At the same time as the development of this graphic style, there was a movement towards very light,

almost too light, photography that contrasted with the dark and sharply focused documentary style of the past. Deliberate blurring, with one area of a picture in focus and the fore- and background out of focus, became a design element. However, a few years passed before this new trend became widely accepted and a demand for it developed. Today, this light, out-of-focus and highly stylised photography is considered “modern” worldwide and is much in demand by many different types of client.



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For some years now, there has been a counter-trend parallel to this type of photography: trend-setting photographers are increasingly adopting a more puritanical attitude to the design of their images, and props are used more sparingly and only for the purpose of reinforcing the message. Once again, the focus is on the aesthetic features of the food portrayed. Dishes are highlighted by the overall design of the image (construction, lighting, etc), and the presentation on neutral white china once again makes the recipe the centre of attention. The extreme blurring that sometimes only allows one to imagine the dishes shown is now being replaced by an organic way of looking at things, and very strong, vivacious colours are used in some cases.

The latest trend is towards two new themes that have become the favourites of the leading magazines: "comfort food" and "granny chic". "Comfort food" is understood to mean simple, traditional and uncomplicated cuisine worldwide, and it is often illustrated with "granny chic" props, ie things that remind one of the times of our grandmothers: enamel pots and pans, stoneware plates, "normal"

cutlery, lace doilies and old silverware. The colours of the fore- and background are various shades of brown or the wide range of berry colours favoured in the 1980s: a dark mix of lilac, violet, fuchsia, mauve and burgundy.

A number of influences from associated subject areas are clearly brought to bear in the development of these new trends:

"Granny chic" props, reminding us of our grandmothers
 Photo: Klaus-Maria Einwanger



Graphic composition by Jean Cazals



"Granny chic"

Photo: Jan-Peter Westermann



- Fashion design: colour interplay, modern themes
- Furniture and light design, architecture: graphic construction
- Holiday countries: Mexico, Caribbean (strong colours, such as at markets, the sea or local/national costumes), Provence, Tuscany (chalk-white or red terracotta country house style)
- Lifestyle themes: wellness, balance, cocooning (dark, earthy colours)

The latest trends are first reflected in the leading food journals. Only a handful are really "in" as far as the food scene is concerned but they are read around the world and photographers gain a lot of kudos if they print their images. The major international food magazines include:

- UK: Food Illustrated, Olive, Delicious
- Australia: Donna Hay Magazine, Food & Travel
- USA: Martha Stewart Living, Real Simple

The big publishing houses in these countries pay for experimental series of food images to be produced by food photographers who are currently in vogue. New trends also originate from the leading design schools, such as the Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design (UK) or the Parsons School of Design New York (USA).

All in all, the English-speaking countries are at the forefront when it comes to the development of new trends. New York used to be the leading source of design trends but it was later replaced by the UK, Australia, Italy and Scandinavia. However, it is catching up again in the field of food photography and, together with the UK and Australia, is now home to the new breed of innovative food photographers.