"ARCHITECTURAL HORS D’OEUVRES"

ANNETTE CONDELLO

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—Saki, “Reginald at the Carlton,” (1904)

Hors d’œuvres, almost canonically, connote food: small morsels to be consumed in advance of a meal’s main course. When coined in the sixteenth century, however, the term hors d’œuvres originally denoted buildings and other architectural objects that garnished not dishes, but constructed landscapes. These buildings, in turn, were imitated in food, to be eaten off a plate. Today, the connections between architecture, hors d’œuvres and food more generally have been obscured, if not lost—perhaps save for the proliferation of coffee-table books on “hip” restaurants. Recently, however, Mark Morris revivified hors d’œuvres’ architectural connotations:

Hors d’œuvres and appetisers from fanciful canapés to prosciutto pigs-in-a-blanket are precisely constructed objects that are offered as proof of the calibre of subsequent courses. The one rule to all hors d’œuvre recipes is that it must be portioned in such a way as to be eaten whole with the
HORS D’ŒUVRES

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Although resonant metaphorically with Morris’ concerns this chapter attempts to unravel the literal connections between architectural and gastronomic hors d’œuvres. And, in parallel, it seeks to recover and re-establish the dialogue between architecture and cuisine.

“Hors d’œuvres”: From architectural to culinary usage

Hors d’œuvres is a slippery concept. Before its culinary subsumption, the term first appeared in the French language in 1596. Vitally, this initial appearance was made within in an architectural context: drawings of small constructions and other works to be built outside a main palace were labelled hors d’œuvres. Translating into English as “outside the work,” hors d’œuvres thus describes buildings of a particular kind.

Commonplace even today in French architectural vocabularies, hors d’œuvres were built objects, detached from the main structure and set within the broader estate. A garden pavilion, for instance, would be one example of such an “architectural hors d’œuvres.” As they sometimes served functional purpose, these hors d’œuvres are not necessarily synonymous with follies. Hors d’œuvres were novel in that they were “excessive,” or superfluous, and usually extravagantly-designed. As will be seen, however, such “architectural hors d’œuvres” could also be found contained within a house. That is, some could be considered buildings within buildings. Early linking cuisine to architecture, some hors d’œuvres made provision for food storage and accommodated the elites’ luxurious lifestyles. “Architectural hors d’œuvres” were often venues for extravagant consumption.

Around 1690, nearly a century after its architectural genesis, hors d’œuvres appeared in an explicitly culinary context and its definition enlarged to include the familiar “appetizer” in its scope. Willi Bode attributes the invention of this new hors d’œuvres type to French chefs then working in Russia. It is important to distinguish, however, that purveyors of fine food have always had an insatiable appetite for things small, tasty, and decorative. Long before the French, for example, the ancient Sybarites consumed fishy delicacies, the Russians served caviar as their zakuski and the Florentines arranged their antipasti. Then, as now, these luxuries attracted as indicators of refinement.
Interior architectural hors d’œuvres: The “flying tables”

Hors d’œuvres’ dualistic meaning eventually gained physical, built expression in eighteenth-century France. There, hors d’œuvres or appetizers for the rich became known as “assiettes volantes” or “entrées”—flying dishes or flying entrees. Light and extraneous, flying dishes, as food historian Reay Tannahill puts it, “flew down the throat almost unnoticed.” Within dining rooms, flying dishes soon came to be set upon “tables volantes” or “flying tables.” Initially appearing in royal dining rooms, “flying tables” were mechanical devices, that transported food vertically, from the kitchen or cellar below to the dining room a floor above. Rodolphe El-Khoury describes one of these luxurious mechanisms appearing in Jean-François Baside’s libertine novel and architectural commentary La Petite Maison (1758):

This table is composed of a fixed frame and of four side platforms. The whole is lifted all at once by a machine in such a way that the surface of the table, the frame as well as its attachments, is composed by a section of the raised floor.... When the guests enter the dining room, there is not the least sign of a table, all that can be seen is a uniform floor that is adored by a rose at its centre. At the slightest nod, the leaves are retracted under the floor, and a table laden with food makes its sudden ascent, flanked by four servants emerging through the four openings.

