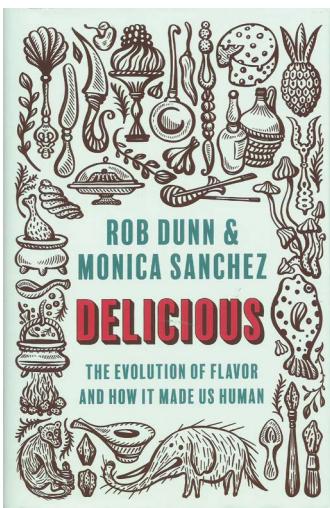


BOOK REVIEWS



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- 1 Tongue -Tied
- 2 The Flavour-Seekers
- 3 A Nose for Flavor
- 4 Culinary Extinction
- 5 Forbidden Fruits
- 6 On the Origin of Spices
- 7 Cheesy Horse and Sour Beer
- 8 The Art of Cheese
- 9 Plant Volatile Families: Green, Fruity, Flowery, Spicy
- 9 Dinner Makes Us Human

DELICIOUS: The Evolution of Flavour and How It Makes Us Human

Reviewed: Dr Tony Curtis

Just when you think that everything that can be written about food and flavours has been written, along comes a book with a completely new take on the subject. For me the key assertion is food is more than just fuel to keep us going. People and animals go to considerable lengths to access food that is not only nutritious but also a delight to eat: food that is delicious. I am reminded of a cat cartoon. The cat is looking at an advertisement which states '9 out of 10 cats prefer xxx cat food', the caption below states '**and I am not one of them!**'. Even cats can be picky eaters!

There is some sound coverage of the fundamental theory of flavour and odour e.g., discussion of the work by Linda Buck and Richard Axel (Nobel Prize winners) on the working of the olfactory receptors in the nose. Some of the consideration of animal and early man's appreciation of flavours is of necessity a little speculative.

In this review I will fast forward to Chapter 6: On the Origin of Spices. Again there is a bit of theory. Pepper contains piperine which fits the 'key' for the TRPV1 receptor. This is the same receptor that lets you know that that cup of coffee is just a bit too hot! Hot [spicy] food is really hot. Here we enter a whole new dimension of food for me: culinary danger! I liken this to the seaside big-dipper. When people come to the big drop, they scream in a mixture of fear and delight. It is a safe thrill. The authors use the analogy of bungee jumping. In the discussion of Paul Rozin's work in the areas a new culinary term is used that I have never come across before 'benign masochism'. When I next have a curry I will treat with a bit more respect!

This book is not for the faint-hearted as you can see in Chapter 7! I have watched many a TV programme featuring experimental practical archaeology: just how did they move the multi-tonne stones to Stonehenge? Let us get 100 people and experiment with rollers etc. Prehistoric mankind had a food problem. Being a hunter gatherer had periods of fest and famine. Kill a mammoth and you have lots of food for a long time, if and only if, you can preserve it. The palaeontologist Daniel Fisher was intrigued with the problem and decided to

do some experimental archaeology to see if Clovis hunter-gathers could store meat. The experiment runs something like this: take one horse (dead of course) and cut it up into suitable joints. Drop these though a hole cut in the ice of a pond and weight them down to sit on the mud. Return over a period of weeks and retrieve samples. Scrape off the mud and algae and cut off a generous slice, then cook on hot coals. The flavour was said to be 'Like beef, but sweeter and a little sour'. This is one experiment I will not be replicating. I will stick to my baby freezer!

In the study of Cosmetic Science microbiology plays only a small part with consideration of preservation of systems (e.g. emulsions) that are susceptible to spoilage. In Food Technology it is a wholly different ball game. Food spoilage is more important, since organisms that cause illnesses like botulism can kill you. Microbiology is both friend and foe! Microbiology provides a host of products we enjoy such as: beer, wine, cheese, preserved meat (e.g. ham) and fish (e.g. Swedish surströmming). Chapter 8 The Art of Cheese is a delight and celebration. In Tavistock (a small UK Westcountry market town) there is a temple (well a small chapel!) to cheese. This tiny shop has a counter groaning under the weight of cheese from around the world with special emphasis on locally produced artisan cheeses such as the famous Blue Vinny.

