

a Question of Taste

Robert Urquhart explores recent collaborations and experiments that blur the boundaries between food and design.

There is a creeping waft of food in unexpected places; art galleries, exhibition pavilions, pop up trailers outside art events. Chefs are collaborating with designers, designers are masquerading as chefs and brands and their audiences are sitting down to dinner en masse. Designers are adding the sensory perception of taste to their armoury. Food as experience may not be a new value to the food industry but it has been firmly set alight by the design tribes. As Mark Woodman, trend analyst and contributing US editor at Global Color Research points out: "Food has grown beyond just fuel for our bodies; we have rediscovered it as comfort, as celebration and as an exhibition."



Photo: Beth Evans

In April, London curators B.C. (Baz & Chaz) presented a pop-up restaurant at Rowing (Rowing Projects), a new gallery space, in Holloway, North London whereby they invited designers Patrick Best and Carla Valdivia to set up El Gatito Rosa, a Mexican influenced restaurant, for the evening. The food, which was influenced by the typical street taqueria (taco shop) that is abundant in Mexico City, "Was born of Patrick and Carla's many successful lunches for family friends at their flat in Hackney," according to Barnie Page of B.C.

Page explains the link between their role of designers and food aficionados by saying: "Design most clearly comes into play with their branding of the project, but when you visit one of their restaurant events you realise the extent of their 'design'; rather than a sit, be served, eat, leave scenario it is an experience. El Gatito Rosa is influenced by the typical street taco shop; muted TV playing Mexican football, music videos, adverts, news; a radio playing; wrestling posters; shrines to dead pop stars; Mezcal shots served with a fried grasshopper. All the ingredients of this experience are selected and sourced carefully."

Kate Jenkins, an illustrative artist/designer from Brighton, UK, specialises in idiosyncratic knitting works under the name Cardigan, often using food as a springboard, "Food plays a very important

part in my work as it is such a vast subject matter. There are so many areas to get inspiration from such as countries, styles, periods and packaging, the possibilities are exciting and endless," she explains.

Having recently curated a show entitled The Illustrated Recipe, Jenkins brought her interest to bear in her hometown with a historical re-imagining of food. "The show was an idea I had a while ago to re-create dishes by the first celebrity chef Antonin Carême who was appointed by The Prince Regent at the Brighton Pavilion. I wanted it to be a group show to see how each artist interpreted the recipes and dishes in their own distinctive styles and mediums," she says.

Masters of ceremony, Bompas & Parr (Jelly Mongers) agree that design and food are now soul mates. "Food experience is certainly the hot topic. We're pretty lucky in terms of working on excellent projects like breathable clouds of gin and tonic, flooding the roof of Selfridges to create a boating lake and float up bar and the recent whisky tornado. Through grit, determination and graft we are able to realise most of our dream projects. There are still a few on our wish list yet. These involve whole cow cookery, competitive eating, and winning a Turner prize. It's unlikely this'll all be at the same time," says Sam Bompas of Bompas & Parr. ▶

Opposite page: Bompas & Parr
Clockwise from below:
DSCAE;
Mercedes Drive Thru, Bompas & Parr;
Furniture Cakes, Sapore dei Mobili



Photo: © Ann Charlott Ommedal



Photo: © Floris & Luiz

And it's not just within the UK that the love affair between design and cuisine burns bright. Italy, spiritual home of both genres of creativity, has long been the bed of salvation for chefs and designers who feel the pull of attraction. This year's Milan saw Ventura Projects, a Dutch based design studio lead with Ventura Lambrate, a noteworthy large-scale exhibition space, which brought together brands, designers and food. Ventura Lambrate curator Margriet Vollenberg explains: "It has always been a conscious decision to include creative kitchens into the event. Especially because they further complement the positive, creative atmosphere of Ventura Lambrate as a whole. But they are also important to us because they show a different sort of creativity; a different angle in design and diversity."