La Petite Maison’s table is portrayed as a functioning “architectural hors d’œuvre,” analogous to a building within a building. In 1762, artisans Loriot and Gamion designed a “flying table” reminiscent of its fictional La Petite Maison counterpart for Louis XV’s Petit Trianon at Versailles. When later writing an historical account of this garden palace, Gustave Desjardins did not fail to include a section on the remarkable tables volantes. The architectural plans he used as illustrations depict the flying table in the first floor dining room and its outline, as it descended, on the lower level kitchen.

The fashion for “flying tables” soon spread to distant Russia. The Small Hermitage at the Peterhof (ca.1764), for instance, was equipped the device. Importantly, this particular architectural hors d’œuvre example was apparently designed by an architect, Yuri Velten (see figure 3.1).
Special hors d’oeuvres: The “flying tables”

The term hors d’oeuvres, which originally meant eventually gained physical, built-in status in 19th-century France. There, hors d’oeuvres or hors d’oeuvre tables became known as “assiettes volantes” or “flying tables.” Light and extraneous, flying Reay Tannahill puts it, “flew down the throat in dining rooms, flying dishes soon came to be known as ‘flying tables.’” Initially appearing in royal kitchens were mechanical devices, that transported dishes from the dining room to the kitchen or cellar below. Choury describes one of these luxuries in Jean-François Bastide’s libertine novel and La Petite Maison (1758):

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of a fixed frame and of four side platforms. The table is portrayed as a functioning “architectural object” a building within a building. In 1762, artisans designed a “flying table” reminiscent of its fictional La for Louis XV’s Petit Trianon at Versailles. A historical account of this garden palace, Gustave Gauvine includes a section on the remarkable tables. Plans he used as illustrations depict the flying table and its outline, as if descended, on the ground floor with a machine to raise and lower the central section of the dining table with its fourteen walnut place mats. All the service, course by course, was provided on the ground floor, and the meal could be freely enjoyed without the inhibiting presence of servants. Through the windows there were splendid views of the park and the Gulf of Finland, and an outstanding collection of pictures covered the walls. A such architectural hors d’oeuvres provided places and means for sumptuous, dramatic dining without the disruption of servants. Ultimately, the Small Hermitage was an architectural hors d’oeuvre in a double sense: a building within a building set amidst a splendid parkland, transforming royal dining into an architectural spectacle.
Drawings of hors d'œuvres

The table-top itself, flying or otherwise, has long been a nexus for architecture and cuisine. In seventeenth-century Rome, for instance, edible constructions replete with gods on chariots and elaborate garden surroundings were used as table centre-pieces. Similarly, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian porcelain sculptures and edible miniatures often appeared in the form of built ruins or fountains and featured in architectural table-top spectacles. Importantly, architects and cooks often made small-scale spatial models and drawings of such hors d'œuvres in advance of constructing the actual objects. As well, drawings might be made afterwards to document the artefact. These graphic representations also encapsulate architectural hors d'œuvres. As registered by such drawings, royal and papal banquets merged architecture and cuisine and associated them with permanence and indulgent luxury. Nichola Fletcher explains these lavish "architectural" affairs:

The banqueting course was often referred to as a collation (meaning a light meal which was taken up in a monastery)...huge tables were covered with elaborate swirls of candied and fresh fruits, interspersed with dishes of colourful sweetmeats stacked up into tall columns or pyramids. Their forms echoed the towering centre-pieces portraying classical allegorical scenes; these were often edible too. Some accounts of Italian outdoor events boasted entire paths and flowerbeds made of cured sausages and sweetmeats.

