



Foreword

by John Williams

In his book, *“The Business of Being a Chef”*, Mark French has identified and provided a comprehensive volume that addresses areas of experience and knowledge that is lacking in far too many chefs these days.

That is to say, a well-balanced grounding in the fundamentals of running culinary operations as a viable business.

The thousands of cookbooks with beautiful glossy photographs and the plethora of television shows glamourise our industry, appealing greatly to creative individuals, who aspire to opening or heading up their own restaurants and operations.

It is an unfortunate fact that more than 65% of restaurants that open up, fail within 2 years, in most instances, due to a lack of strong understanding of the many aspects that must work in conjunction to achieve success.

I have known Mark for over 40 years, originally working together in our formative years and crossing paths as he embarked on an international career.

His wide knowledge and experience are demonstrated through a comprehensive review of the key components in running kitchens today, along with many real-life examples to put the topics into perspective and keep the subjects interesting.

Having a strong commitment to mentoring and developing chefs as they grow within our kitchens, before taking on leadership roles of their own, I can attest that the information contained within this book will be extremely

useful in their journey and as a constant point of reference in day-to-day operations.

In short, I would highly recommend “*The Business of Being a Chef*” to any aspiring culinarians as well as established chefs and operations managers, who will also benefit greatly from the content.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J". A long, thin horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature, extending from the left side of the "J" towards the right.

JOHN WILLIAMS, MBE
EXECUTIVE CHEF, THE RITZ HOTEL LONDON



Today's Executive Chef

*“Techniques are not the most difficult to teach.
The attitudes chefs take are much more important.”*

- ALAIN DUCASSE -

Responsibilities of The Chef

Today, the business has evolved to a point where I feel that many wonderful managers who have honed their service and hospitality skills are being pressured with less available time “on the floor” due to business reporting and administration duties.

It is my hope that the content within this book can help streamline necessary processes and procedures, allowing more effective time spent directly with guests and staff, enhancing their experiences.

Computers have been an amazing innovation, but we need to stay rooted to the fundamentals of hospitality.

Progressing in my career, I took on further responsibilities as an area, then global director of food and beverage, then on to general manager posts in 5-star hotels.

Throughout this time, continuing to maintain close connections with food & beverage operations, I have striven to provide the best support with all staff that I work with and set them up for success.

We need to keep a crystal-clear focus on what is important and let's be honest, it should be quite simple to provide a guest with a memorable experience.

I sometimes remind myself about all of the incredible achievements in the world such as space travel and architecture when we are having a challenging time to serve a guest with a good cup of tea with style!

In today's executive chef, my expectations as will be seen, are straight forward and simple.

Now, as you will read further on, simple does not mean easy ... whether referring to food or running a business. It means getting down to the essence of what excellence is.

There are thousands of cookbooks out there today with inspiration and ideas to fulfil any aspiring cook's needs. There are also many management books to be read, however, it is my goal to provide you with a package of tried and tested approaches.

These are real life situations, particular to the world of the multi-faceted chef, with approaches that you can immediately put into practice.

Excellence in cooking is the entry pass to being a true chef. One must first master the fundamentals and be a great cook before you can successfully run the business as a chef with responsibility to employees, owners, and guests.

The Chef as a Business Manager

There is no question that a large part of a chef's responsibility is being an astute business manager. Even basics such as food cost, if not handled well, can put a restaurant out of business.

When I joined the team at The Royal Garden in London, it was a revelation, as the brigade was large and the chef, Remy Fougere was not actively involved in the cooking every day (at least not on my level!). Many of the aspects explored in this book, stem from learnings back then, such as hiring a great team, empowering them, and stepping in to guide and teach when needed, along with managing the financial aspects.

These are lessons that have stood me in good stead throughout my career. Another development in recent years, is the creation of the “Chef & B” position, combining the Chef with the F&B manager.

Whilst I can understand the economic reasons for this position, in my opinion, this can only dilute the focus that you would have if staffed with good professionals.

Time is needed, in addition to normal service demands, for devoting to creative ways to drive revenue, as well as controlling costs and thus knowledgeable professionals will self-fund when given the direction.

The Pursuit of Excellence

As a chef of some accomplishment, you will have that built in characteristic of being a person driven by the pursuit of excellence.

You will have to, in order to succeed.

