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architecture + design

# icon

design award winner

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the muscular architecture of  
*Neutelings Riedijk*

the de Young museum

Design Academy Eindhoven

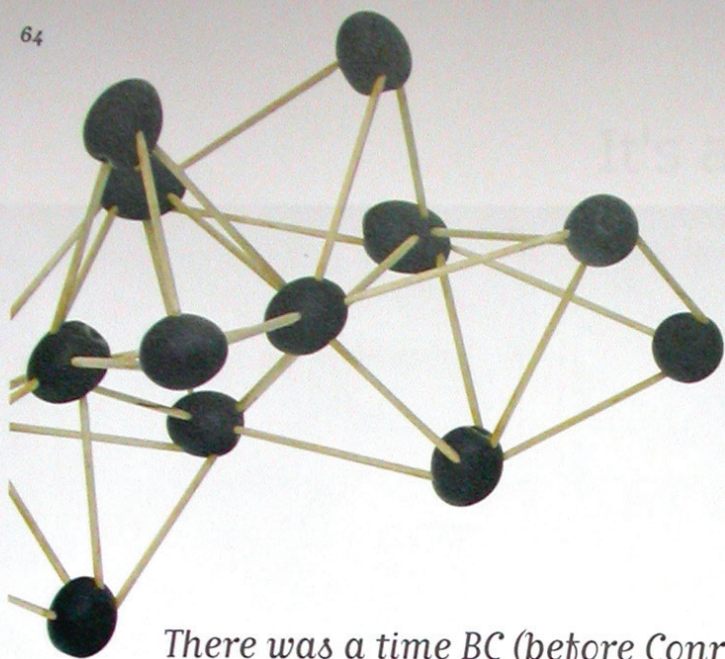
designing with food

Heineken does regeneration



plus Klein Dytham Architects, the Kabakovs, Marti Guixé and Kellogg's





*There was a time BC (before Conran) when  
chefs and designers moved in separate  
spheres. But, in recent times,  
the boundaries between*

# *food*



**above** Martí Guixé's  
Atomic Olive Snack  
**right** Paolo Ulian's  
Finger Biscuits  
**below** Marcia Nolte's  
Bread Goddesses





right Paolo Ulian's  
Greediness Measure  
left Marcel Wanders' Tulips:  
french fry substitutes made  
from rice and herbs  
below Martí Guixé's i-Cakes

words Lesley Jackson

# and design

## have begun to dissolve.

There is a new school of chefs tackling food with an attitude that can only

be described as design, while a growing number of designers are discovering that food is just another raw material.

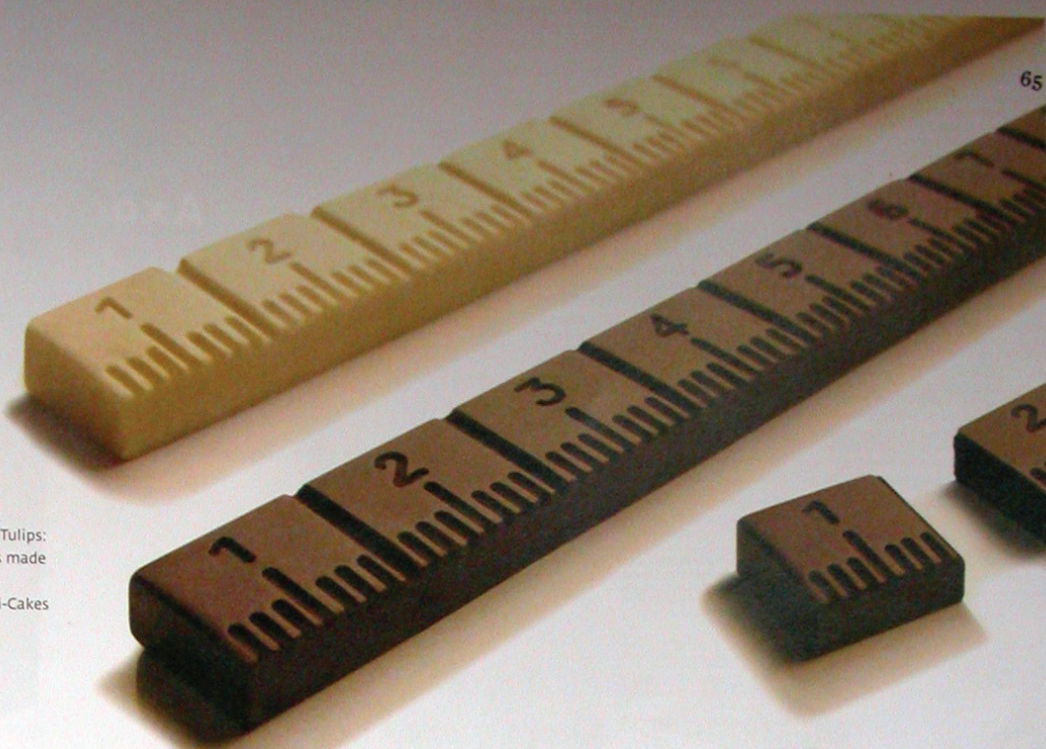
In contemporary gastronomy circles, nouvelle cuisine has been knocked off its perch by the vogue for "techno-cookery". Today, it is culinary boffins such as Spain's Ferran Adrià and the UK's Heston Blumenthal (with three Michelin stars apiece) who lead the way. Adrià and Blumenthal look to chemistry and physics for inspiration, experimenting with hitherto untried combinations of flavour, texture and colour to create provocative, complex, "engineered" dishes.