Such intricately presented small-scale architectural ensembles would have undoubtedly impressed the food taster. As an architectural and cuisine affair, the "collation" demonstrates how light meals emerged from the kitchen and entered public space to become architectural hors d'œuvres.
Architectural hors d’œuvres

Hors d’œuvres, flying or otherwise, has long been a nexus for Roman gods on chariots and elaborate garden surrounds replete with fountains and featured in architectural tableaux. Architects or cooks often made small-scale drawings of such hors d’œuvres in advance of objects. As well, drawings might be made of the artefact. These graphic representations also hors d’œuvres. As registered by such drawings, merged architecture and cuisine and associated with indulgent luxury. Nichola Fletcher explains "had a taste for" affairs:

as often referred to as a collation [meaning a light meal in a monastery]... huge tables were covered with food and fresh fruits, interspersed with dishes of fish and other delicacies. Their centre-piece portraying classical allegorical edible too. Some accounts of Italian outdoor shows and flowerbeds made of cured sausages and

Remondini’s etching of Cucagna (Cucagna’s land of plenty) features a similar architectural hors d’œuvres. These later metamorphosed to become a chateau’s building foundation, illustrating literal hors d’œuvres in a theoretical treatise by architect Viollet-le-Duc (see figure 3.2). In eighteenth-century Madrid, an illustration (1747) of a cake in the shape of a building foundation records edible architecture’s burgeoning scale. These images of food ensembles are as important as the reality they represented: composed and drawn in an architectural manner, they likely were made by architects. Hors d’œuvre drawings such as these, as shall be seen, would later inspire Antonin Careme.

Exterior architectural hors d’œuvres

Beyond the dining room and the house itself, architectural hors d’œuvres could also be found out of doors in the garden. Early exterior architectural hors d’œuvres such as icehouses literally link cuisine with functional architecture and were later imitated in food bound for royal table. The origins of icehouses can be traced to Renaissance Italy when “the Roman custom of using snow to add to wine and to chill food that was revived by the new wealthy and cultured classes. Underground ‘snow-pits’ with thatched roofs were soon devised in order to store compacted snow and ice throughout the summer.” Icehouses were thus architectural hors d’œuvres that functioned to preserve food and ice which, like sugar,
quickly became a novel luxury amongst the elites. Icehouses evolved from underground chambers into more elaborate, free-standing constructions. Beginning with the first royal example at Versailles (1664), icehouses became increasingly more elaborate. In Italy, for instance, the ghiacciala at the villa Ranuzzi-Cospi at Bagnarola (1700), was even designed by an architect, Sebastiano Bertelli.\textsuperscript{20} As exterior, detached buildings containing food within, icehouses were “double” hors d’œuvre.

![Figure 3.3](image.jpg)

Figure 3.3. Elevation of Monsieur Monville’s Broken Column House as an exterior hors d’œuvre.


Emanating from the pragmatic, utilitarian origins of the icehouse, exterior architectural hors d’œuvres soon increased in scale and took on decorative dimension. François Racine de Monsieur Monville famously included an array of exterior architectural hors d’œuvres in his picturesque landscape garden, Desert de Retz (1775-1788). Amongst these, his dwelling, known as the Broken Column House (1780), was the most spectacular. Based upon illustrated editions of antiquity (see figure 3.3), the design of this four-storey, architecturally excessive hors d’œuvre took the form of a ruinous Greek column, its walls cracked and roof jagged.\textsuperscript{21} The ruinous appearance of the house, along with its seemingly fractured roof, almost persuades one to believe hors d’œuvres provide no shelter.
Above all, the Broken Column House exemplifies another type of excessive architectural hors d'œuvre: a garden folly, albeit one that functions. One visitor to Monville's Desert de Retz left particularly impressed: celebrated French chef Antonin Careme (1783-1833). And, in his pastry cooking drawings and picturesque pastries, Careme would fuse architecture and cuisine.

**Fusion of interior and exterior hors d'oeuvres:**
Antonin Careme's pastry cooking drawings

The dialogue between architecture and edible hors d’œuvres is multifaceted. For Careme, pastry cooking was a culinary and picturesque, architectural art. Indeed, Careme had learnt drafting from the architect, Charles Percier. Under Percier’s tutelage, Careme developed a keen interest in picturesque gardens and ruins. This preoccupation led him to study the architectural embellishment of, for instance, Paris and St Petersburg. In Russia and France, architectural hors d‘œuvres often took the form of garden follies, as exemplified by those excessively luxurious constructions at Peterhof, Versailles and the Desert de Retz. Although follies are often only decorative, they can be interpreted as functioning to educate the public about the culinary arts. Eventually, Careme would publish two volumes on architecture.