As you progress in your career and take on more responsibility, the challenge increasingly becomes how you take this passion and instil it in your team to accomplish your goals through them.

There are many aspects to this explored throughout the book. One thing to remember though, is, that you cannot possibly accomplish the necessary tasks on your own and the bigger the job, the more you have to put faith and trust in your team, once you have set them up for success.

What You Tolerate, You Become

A good approach to personally develop is a relentless pursuit of excellence in the operation, refusing to accept incompetence and being the gatekeeper for standards. Your responsibility is to set the standards and then to motivate your team to consistently meet them.

If you accept poor performance or attitudes, this will be recognised and seen through the whole operation, bringing the overall performance down.

Compromising your standards sends the wrong message and in fact de-values them.

Tacit approval, where your unspoken actions or lack of reaction are perceived as acceptance is explored later in the communications chapter. This should always be in mind as you set the benchmark.

This means that you continue to look for great performances and recognising and encouraging them but firmly and fairly deal with shortfalls.

It is a fact that not everyone can fit into any team, or industry. An example is the mystery of the football superstar, who transfers to a new club and never quite makes it. These are the intangibles that you as a manager must deal with.

A Trilogy of Focuses

Hospitality today is quite different to when I embarked on my career in the luxury market. In those days, rooms were looked upon as the main revenue driver in hotels and food and beverage was an amenity. Food and beverage facilities were there to make a statement and attract guests to the hotel, thereby driving the goal of filling the rooms. For many owners, profitability was not the foremost goal, rather to have a showcase for which they could bolster their egos.

Times have changed and these days, when it boils down to it, there are three main areas of focus on a day-to-day basis. All managers need to keep these front and centre in all aspects of operating. Without all 3 working in sync, overall results will be impacted.

A Trilogy of Focuses

1. Employee Motivation & Satisfaction

(Treat everyone as you would wish to be treated)

2. Guest Satisfaction

(Treat every guest as if they are a close friend or relation, invited to your home).

3. Owner Satisfaction

(Approach the business as if you own it)

There are certain aspects of a successful food operation, led by the executive chef, that I view as fundamental and regard as the 4 cornerstones of operating.

My expectation is that every effort is demonstrated to master these areas.

- 1 Food Quality
- 2 Food Safety & Sanitation
- 3 Training & Development
- 4 Managing the Business

It is rarely that you will come across the “perfect” chef who has full experience in all areas, and this is where it is important to ensure that a solid team is developed comprising of members that complement each other.

An example of this might be that you are an executive chef who is very solid on the administrative tasks necessary but perhaps are not completely up to date with current trends and customer preferences.

This would be a good opportunity to hire a sous chef that has a passion for the food but also the ability and willingness to develop in what traditionally might be considered the more mundane aspects of the business.

As mentioned, they are not expected to be a superstar in all areas but to certainly take ownership for them as the executive chef.

Remember, if you are not sure or don't have the solution for something, use your resources and reach out whether in the operation or further afield.

Any manager that you report to or colleagues in this industry are usually more than happy to support others when needed!

Set Expectations for Your Staff

Expectations of Cooks

All staff need to know exactly what is expected of them.

Without standards and boundaries, there cannot be any consistency or quality in the operation.

It is a fact that employees expect to be directed and will test the waters sometimes to see if they are corrected.

This is all part of getting a team aligned on a mission of being the best that they can.

The form below, to be signed off by a supervisor or sous chef, covers most of the important aspects of a cook's responsibilities.

As one of the core commitments, during orientation, this document should be reviewed, understood, and signed by the cook, then placed in their employee file.

It is important to be able to show that every effort has been made to train and guide employees in the event of poor performance that warrants corrective action.

Cooks & Lead Cooks Daily Focus Points

- Mise en Place for each station is set up correctly.
- All cooks have a thermometer as part of their uniform.
- All cooks use gloves for ready-to-eat food items.
- All cooks wear a hat or standard hair-covering.
- All cooks use the correct cutting boards.
- All cooks have a bucket with sanitiser and cloth on their station.
- All employees work in an organised, "clean as you go" fashion.
- All food items are produced according to use record standards.
- Any mechanical defects or safety issues are reported.
- Closing responsibilities are completed for all stations.
- Requisitions are placed for the following shift product needs.

