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Fragments of The Past: The Art of Naming Dishes

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From the start, menus have been a customer's first impression into the restaurant's culinary experience. Menus that have been carefully designed have drawn the customer's eye to specific dishes and provide guidance when selecting a meal. (e.g. McCall & Lynn, 2008)

Restaurant menu experts have begun to find that using consumer psychology to design their menus have a direct impact on guest purchases and total revenue. These experts have noted that how a menu item is named can influence the guest perception of the dish. "A highly descriptive name can help create value by priming the guest with positive affects." (Yang, 2013, p. 8)

While descriptive menu labels have been in the center of attention of researchers, the history and practice of naming dishes received little attention.

A Brief History of Menus

In part, based on Marco Polo's travel notes in China, we could believe that during the Southern Song Dynasty, the commercially lively 13th century Hangzhou had an important restaurant scene where customers, after being seated at taverns, were handed a menu to choose dishes according to their preferences (Gernet, 1962, Szende, Pang, & Yu, 2013).

Similarly, the first menus in Europe appeared at the end of the middle ages. A medieval text written in 1393 "Le Ménagier de Paris," (The good wife's guide) presents menus for various occasions and feasts. (Rambourg, 2011).

However, the Germans will often cite their findings about the 'first written menu' from a festive banquet in 1541. According to their account, a long note, "*ein langer zedel*" was placed in front of the guests with the menu created by the Chef, '*Kuchenmayster*.' (Kindermann, 1964, p. 202.)

The Origin of Naming Dishes

Nicolas de Bonnefons, a 17th-century writer advised chefs to respect "*le vray goust*" {the true taste} of all menu ingredients; subsequently chefs began to indicate the origin of ingredients used. (Rambourg, 2011, p. 15)

In early years, dish names contained basic menu labels only e.g. "chapon aux herbes" or "poulaille farcie" used by Chef Taillevent (Poulain & Neirinck, 2004, p. 66). However, towards the end of the 17th century, it is assumed that French Chef Massialot, began the practice of naming dishes so that they could be universally recognized.

Since then, giving dishes a name ('*appellation culinaire*') has become an essential characteristic of grand cuisines (Poulain & Neirinck, 2004).

This begs the question, why French dishes needed an additional name? The answer is probably in the complexity of classic French cuisine and the importance of the garnishes. These garnishes were common and integral to French cuisine. "Garnishes consist of various trimmings added to a dish or placed around the meat, chicken, fish, etc., or served at the same time on a separate dish. Garnishes must always blend with the flavor of the basic dish." (Montagné, pp. 445-446) Garnishes were labeled as either are *Simple* or *Composite* and could contain either an individual or numerous components.

The Choisy Menus (1744-1759)

During his reign, Louis XV used the Château de Choisy as a royal residence and a refuge to meet Madame de Pompadour. 413 colorful and richly-decorated menus, many of them hand-calligraphed, commemorating his frequent visits between 1744-1759. The Choisy menus were created in only one copy. Contrary to the current practice of the menu, no menus were distributed to the guests. Louis XV might have wanted to keep the menus as memorabilia. Choisy's menus were all placed into eight collections keeping as personal memories. The menus were all signed by F.P. Brain de Sainte-Marie; the menu designer's true identity regrettably remains a mystery (Josserand, 2008).

Many of the menu items indicate the origin of the food, such as "*les chapons de Bruges*," or "*le marcassin et le chevreuil de Compiègne*." *Appellations culinaires* appear on the menus as well, referring to the methods of preparation of dishes, such as "*à la Strasbourg*," or "*à la provençale*." (Rambourg, 2011, p. 15) Some of the menu items were brought in by distinguished guests and the menu items carried their names, such

as the wild boar pudding on January 10, 1752: “*Boudin de sanglier par le marquis d’Ecquevilliers*” (Josserand, 2008, p. 17).