The 'creative kitchens' on show where collaborations between the clothing brand Diesel and Amaro Industries, a Dutch slow food celebrity, for the Diesel Social Café. The collaboration between brands and 'design food' was fruitful as Ventura curator Margo Konings explains: "Amaro Industries and Diesel collaborated closely together. When Diesel came to us with their application for Ventura Lambrate, we had already agreed with André Amaro that Amaro Industries would create a restaurant. Diesel came with their social café idea and after hearing about it, we quickly came up with the idea of connecting them. Amaro introduced Diesel to Kaffee Fabrik, who served the coffee at the Diesel Social Café, while Diesel with its partners was responsible for the furnishing of the Diesel Social Café and part of the Amaro restaurant."

Designers Rui Pereira & Ryosuke Fukusada, who last year collaborated in Milan with a food inspired piece entitled Sapore dei Mobili were this year celebrating the repercussions of mixing design and food. Pereira joyfully notes: "The interesting thing about Sapore dei Mobili is that it can be read at really different levels. We had a request from a big American department store, from bakeries and a museum that wanted to feature it as a collection piece. We just got an e-mail the other day from the company that is willing to produce the project, so very soon we'll have some more good news."

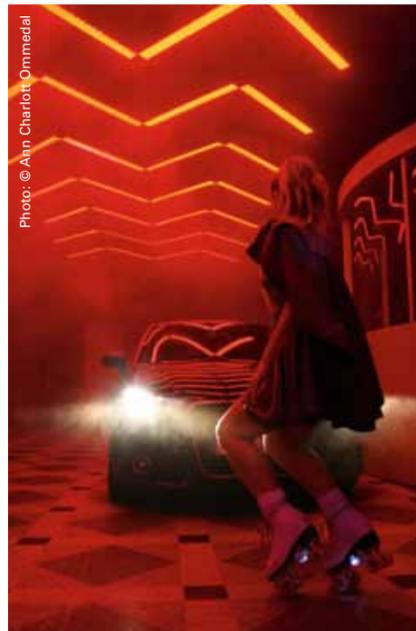


Photo: © Ann Charlott Ommedal



Photo: © HBA



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Opposite page, from top: Mercedes Drive Thru roller girl, Bompas & Parr; Diesel Social Café

Above: Amaro Extravaganza

Brands, sensing the cache in mixing two very economically and culturally diverse interests have been quick to encourage the union. Food futurologist Dr Morgaine Gaye says: "I think we have seen many fashion brands using food as a new angle for their brand, for example when the cupcake shop opened in the Top Shop flagship store, during the same time that fashion brands were using food displays in their windows. Food became cool and clothing brands are always on the lookout for the zeitgeist. They realise that clothing isn't the only social indicator of status and taste. Food has almost become a brand extension."

Woodman of Global Color Research adds: "We've not seen many pop ups with fashion [in the U.S.], however, as an extension of brand, a number of retail powerhouses have added cuisine to their repertoire. American Girl is known for its tearooms and parties and Ralph Lauren has a restaurant near his flagship in Chicago that reflects his aesthetic. Rumours have floated about a Marc Jacobs Café in New York."

Woodman, in his role at Global Color Research was recently involved in a project that saw DuPont, Corian and Zodiaq, working in partnership to produce a multi-sensory launch for its new product collection by identifying colour trends, the concepts of which were translated to the tasting courses offered to the guests. "One of the resulting articles exclaimed that the way to launch a product had been taken to a new level; texture and colour drove the food story instead of the reverse," states Woodman. So, while design has long been food for thought, it now appears that food is thought for design. ■

Contacts

- www.amaro.nl
- www.cardigan.ltd.uk
- www.globalcolor.co.uk
- www.jellymongers.co.uk
- www.morgainegaye.com
- [http://rowingprojects.com](http://www.rowingprojects.com)
- www.saporedeimobili.com
- www.venturaprojects.com