Closing Responsibilities

All Cooks before leaving for the day must check out with the Chef, Kitchen Supervisor, Lead Cook, or a Restaurant Supervisor on duty.

Hot Line - AM/PM	Completed
The station is completely wiped down and sanitised.	
All prepared food is stored properly, labeled, and dated.	
All raw & uncooked meats/ poultry/ fish are on appropriate shelves in the fridge.	
All cold food Food is iced down properly, and pans are changed out.	
Cooking, Reheating & Hot-Holding Logs are completed before leaving.	
All Fridge/ Freezer Temperature Logs are completed for that shift.	
Railroad Cleaning assigned for that shift has been completed & signed off.	
All Prepared and Raw foods remaining in fridge drawers overnight must be in clean pans, properly sealed, labeled, and dated.	
Production Charts are completed by each employee for each shift.	

Cold Line - AM/PM	Completed
The station is completely wiped down and sanitised.	
All prepared food is stored properly, labeled, and dated in walk-in.	
All prepared food remaining on the line is in clean pans & properly stored.	
Cold Holding Logs are completed before leaving.	
Cooler/ Freezer Temperature Logs are completed for that shift.	
Railroad Cleaning assigned for that shift has been completed & signed off.	
Production Charts are completed by each employee for each shift.	

I understand and agree with these standards:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Figure 1 Cooks Daily Checklist

Expectations of Sous Chefs as Managers

- 1** To follow and execute on “The Guiding Principles”. These are operation-wide principles built into the mission/vision.
- 2** To make sure that you actively manage your departments and execute on all opportunities to increase performance.
- 3** To challenge your teams to increase performance and results and provide them with direction and tools to do so.
- 4** To provide incentives to motivate employees to achieve goals.
- 5** To take ownership in running your department as if it is your personal money to be spent or saved.
- 6** Take responsibility to bring up issues that you encounter and discuss where necessary.
- 7** To always develop solutions to situations rather than expect someone else to do so.
- 8** To always support your co-managers, supervisors, and employees in doing the right thing.



CHEF'S TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Responsibilities

1. Approach the business as if you own it.
2. Stay rooted in the fundamentals of hospitality.
3. Relentlessly pursue excellence.
4. Be the gatekeeper for standards.
5. Motivate and develop staff.
6. Care for every guest as if a close friend or relation.
7. Do not accept poor performance.
8. Know your strengths and build a team to complement.
9. Define and communicate your expectations.
10. Serve excellent food!



Cooking

“I’m not hard to please, I’m content with the very best.”

- FERNAND POINT -

As with any enterprise, the secret (or not so secret) key to success is in the foundation.

As a manager and leader of others, it is your responsibility and in fact, moral obligation to develop your staff and mentor those that you see potential in.

An interesting thing about teaching is that you continue to learn and refine your own skills through the process.

Contained here are some important aspects to consider and build into your particular operations setup and needs.

Through this process, you will also identify areas that you may benefit from exploring personally.

Skills to Focus On

- Knife skills.
- Cooking techniques
- Developing a palate and understanding of seasoning.
- Organisation and cleanliness.
- A sense of urgency.
- Be curious.
- Take a lot of notes.

Food Quality

The formula is very straight forward.... Focus on purchasing the best products that you can afford, cook them using solid techniques and let the natural flavours speak for themselves.

Simply prepared items, showcasing the best of local and regional ingredients will be more well received than concoctions where a chef may try to be dazzling the world with their high wire antics.

An example would be purchasing an excellent steak and not messing with it as opposed to having to disguise an inferior one with all kinds of other flavours.

I am a sauce lover myself, but they should be a part of the dish to enhance, not smother the main item.

Always keep in mind what the guests actually want and what sells. This means real food, prepared for regular people, unless you happen to be at the top of the chain in a 3-star Michelin establishment.

Putting your ego aside, home cooking can be very powerful and depending on your location, your cooks can bring some great ideas to the table.

Think about what chefs prefer to eat on their days off and that will tell you something.

This can evolve into your personal identity and style but more importantly will keep the guests coming back.

A few years ago, I was fortunate to help facilitate a training programme, bringing together hotel executive chefs and their general managers for 2 days.

The aim was to explore what is quality food, how to improve the focus on the important things and by having the GM's present, bolster the teamwork and ultimately drive the support for the chefs when they returned to their hotels.