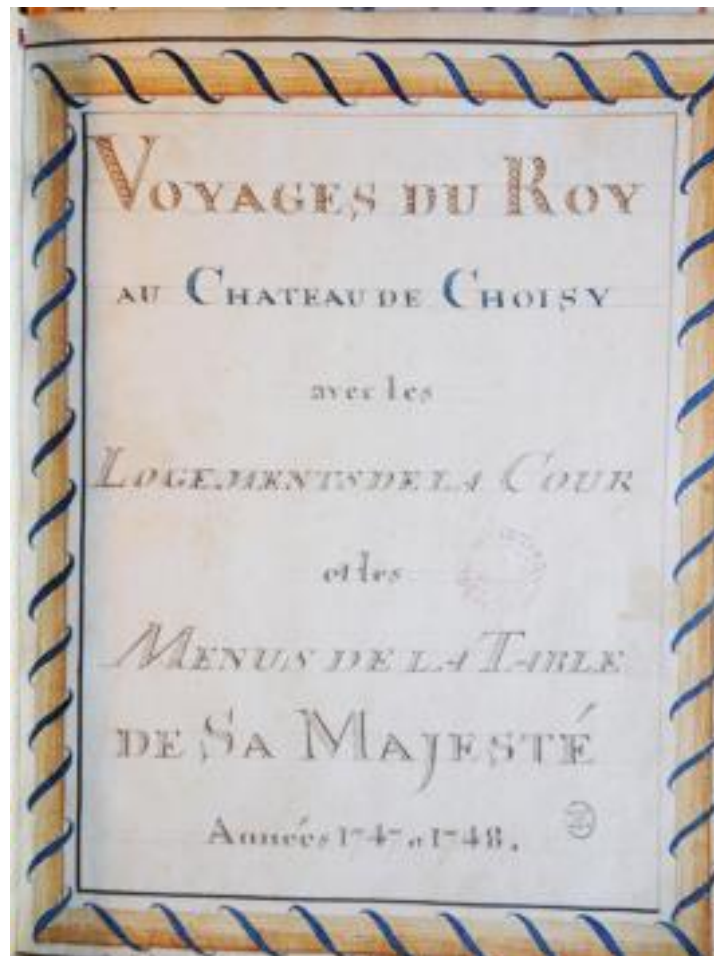


Figure 1. The Choisy Menus (1747 – 1748) – Cover Page

Photograph by Peter Szende

Source: Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris

The Birth of Parisian Restaurant Menus

Beginning in the early 1770s, Spang claims that restaurants utilized printed menus for guests to select their meals. (Spang, 2000) According to an early 19th-century local dining guide, the first Parisian restaurants opened their doors in 1774 (Le guide, 1814, p. 10).

One of the oldest menus that included individually priced items is the Véry brothers restaurant in the 1790s. The menu is structured by categories and several *appellations*

culinaires are present. Some indicate preparation methods, such as the “*Tourte à la financière*,” or the “*Poitrine de mouton à la Sainte-Menehould aux choux ou aux navets*,” or the “*Morue à la maître d’hôtel*.”

VERY, Frères, RESTAURATEURS, Maison Egalité, N°. 83.			
PRIX FIXE DES METS POUR UNE PERSONNE.			
POTAGES	FAISANDES	POISSONS	ENTRÉES
Potage au choucroute 4 Potage à la crème 4 Potage à la tomate ou aux légumes 4 Trois œufs au jus 4 Soufflé à la crème ou aux légumes 4 Soufflé de macaroni à la béchamel 4 Soufflé au lait de crème 4 Soufflé au lait de crème 4 Soufflé au lait de crème 4 Soufflé au lait de crème 4	Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10 Faisande au choucroute 10	Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10 Poisson au choucroute 10	Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10 Entrée au choucroute 10

Figure 2. Restaurant Véry – menu created in approximately 1793.

Photograph by Peter Szende

Source: Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris

The previously referenced Paris dining guide also presents some remarkable examples of *appellations culinaires*. In the menu of the famous restaurant Beauvilliers, we find “*Cuisse de dindon grillée, sauce Robert*,” or “*Deux côtelettes de mouton à la Soubise*.” The restaurant ‘Les Frères Provencaux’ offered a large variety of named dishes, such as “*Petits pâtés à la Béchamelle*” [sic] or “*Poulet à la Marengo*,” or a “*Meringues à la Chantilly*” for the sweet tooth. (Blanc, 1814)

Based on Poulain & Neirinck, (2004, pp 66-67), the usage of *appellations culinaires* exponentially increased between 1651 and 1833.

Important French Cookery Books	% of recipes that include an ‘<i>appellation culinaire</i>’
La Varenne: Le cuisinier françois - 1651	0.02%
Massialot: Le Cuisinier roïal et bourgeois – 1691	10.2 %
Menon: La cuisinière bourgeoise - 1774	14.5%
A. Carême: L'Art de la cuisine française au XIXe siècle – 1833	68.67%

Popularizing *Appellations Culinaires* – Champion One: Marie-Antoine Carême (1784- 1883)

Carême was the father of haute cuisine and a devoted codifier of French cuisine; he could be considered as one of the first celebrity chefs who cooked for Georges IV in England and the Tsar Alexander I of Russia. (Jankowski, 2017).