The chapter extols the delight of such artisan cheeses with a case study of Cabrales cheese made (possibly better described as created) in Carreña, Spain. Of course, temperature control is an important contributor to the production process. You do not need an elaborate microprocessor temperature-controlled room; it's much more fun and artisan to use a cave (humidity controlled as well!) infected with Penicillium fungus. You can then lovingly mature your cheeses under the right conditions for a fair period (this is diametrically opposite to fast food!). This process goes far beyond the need to simply preserve food rather the objective is to create wondrous, complex flavours. These are to be enjoyed in good company with other good food and regional wine. This explains my monthly pilgrimage to

BOOK REVIEWS

continued from previous page >

Tavistock to purchase my monthly supply of various cheeses. In the last edition of the ICATS Newsletter we reviewed *The Chemical Story of Olive Oil*. Most conveniently next door to the temple of cheese is the shrine of olives: a shop that only sells olives (sumptuously marinated in various flavoured olive oils) and olive oils from around the world.

Perfumes have often been described as 'More than a nice smell'. Good food is more than fuel to go. The culture of 'fast food' and the continued growth in home delivery services does enable some small local producers to reach a wider marketplace. Sadly, more often, there is a disconnect developing with some people from the provenance and subsequent preparation, not of good food, but of great food.

This brings us to the pinnacle of this brilliant book with Chapter 9: *Dinner Makes Us Human*. The quotation at the start of the chapter is particularly appropriate:

*Food and language are not only close neighbours ...
they occupy the same house*
Gordon Shepherd

In our busy life, the quick breakfast and away may be necessity but we should find time to come together to talk, eat and socialize. In the UK a sign you could often see during the COVID19 crisis was 'Keep social distance – 2 metres'. Before central heating and air conditioning the kitchen table and fireside conversation were a fact of daily life. It was the [only] warm part of the house in winter! Dinner makes us human and brings us together with conversation between people in good company. Great food lovingly prepared should be savoured slowly and appreciatively.

This well-written accessible book is meticulously researched. The 30 pages of copious chapter notes and 17 pages of carefully selected key references give the serious student or researcher the path to further information. At £16.85 it is a bargain. Do get your own copy and pass it onto friends and then you can discuss it over some splendid food and discuss that as well!



MOUTHFEEL: How Texture Makes Taste

Reviewed: Dr Tony Curtis

I found the title of this book slightly misleading. It is so much more than just about mouthfeel. The first three chapters provide an excellent introduction to the context of the enjoyment of food. It nicely fills a gap in my bookshelf between:

Food Science and Technology (2nd edition) with its galaxy of eminent authors and authoritative Editor (Geoffrey Campbell-Platt, Reading Professor of Food Technology). This provides excellent academic cover of the various aspects of food technology. That is why it is a key reading text for the IFEAT / ICATS course (Flavour pathway).

The Food Lab; Better Home Cooking Through Science (J. Kenji López-Alt) is a masterful cover for the serious domestic cook (and all good chefs!). I well remember reviewing it and thinking it was going to be expensive with its cover of alluring kitchen utensils (he is lyrical about Japanese kitchen knives – wonderful but expensive!).

Mouthfeel is nicely complementary. Of necessity *Food Technology* is divided into specific component aspects (e.g. food analysis). The *Food Lab* does what it says on the tin – it is kitchen orientated. Mouthfeel starts from a different perspective. Chapter One: *The Complex Universe of Taste and Flavor* explores the multidimensionality of the food experience.

I particularly liked the sections on *The Interplay Between Mouthfeel & Sensory Impressions and Neurogastronomy: Flavour is All in the Brain*. In the academic study of a subject it is often necessary to divide it into appropriate 'subjects'. Key elements are set out on page one of *Food Technology*. The introduction of this highlights that:

Students need to have undertaken courses in the basic scientific disciplines of chemistry, biology, mathematics, statistics and physics.

This is entirely correct and necessary. However, something is lost in this approach. In the UK there is a radio channel devoted to what might be called popular classical music (Classic FM). In the early morning programme favourites are played such as *A Young Persons' Guide to the Orchestra*. This specific composition attempts to illustrate the various contributions that individual instruments make to the overall sound of the orchestra. This is some ways a different experience to normal classical compositions. August is a feast of music with the BBC Promenade season with a whole variety of outstanding music played live to an audience by great artists from around the