A large part of the programme was driven by the head inspector of restaurants for the AA at the time, with an overview of what differentiates restaurants in ratings.

The AA, or Automobile Association, is an organisation that much like Michelin, evaluates restaurant anonymously and bestows awards of merit. In the case of AA, this is a ranking of rosettes from 1 (showing mastery of basic techniques with fresh ingredients, increasing in technical skill, innovation, all the way to the exalted 5 rosettes and a truly memorable dining experience.

It should be noted that only 10% of restaurants in the UK are worthy of the 1 Rosette or higher.

The quotation below, is the result of many thousands of dining experience, distilled into a simple but profound statement.

“The difference between 1 and 5 rosettes is how you apply advanced techniques while retaining maximum flavour, assuming an appropriate quality of source ingredients”.

- GORDON CARTWRIGHT -
Former Key Accounts Executive, A.A., U.K.

It was discussed that many dining experiences fall flat due to some very basic shortfalls and these are laid out here for your consideration and reflection.

Commonly Experienced Mistakes in Meals

- Poor seasoning of ingredients and dishes.
- Poor flavour of ingredients and dishes.
- Flowery menu descriptions.
- Flowery, ostentatious presentation.
- Overcooked ingredients.
- Complex desserts which are over-elaborate.
- Fussy canapés and amuse-bouche.
- Over frozen sorbets or ice creams.
- Using unseasonable produce.
- Dishes overcooked or undercooked.
- Dishes served either too hot or lacking sufficient heat.
- Poor balance of ingredients on the menu.
- Poor balance of flavours.
- Dishes lack contrast of flavour.
- Dishes combine too many conflicting flavours to appreciate the true flavour of any.
- Hybrid flavours (where two ingredients join to create a new flavour). such as a blended banana and strawberry cheesecake require careful handling.
- Vegetables not tailored to individual dishes in terms of either garnishing or accompaniments.

The Pursuit of Excellence

What is Excellence?

First of all, let's be clear, excellence is not perfection.

Vince Lombardi, the legendary sports coach put it best when he said, "Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence".

What Does It Take to Be the Best?

In my experience, success comes down to creating a culture of active, genuine hospitality.

A guest may have a technically perfect experience but if the service is robotic and not performed with genuine care, there is no soul to the experience.

The best operations provide service in an unobtrusive way, adapting to the cues from the guest.... some want more pampering than others but have the same expectations of receiving what they are paying for.

Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's applied the following principles as his benchmark, believing that if consistently provided, his competitors would always be trying to catch up.

Ray Kroc's Principles of Operation

Do it first class and don't compromise on:

- Value
- Quality
- Service
- Cleanliness

Ferran Adria, A Learning Experience

How often do we settle for "OK", or even "very good" but in the rush of day-to-day business, fail to relentlessly pursue the very best dishes that we can produce.

I certainly am aware that I am guilty of this and would like to share the following experience to present another approach.

I was lucky enough to be a part of a study group that visited Ferran Adria's laboratory in Barcelona. As you may know, the restaurant "El Bulli", presided over by him became famous for molecular gastronomy and was rated number one restaurant in the world for several years.

The restaurant operated for half of the year, then closed and the other half was dedicated to research in the laboratory. Not feasible for most but there you go.

While I am not a huge fan of this style of cooking, the visit was fascinating, and the great man himself, demonstrated his techniques, apparatus and how he was developing items.

What really left me with an impression, was yet to come.

Next, we headed across town, by the market to visit Ferran's press office. At the entrance, the walls were papered with innumerable cover pages from magazines the world over.

We went through to the office area and reviewed a new project undertaking. The team was developing a new hamburger concept. Not what you would expect, but their approach to this simplest of items, really drove home a message about the pursuit of excellence. There was a whiteboard and on it, all the components for a burger were listed. The actual burger, bun, sauce, French fries, accompaniments, seasonings, packaging etc.

The approach was to take all of these components and explore each one until all possibilities to make the best example possible were exhausted. I had to ask myself, how would this approach, elevate the standard of my food and the answer was clear.

Of course, very few chefs have the luxury of spending an inordinate amount of time on the many items that they produce, but what a concept. Certainly, something to bear in mind when assessing new dishes.