Escoffier later attributed the foundation for French cuisine and preparation to Carême who allowed it to transcend borders and gain appreciation worldwide. (Ferguson, 2004)

From Ferguson, we learn that “Carême baptized each preparation...sometimes he had the ingredients supplied the names...the variants – of soups, of sauces, and other dishes – allowed him greater scope for honorific, geographical, and historical names.” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 72)

For example, shrimp bisque came with a variety of denominations such as “*à la française, à la Corneille, à l’amiral de Rigny, à la Périgord, à la princesse, au chasseur, à la Régence, and à la royale*.”(Ferguson, 2004. P. 72)

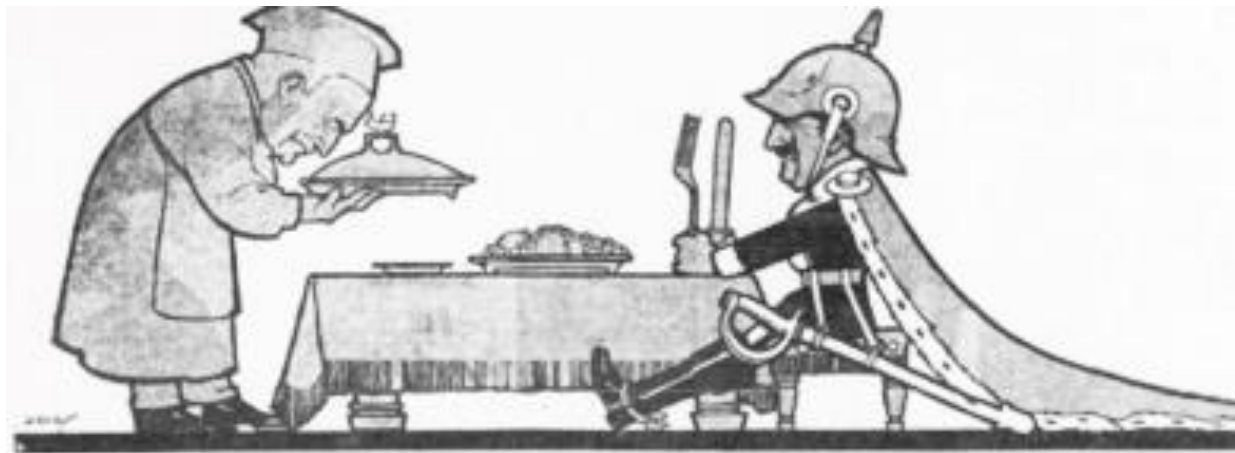
Carême believed that by these *appellations culinaires* would be more recognizable for culinary professionals. (Ferguson, 2004)

Popularizing Appellations Culinaires – Champion Two: Escoffier (1846-1935)

“The most famous cook in the world,” Escoffier was considered a champion of French cooking. (Shaw, 1994, p. 9) “Escoffier radically simplified food service by advocating the use of seasonal ingredients and the abandonment of elaborate garnishes. He also streamlined the organization of professional kitchens.” (Britannica, n.d.) Throughout his long career, he invented several infamous dishes that still remain prevalent today. As Escoffier wrote, “I first put Pêche Melba on the menu for the opening of the Carlton Hotel [in London].” (Escoffier, 1997, p. 115)

Much like the Pêche Melba, Escoffier would name all his favorite dishes after women. The range of women extended from princesses to actresses and singers, as well as *demi-mondaines*. Other times, Escoffier elected to name his dishes after destinations such as *Filets de Sole Walewska* that was named after the Villa Walewska in Monte Carlo. (Shaw, 1994)

From the beginning, Escoffier remained adamant that the French names remained untranslatable. Because of the French language’s diverse descriptions, he insisted that French “cuisine would continue to speak French.” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 72)



M. Escoffier has been frequently spoken of as the German Emperor's chef. An epigrammatist has called him "the chef of Emperors and the Emperor of chefs." The facts concerning his services to the German Emperor are these: In 1906 the Emperor paid a visit to the newly launched monster of the Hamburg-American Line, the Amerika. This was a very unusual honor from a reigning sovereign, and the directors of the line, to show their appreciation, determined to give his Majesty the finest banquet possible. With this object they engaged M. Escoffier at great expense and he prepared a banquet for the Emperor on the ship. After dinner the Emperor, who was in an exceptionally jovial mood, summoned the chef before him and said: "Monsieur Escoffier, that is the finest dinner I have ever eaten."