The celebrity French cook soon adopted an architectural approach to the design of the pastry constructions, studying the history of foreign foods and architecture. Careme’s cooking drawings were no less elaborate than the pastries they represented. His depiction of food hors d‘œuvres might easily be mistaken to represent exterior architectural hors d‘œuvres or follies. Careme published his drawings of pastry creations or, as he called them, extraordinaires, in a book entitled Le patissier pittoresque (first published in 1815 and then in 1842). These visual templates or rustic “place mats” instruct a cook or architect in the decoration of food or architecture. Careme’s pastry constructions are at once food and architectural hors d‘œuvres, imitating and transforming functional “follies” into miniature function-less palaces. The most direct example of Careme’s edible metamorphosis is his pastry drawing of an Athenian ruin (Ruine d’Athenes) (see figure 3.4).
In this image of a partial temple facade, the last of its three columns is broken and lacks a capital. Undoubtedly, his visit to Monville’s Broken Column House had provided the chef with a model. Typically, Careme’s extraordinaires were to be made of sugary substances and pastry. Some of his pastries, however, also included inedible materials, becoming a foreign melange of architectural hors d’oeuvres. Frivolous to the connoisseur, Careme’s drawing of the picturesque Athenian ruin could also be considered emblematic of luxury itself. Similarly, many of his sumptuous architectural hors d’oeuvres appear half-eaten, left-over, if not abandoned. Of course, they were not; their ruinous appearance merely camouflaged material wealth.

Careme’s peers certainly recognised the architectural sensibilities underpinning his culinary creations. Gastronome Louis Marquis de Cousy, for instance, characterised Careme as “the Palladio of the kitchen.” Similarly, as Ian Kelly recently asserted, Careme “always argued that food was very like architecture, the final construction in both cases relying upon a balance of well-organised elements.” Careme’s architectural
approach, however, eventually exceeded the limits of cuisine. Novelist and food writer Marion Halligan observes:

Careme’s architecture turned creams and jellies into classical temples and country house follies... These great set pieces were so elaborate and costly that certain miserly rich men made their chefs present the same ones at dinner after dinner—their servants were supposed to dissuade guests from eating them. This is food as unlike food as possible not meant to be eaten but only admired.\textsuperscript{28}

Careme’s “set pieces” were either made for aristocratic Sybarites or meagre ascetics. As they convey architectural information, these “set pieces” or extraordinares qualify as graphic representations of hors d’œuvre confections, as opposed to picturesque assemblages of food structures.

Allen Weiss identified the pervasiveness of garden imagery within Careme’s work. Indeed, the chef himself revealed: “I would have ceased being a pastry chef if I blindly gave in to my natural taste for the picturesque genre, as I conceive of it for the embellishment of the parks of princes and for private gardens.”\textsuperscript{29} Revealing this passion, Careme carefully studied the architectural plates at the cabinet des estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Weiss argues:

[Careme was] inspired by Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola’s five orders of architecture—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Composite—he spun-sugar creations in the form of pavilions, rotundas, temples, towers, fortresses, mills, hermitages, and ruins of all sorts were created in the greatest diversity of styles: Italian, Turkish, Arabic, Russian, Polish, Venetian, Chinese, Irish, Gaelic, and Egyptian. All this was finally combined in an imaginative mélange whose results transgressed the historical limits of both architecture and cuisine.\textsuperscript{30}

Careme’s “imaginative mélange” of architecture and cuisine celebrated ancient Sybaritic myths concerning excessive luxury. These, in turn, underpinned his career as a both a cook and as an architect. With respect to the latter pursuit, Weiss assesses Careme’s various design proposals for Paris as being:

as much in keeping with the great buildings and constructions for public festivals, both royal and revolutionary—utopian architectural fantasies such as those of Etienne-Louis Boullée, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, and Jean-Jacques Lequeu—as it is with the art of pastry decoration.\textsuperscript{31}
This insight elevates Careme into the pantheon of Ancien Régime architects such as Boullee. Careme may thus be regarded as the finest hors d'œuvre architect in the culinary arts. Ultimately, Careme’s intricate representations of antique ruins, grottoes and rustic garden houses left the page to become exterior hors d’œuvres injected within garden surrounds as free-standing structures.