Seasonal Changes

For most locations, an ideal time to change menus is with each season. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

Not everywhere has these seasons particularly defined but they are a good guidepost to work towards.

Benefits of seasonal changes are:

- Costs will be better.
- Menu items are more appropriate.
- Product availability.
- Regionality.
- Keeps the culinary team stimulated.
- Marketing possibilities.

Below is a chart for the UK. A similar one could be developed for your location with the support of suppliers.

Seasonal Food Chart, UK												
	Spring			Summer			Autumn			Winter		
Vegetables	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Acorn Squash												
Artichokes	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Globe Coming Into Season	Globe	Globe	Globe	Globe	End of Season Globe			
Asparagus		Coming Into Season			End of Season							
Aubergine			From Late May					Until Mid Oct				
Beetroot					Coming Into Season						End Season	
Broad Beans				Mid June			Until Early Sept					
Broccoli					End of July			End of Season				
Brussels Sprouts									From End of Nov			End of Season
Butternut Squash							Coming Into Season		End of Season			
Cabbage												
Carrots			From Late May					End of Season				
Cauliflower		End of Season								From Mid Dec		
Celeriac	End of Season						Coming Into Season					
Celery						Coming Into Season					End Season	
Chicory												
Courgettes				Coming Into Season				End of Season				

Figure 2 Part of a UK Seasonal Produce Chart

Flavour

There are traditional “rules” that have been applied for many years, such as white wine with fish, red wine with meat. These are safe but very limiting. The more open-minded approach is to drink what you like, as long as you enjoy it.

There are, however, some principles of flavour that come into play and being mindful of these, can only serve to improve your personal and your guest’s enjoyment of a complete dining experience.

What is Flavour?

Flavour is the quality of something that affects the sense of taste.

It is a blending of taste and smell that can stimulate strong memories and is a very subjective concept, as everyone has personal preferences.

Things that affect a guest’s perception of flavour:

- Presentation
- Smell
- Temperature
- Texture / Mouthfeel
- Taste/Seasoning

Flavour and taste are connected but play different parts in the eating or drinking experience.

Taste is limited to the basic five characteristics picked up on the tongue, while the nose detects a huge number as well as evoking memory, which then precipitates a much-broadened experience.

When describing taste, there is a very limited base to describe, however flavour can be described in a much more appealing manner.... A point to consider in menu descriptions.

Understanding the guest experience and how to combine ingredients and seasonings in your cooking, will elevate the quality of your food significantly and set you apart from the competition.

Developing Flavour

Flavour is developed through:

- Skilled application of cooking techniques.
- Using quality, ripe ingredients.
- Using processes that enhance or balance flavour.
 - Extraction by juicing or pureeing
 - Infusion of oils, vinegars, stocks and juices
 - Marinating items, with liquids or rubs.
 - Reduction to concentrate flavour.
- Thoughtful use of seasonings and flavourings.
 - Herbs
 - Spices
 - Acidic ingredients
 - Liquids- stock, alcohol, juices

Always keep in mind that top quality ingredients and techniques lead to top quality cooking.

Supercharging the Flavour in Your Food

Taste is everything.

After all, if your food doesn't taste great, what does anything else that we are talking about matter?

Reputations as a chef were never built upon good food costs or successful audits. Your guests are not interested in these matters, they come to you for the food.

It is therefore surprising that not more time and thought is put into this area. The chefs that do, see, and reap the results. I hope that the areas below can stimulate you to push your personal boundaries.

Developing a Discriminatory Palate

It is essential that you develop your palate and knowledge through tasting, experiencing new cuisines and never ceasing to be curious. In the world of food, you never stop learning and the more that you know, the more you can share with your guests and team.

Travelling is a marvellous way to expose yourself to completely new taste adventures, which is why you will find that many chefs are very well travelled.

As the leading chef, it is up to you to continually challenge your team on the flavour and taste of your food, even if you are not the one that cooked it ... *it is your food*. Your brigade is an extension of your palette and standards. You can only do this if you have developed your own palette and broadened your experience of ingredients and the ways that they can be used.

This may seem obvious, but it is overlooked in many instances. I have been in too many kitchens where cooks do not even have salt and pepper at their workstations, a clear sign that all is not well. Even if you are preparing meals with the best ingredients available, without thoughtful seasoning, tasting along the cooking process, and adjustment before being served, the flavour of the food will fall flat.