"The Best Dinner I Ever Ate!" Said the Kaiser.

Source: Omaha daily bee, September 24, 1911, Image 35

Let's refer to Prosper Montagné again: "Garnishes are numerous and important to French cuisine. They are sometimes named after the man who originated them, or for an occasion, or for a place, or for many other reasons. (Montagné, p. 445) Expanding on Montagné's attempt to better understand *appellations culinaires*, see below a few selected categories of naming culinary preparations:

NAMING CULINARY PREPARATIONS:

Examples

Notes

SELECTED CATEGORIES

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Names are Based on Geography | béarnaise (e.g. sauce béarnaise) | Béarn is a province of southwestern France. |
| 2. Fantasy or Whimsical Names | demi-deuil | (e.g. Chicken demi-deuil, or "half-mourning,") for the dark color given to the chicken's skin by the slices of truffle tucked under the skin. |
| 3. Dominant color | Carmen or Cardinal | Pinkish

red shades |

4. Historical events	à la Marengo	Commemorating Napoleon Bonaparte's battle of Marengo
5. Reference to a profession, rank or status	à la meunière à la financière	In the style of the miller's wife A rich mixture; banker's style
6. NOTABLE FIGURES		
5.1. Celebrity Chefs, Gastronomists and Hoteliers	à la Dugléré	Named after the 19th-century French chef Adolphe Dugléré
6.2. Celebrities in Art and Literature	Carpaccio	Named after Venetian renaissance painter, Vittore Carpaccio
6.3. Aristocracy and Royalty	Béchamel	Marquis de Béchamel, a general of Louis XIV.
6.4. Prominent Historical Figures	Casanova	Italian Adventurer
6.5. Politicians	Bismarck	Otto von Bismarck, German statesman
6.6. Mistresses	à la Dubarry	Madame du Barry - Courtesan of Louis XV

The table is based in part on principles outlined in Poulain & Neirinck (2004) and Riley (1996).

The '*Gringoire et Saulnier*'

First published in 1914, *Le Répertoire de La Cuisine* was written by Théodore Gringoire and Louis Saulnier; the latter being Escoffier's own student. This little book quickly became a standard reference for the culinary world and the Bible for chefs and restaurateurs. The book contained a short explanation of seven thousand classic garnishes. *Appellations culinaires* helped clarify the meaning of various culinary terms and it denoted specific garnishes and the method of cooking/preparation. As such, generations of culinary or hospitality students will know with closed eyes what the base ingredient is of various appellations: e.g.

Appellation	Denotes
Argenteuil	Asparagus
Crêcy	Carrots
Dubarry	Cauliflower
Florentine	Spinach
Soubise	Onion
Clamart	Peas

Popularizing *Appellations Culinaires* in the US – Champion Three – Charles Ranhofer (1836-1899)

Starting in France, many other countries adopted well known French appellations or created their own ones. Delmonico's, the first fine dining restaurant in the US opened its doors in 1837. In 1862, Charles Ranhofer became their Chef. A French-born and trained Chef who built a remarkable reputation for haute cuisine in New York and invented many legendary dishes such as Eggs Benedict, Baked Alaska (commemorating the purchase of Alaska from the Russians in 1867) or Lobster Newburg. (Delmonico's, N/D).

Delmonico's menu offered in 1838 was presented both in English and French and included some *appellations culinaires*. Here are a few examples: (Menu items are transcribed as found on the menu)

<i>Appellations Culinaires</i> in French	<i>Appellations Culinaires</i> in English
<i>Potage Julienné</i>	<i>Vegetable soup</i>
<i>Jambon de Mayence</i>	<i>Westphalia do do</i>
<i>Entre côte de boeuf à la sauce</i>	<i>[Item is missing]</i>
<i>Petits Patés à la Bechamelle aux truffes</i>	<i>Little pies with truffles</i>
<i>Maquereau à la maître d'hôtel</i>	<i>Mackerel fricasseed</i>
<i>Haricot nouveaux à la maître d'hôtel</i>	<i>Fresh beans with butter sauce</i>

Source: Carte du restaurant, 1838.



