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Plating in gastronomic restaurants: A qualitative exploration of chefs' perception

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Abstract: The study investigates the extent to which the quality of dishes served in upscale restaurants can be perceived through the appearance of the different ingredients on the plate. More specifically, this study aims at identifying visual parameters of the plate that contribute to the perceived quality of haute cuisine from the perspective of experienced chefs.

Five chefs, with decades of experience in gastronomy, participated in individual semi-structured interviews during a 4-hour tasting meal in an upscale restaurant in Montreal. The free-format responses were analyzed using content analysis followed by linguistic discourse analysis on emerging themes.

The results highlight that although plating is an important factor contributing to the gastronomic experience, the quality of a dish cannot be reduced to its visual appearance. Chefs visually analyze dishes along three lines: the combination of flavors, the quality of the raw products and the culinary techniques used. Further lexical analysis will highlight the best practices for plating in the context of haute cuisine.

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