It is a common denominator amongst the worlds' top restaurants that the food is seasoned to the limits, even approaching a surprising level of spiciness sometimes.

Tasting Tips

Before we explore the ways to enhance foods through seasoning, here are some thoughts on how to go about tasting food and the opportunities to be more focused.

Try taking a little more time when tasting or eating something. I get teased sometimes because I have a habit of smelling everything that I eat. You will observe that most people just put food in their mouth, chew quickly and swallow. They do not get to experience the full flavour of what they are eating or drinking.

By incorporating the following points when tasting food, adapted from how wine tasting is normally approached, your experience can be enhanced. (Assuming the food is good!).

In other words, taste with more focus and intention.

Steps When Tasting

1 Look

- a Take a moment to observe. Not only the arrangement of the food, but you can also observe if correct cooking techniques and seasoning have been employed, giving you a preview of how a dish was prepared.

2 Smell

- a Our sense of smell is critical in determining flavour and the average person can detect 10,000 different aromas.
- b As you breathe through your nose, open your mouth slightly allowing air to also circulate at the back of your throat.

3 Taste

- a Take a taste. A small taste, followed by another, balances out an initial “shock” to the plate, especially in highly seasoned food.

4 Consider the balance of the dish

- a What is the initial impression that the dish makes on your palate.
- b How is the balance between salty, sour, sweet, and sweet? Is there any umami coming through?

5 Flavour Development & Finish

- a Pay attention to how the taste is unfolding ... are you experiencing more layers of flavour coming through? Food with more spices tends to continue evolving.

6 Cleanse your palate

- a After something like 5 tastes of something, your palate becomes overwhelmed, and you stop detecting flavours.
- b Try chewing some mint chewing gum until the flavour goes. Take it out and put it on the side for a couple of minutes, then pop it back in your mouth. Surprisingly, it still has a minty taste ... it was your ability to taste it that was affected, not the flavour in the gum!

When you need to taste a lot of items:

- Wine tasters will have some simple bread on hand.
- Try used coffee grounds.... sniffing them, will reset your palette.

Keeping it Simple

Simple food is not easy food.

In fact, the less components or “busyness” that a dish has, the more dependent the end result is on the basic quality of the products and the technique applied.

Curnonsky, a celebrated French writer on Gastronomy put it well.... *“In cooking, as in all the arts, simplicity is the sign of perfection”*.

The challenge that an artist faces in the process of painting, becomes knowing when to stop adding paint. Think of an array of the most beautiful colours over-mixed and added to until the end result is grey.

The same applies to food and flavours. Focus on the main item and how you can make it shine as the star of the dish. Create dishes around seasonal, ripe, and great tasting items.

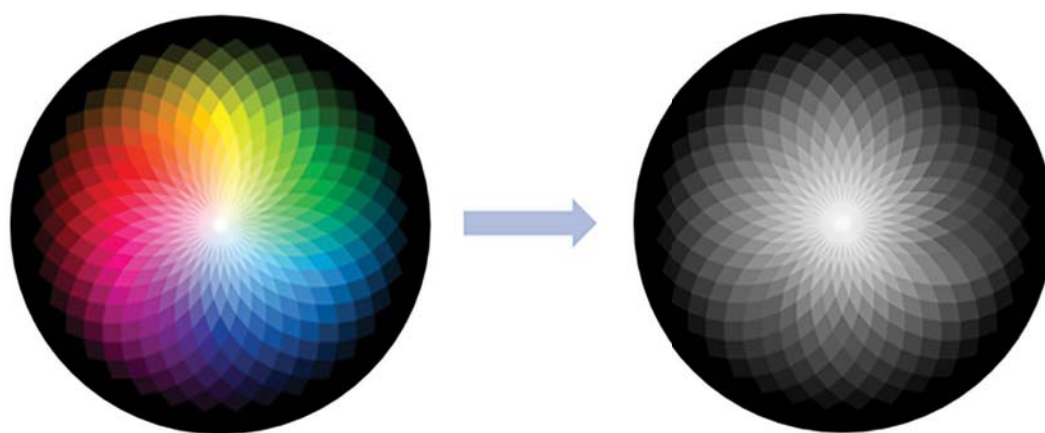


Figure 3 The Effect on Flavour of Over Complicating Food