The Delmonico's in 1897

Source: New York-tribune, August 29, 1897, p. 10.

Perhaps the best-known of the dishes which Ranhofer made popular was lobster a la Newburg. The recipe was suggested to him by a dish prepared by Mr. Wenburg, a patron of Delmonico's. M. Ranhofer perfected the formula, and introduced the dish in 1876 at a banquet given at the Centennial at Newburg, N. Y.

The history behind Lobster à la Newburg.

Source: The evening times., October 12, 1899. p. 6.

Challenges with naming culinary preparations

Challenge 1 – *La langue française*

In 1862, when Charles Ranhofer joined Delmonico's, he switched the bilingual menu to French-only. (Haley, 2011) For decades, this French gastronomic restaurant was clearly the social center for the affluent New York elite.

With time, the concern has become that the French language itself will seriously threaten the survival of *appellations culinaires* in the New World.

As the world plunged into World War 1, the international society changed. No longer was fine dining merely a privilege for aristocracy. Restaurants acknowledged this change and began to appeal to the growing middle class. (Haley, 2011) Many fine dining restaurants reverted to English-only menus and introduced an array of international cuisine. (Haley, 2011)

However, French restaurants and dishes remained among the leading cuisines. These restaurants continued to appeal to the high-class diners with higher prices and more formal dress codes. (Haley, 2011)

A long debate over the necessity of French menus had begun in American society. Here are three examples:

Is there really any excuse for French words on the menu cards in restaurants?

Source: The Norfolk weekly news-journal., November 18, 1910, Image 4.

WASHINGTON GOSSIP



French Remains the Menu Language of Washington

FRENCH will remain the language of Washington menu cards. No matter how strong the offensive of the New York hotel chefs becomes to have the French of the bills of fare supplanted by English, the lines of French on menu cards bid fair to hold firm in the capital.

This is the opinion of August F. Moeller, maitre d'hotel of the New Willard.

"We have decided to be strictly neutral," said Moeller, with a twinkle in his eye and a decidedly Teutonic accent when questioned as to the proposed oblation of the French from the bill of fare.

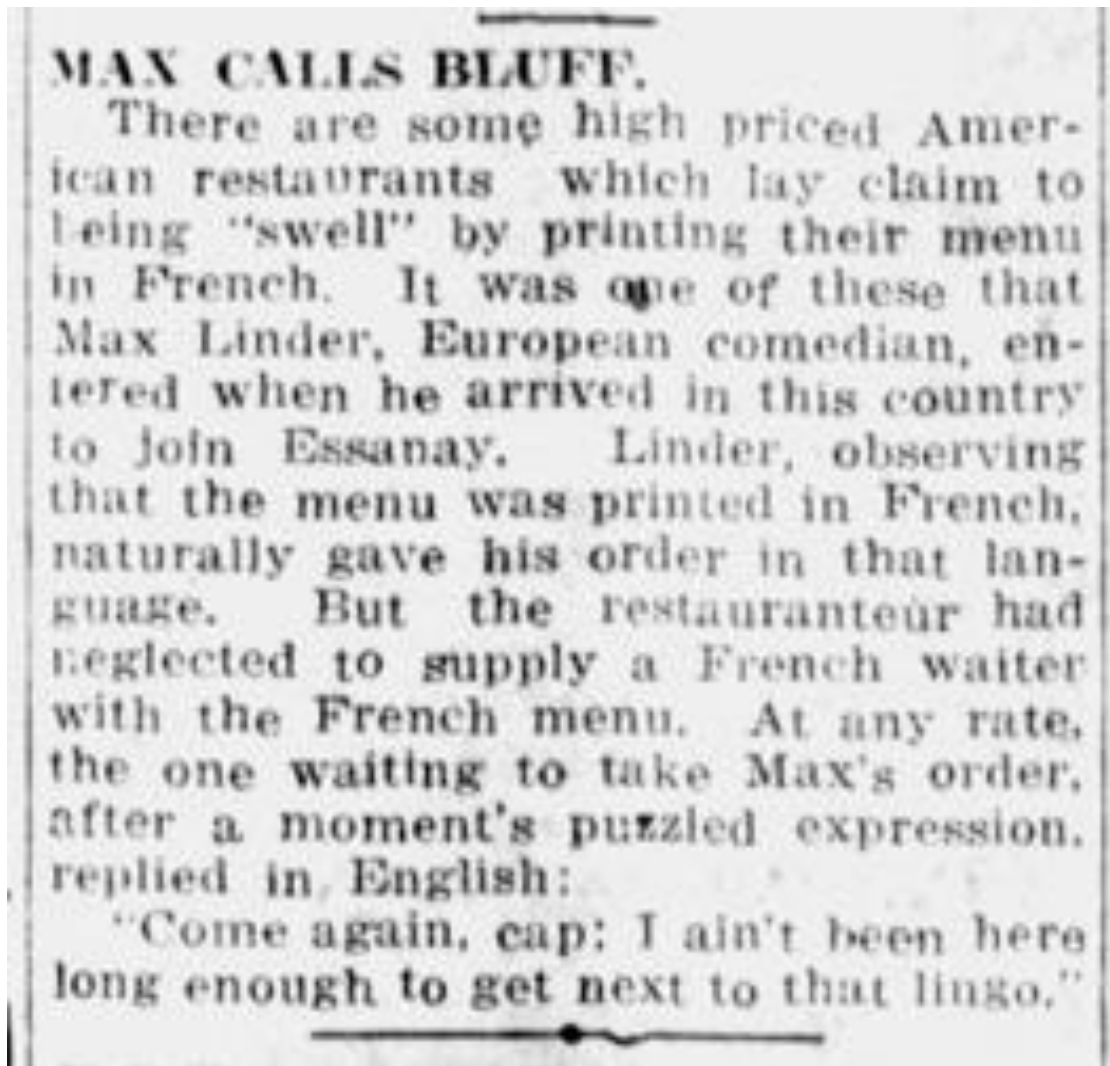
"Why, it would be just the same as asking the average English-speaking connoisseur to change his language," continued the maitre d'hotel. "There are many persons, those persons who are accustomed to eating at hotels and cafes, who would not know how to order their meals if the French on the menu card was supplanted by English."