Adrià, who runs the internationally acclaimed El Bulli restaurant near the Costa Brava in Catalonia, is famous for his astonishing gastro-feasts lasting several hours. Each meal consists of over 30 mouthwatering morsels, ranging from sea cucumber crackling and foamed carrots to caramel-coated quail's egg yolks. Adrià devotes six months of each year formulating new dishes at his "laboratory" in Barcelona. Innovation is his holy grail.

Heston Blumenthal's bistro, The Fat Duck in Berkshire, was recently voted best restaurant in the world, and he has co-opted the term "molecular gastronomy" (originally coined by Nicholas Kurti, professor of physics at Oxford University) to

characterise his approach. Throwing culinary folklore out of the window, Blumenthal treats cookery as a form of high-tech materials science, selecting and processing his ingredients according to how they react at a micro-level. His dishes, which include concoctions such as snail porridge, basil blancmange, beetroot jelly and bacon and egg ice cream – on paper more like something out of a Roald Dahl story – have sent shockwaves through the restaurant world. "Eating is a multi-modal process involving all the senses," explains Blumenthal on his website, where he also stresses that taste is but one element in our perception of food. "Both physiological and psychological factors come into play," he says. "And, in many cases, they cannot be separated."

This could quite easily be a designer talking. Conversely, though, designers of all complexions are becoming increasingly preoccupied with food. Capitalising on the boom in dining out, many designers earn their bread and butter in the lucrative field of restaurant interiors. The crossover from tables and tableware to food is a natural progression in many ways. It all started back in 1987 when Philippe Starck was invited to create a new pasta shape for Panzani. Almost two decades on, as the cultural impact of design becomes ever more far-reaching, interest in "food design" is rapidly gathering momentum. ➤







Today, food design means different things to different people. To the food technologist, it implies a new flavour of crisp or a new shape of extruded breakfast cereal. To the restaurateur, it means food with frills, like designer dim sum (see icon 025), or anything to catch the eye of magazine picture editors. To the couturier, food design provides yet another opportunity for display. Last year, Pain Couture was the title of an extraordinary baguette installation by Jean-Paul Gaultier at the Fondation Cartier in Paris.

For the "industrial designer", food is an open book. On one level, it is a material like any other, to be cleverly remodelled in a witty or ingenious new guise. But to the "conceptual" designer, food is the perfect toy for exploring life, culture and the universe. More often than not, though, it has to be said, food design is simply an excuse for a bit of fun. "I love food and all the rites around food," admits Italian industrial designer Paolo Ulian, who created The Greediness Measure. This chocolate bar in the form of a ruler was his first edible product, made for a themed exhibition in 2003. His second design, the Finger Biscuit, is cone-shaped for eating spreads like Nutella. "In my studio there's a specific someone who is always finger-dipping the chocolate jar," he explains in The International Design Yearbook 2005.

Food producers and outlets of all descriptions are increasingly conscious of the make-or-break input of design, and often one kind of commission can lead to another. The Design Laboratory – a multi-disciplinary consultancy harnessing the talents of graduates from Central Saint Martins College – recently redesigned the interior of a French-style patisserie called Henri Charpentier in Osaka. This, in turn, led to an invitation from their parent company, Cool Earth Japan, to design a range of luxury gateaux.

Confectionary is one of the most accessible areas for aspiring food designers. At designersblock in London this September, one entrepreneurial Dutch graduate, Bas Kools, even set up his own lollipop stand, called Lolly Lab.

Food has long been a major preoccupation of Dutch design guru Li Edelkoort, and regularly features in her trend forecasts. In fact, she has just opened a restaurant in Paris called Laurier (meaning bay leaf), specialising in Mediterranean flat bread. It is largely as a result of Edelkoort's influence that the Netherlands has emerged of late as a hotspot for conceptual food design. The hub of this new movement is the Design Academy Eindhoven [see the feature on page 46], where Edelkoort is one of the directors. At the press conference to announce her appointment in March 1999, a special all-white meal was served, inspired



by the concept of a "funeral lunch", as in many countries white is the colour of mourning. Served on white plates by white-garbed waiters, the food included such anaemic delights as peeled radishes and poppadums.

Food also crops up regularly in student projects at Design Academy Eindhoven. Recently, Marcia Nolte, a third-year student, has done some extraordinary things with bread rolls. Nolte experimented by tying string around the uncooked dough. "Because bread rises, the end result is always a surprise," she remarks. "It was nice to see that the bread came through the string like rolls of human fat."