"Will there be a change from the old order which might interfere with the gastronomic environs of Washington's gourmets?"

"Jamais, jamais," which in the words of the language attacked means "Never, never."



Source: The Kansas City sun, September 23, 1916 Image 6.



Source: Albuquerque morning journal February 17, 1917, p. 5

As the usage of French language menus decreased by the end of the first World War, *appellations culinaires* also diminished.

Challenge 2 – Inconsistency in Naming Dishes

In 1976, Jacques Pépin emphasized the importance of establishing a structure and scope for French cooking and garnishes. However, he lamented that internationally, dishes were produced and named in restaurants without an understanding of the proper garnish to be utilized. (Saulnier, 1976).

In spite of the existing reference books and culinary guides, due to the uncontrolled nature of naming dishes, the globalization and the proliferation and permutation of designations that were used led to a rather chaotic situation in the world of gastronomy.

The fading of *appellations culinaires* in the culinary world.

Systematically naming culinary preparations in fine dining restaurants had been a norm until Nouvelle Cuisine revolutionized French cooking toward the end of 1960th and in the 1970th. Jacques Pépin wrote in 2003: “Nouvelle Cuisine was, and would remain, the biggest revolution in my culinary life.” (Pépin, 2003, p. 178.)

Nouvelle Cuisine allowed chefs to receive fresh ingredients and condense their menus to focus on specific dishes. This reduced cooking times and overall simplified recipes and dishes. (Pépin, 2003)*

Interestingly, when the first author of this article moved to France in the early 1990th observed many fine dining chefs were still keeping the Gringoire and Saulnier book in their back pockets of their chef pants.

**Note that an earlier, 18th-century culinary movement was also called nouvelle cuisine.*

Epilogue

On November 29, 2016, we had the opportunity to interview Chef Jacques Pépin and Chef Jean-Claude Szurdak at the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University. At this point, we asked Chef Pépin on his thoughts regarding the importance and relevancy of *appellations culinaires* in modern-day kitchens. Chef Pépin noted that during his early years in the kitchens, these terms were crucial for the success of the restaurants as they were a universal language. With the rise of Nouvelle Cuisine, Chef Pépin confirmed that there was a decrease in these denominations. This created more complicated menu descriptions and decreased comprehension by patrons.



Chef Jacques Pépin and Chef Jean-Claude Szurdak at the School of Hospitality Administration
Photograph by Peter Szende

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