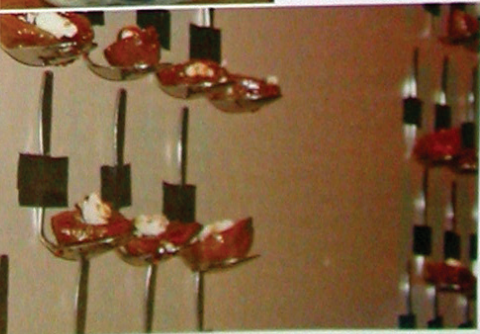
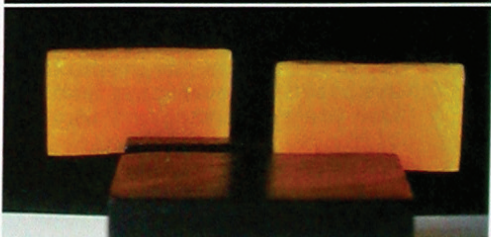
One of the chief protagonists behind Li Edelkoort's all-white lunch was Marije Vogelzang, who was then an Eindhoven student on the industrial design course. Vogelzang has just opened a small restaurant and food design studio in Rotterdam called Proef (meaning Taste, in the

left: Pain Couture by Jean-Paul Gaultier

below three dishes from El Bulli: pistachio and yoghurt parcels, quail's egg and bacon teaspoons and whiskey and passion fruit pastilles

bottom right: one of Marije Vogelzang's food installations, and a loaf of bread for the Royal Tichelaar Makkum factory café

bottom left: Heston Blumenthal's serving of caviar and chocolate for The Fat Duck far left: Blumenthal's lemon cream palate cleanser frozen in liquid nitrogen







imperative). "I love using food as a material to communicate with," she says. "I'm interested in chemical processes, taste and rituals: in designing things you put into your body. I'm also interested in things that don't last."

Specialising in customised "food concepts", mainly for design-related events, Vogelzang's assignments since graduating have included a meal comprising "forgotten vegetables" for an exhibition for trendsetters Droog in Lille, and a buffet of "emotion food" (strongly flavoured dishes "tattooed" with evocative words picked to trigger particular feelings) for the opening of Jongeriuslab's Ideal House at the Cologne Furniture Fair.

Self-proclaimed "ex-designer" Martí Guixé, author of a book called Food Design, comes at the subject from a totally different angle. His attitude to food is much more cheeky and irreverent. Over the years, Guixé has initiated a plethora of food-related projects, from i-Cake (his 2001 pie-chart creation), to his Olive Atomic Snack Performance (2003). Last year, Guixé caused a stir with FoodBALL (icon 020), his laddish fast-food outlet for shoe firm Camper, where all the grub on offer is golf-ball shaped.

Perversely, Guixé denies any real interest in food, and claims he can't cook. "I consider food a mass consumption product," he asserts. **"I like the fact that it's a product that disappears – by ingestion – and is transformed into energy. In my food projects, the products are based on developing food that fits a contemporary way of life.** They have to meet the demands of a more complex lifestyle and are de-territorialised."

Performance, not to mention exhibitionism, are key elements in the design community's current love-affair with food. London-based Italian designer Martino Gamper and his chums, Maki Suzuki and Kajsa Stahl (graphic designers from Japan and Sweden respectively), have taken to hosting food-night soirées where they "curate" both the environment and the meal. Promoted under the Trattoria al Cappello label, these peripatetic events take place roughly once a month at various East London locations. The cult Japanese foodie film Tampopo was the theme for a gastric happening (Orchestra and Flavours) during September's London Design Festival.

Droog now celebrates the exhibition openings at their Amsterdam gallery, droog@home, by inviting the featured designers to host a dinner party. Melding food, design and social interaction, these meals – or food performances, as they might better be described – provide a new vehicle for designers to explore their creativity.

For the inaugural exhibition, New Dutch Designers, Marcel Wanders, who has dabbled in food design over the years, enthusiastically rose to the challenge. He installed a do-it-yourself sushi bar, the idea being to encourage guests to be creative and cook for themselves instead of relying on the host to do all the work.

For a recent dinner party at Droog, the all-female Swedish design group Front came up with the brilliant idea of speed-dating. The self-consciously nationalistic dishes, consisting of esoteric Swedish delicacies such as reindeer heart and elk's tongue, were intended as a talking point. And just in case the conversation dried up, the tablecloth and plates had questions printed on them.

Given that product designers such as Wanders and Front seem so at home in the culinary arena, it begs the question: are there any real differences between the type of creativity involved in food and product design? Martino Gamper believes the two are closely related. "First you have to figure out what it is you want to cook or design. Then you'll have to think about the ingredients or materials you will need. While designing, one always wants to create something new, so at the end of the day the two are quite similar." †



left Lolly Lab  
below Martí Guixé's FoodBALL restaurant in Barcelona  
middle and bottom Front's speed-dating dinner at Droog, with conversation prompts