In 1947, more than a century after the chef’s death, Barbara Jones curiously evoked Careme’s drawings and their architectural underpinnings in the pages of The Architectural Review. In her article “The Decoration of Food,” Jones does not illustrate hors d’œuvres as such; instead, she depicts “chef œuvres”—meaning masterpieces, cottage ornees as centrepieces for a dinner table. As not all edible centrepieces or architectural objects are necessarily masterpieces, hors d’œuvres would have been a more apt choice. Nonetheless, the timing of Jones’ essay is also curious as she was advocating an ornate, if not archaic, cuisine in an era otherwise preoccupied with austere modernism; one which had long forgotten Careme and the relations between architecture and cuisine.

Figure 3.5. Horseback dinner at Louis Sherry’s restaurant as an interior/exterior architectural hors d’œuvre.

Although essentially an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phenomenon, architectural hors d’œuvres persisted into the twentieth.
Careme into the pantheon of Ancien Régime. Careme may thus be regarded as the finest hors d’oeuvres culinary arts. Ultimately, Careme’s interactive ruins, grotoes and rustic garden houses left the hors d’oeuvres injected within garden surroundings a century after the chef’s death, Barbara Jones’s drawings and their architectural underpinnings. In her article “The Decoration of trite hors d’oeuvres as such; instead, she depicts as edibles and serving vessels, cottage ornaments as centrepieces for a edible as centrepieces or architectural objects are hors d’oeuvres would have been a more apt nging of Jones’ essay is also curious as she was ? not archaic, cuisine in an era otherwise modernism; one which had long forgotten between architecture and cuisine.

Attention to one such American example is an apt conclusion to this chapter. For one evening in 1903, Louis Sherry’s New York Hotel ephemeral metamorphosed into an architectural hors d’oeuvre, fusinf interior with exterior and architecture with cuisine (see figure 3.5). On 28 March, American millionaire C. K. G. Billings hosted an extravagant banquet, not only for his guests, but also their horses. More than thirty horses were “hauled up the fourth floor in the freight elevator.” Upon arrival at the restaurant, the guests and their mounts encountered a pastoral scene, replete with actual turf, recreated within a skyscraper. Billings’ elevated horseback banquet perhaps epitomises an interior/exterior architectural hors d’œuvre—an oniric hoist or surreal “flying table,” and in the process, captures one’s imagination.

Works Cited


Notes


3. I am grateful to my partner and colleague Christopher Vernon for his encouragement and support. John Dixon Hunt, Michel Bardion, Michael Levine, Dara Goldstein and Marco Frascari also provided helpful insights into my research. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Quantitative Gastronomy, First International Conference, Ecole Nationale d’Ingenieurs des Travaux Agricoles de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (May, 2006); Place, Taste and Sustenance: The Social Spaces of Food and Agriculture, Annual Meeting of the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society and the Association for the Study of Food and Society, Boston University (June, 2006); and Panorama to Paradise, XXIVth International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand, Adelaide (September 2007).


8 Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, *Les Premier volume des plus excellents bastiments de France*, 172. Historically, French treatises suggest multiple meanings of the architectural term. Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau’s *Le Plus Excellents Bastiments de France* (1579), labelled outlying garden buildings as *dehors*—meaning outside the main part of a building. Also, see Jean-Marie Perouse de Montclos, *Vocabulaire de l’architecture: Methode et vocabulaire*, 1792. De Montclos defined *hors d’oeuvre* as a pavilion or interior walls enclosing staircases within a château (my translation). Viollet-le-Duc, *Description du Château de Coucy*, 1875, the celebrated French architect and theorist illustrates the foundations of the palace outside the main building and labels them *hors d’œuvres*. Elsewhere in the text, Viollet-le-Duc also identifies *hors d’œuvres* as outlying constructions, separate from the main part of the building (my translation).

9 My translation. Paul Robert, 1985, 256. Willi Bode writes: “Originally, *hors d’œuvres* were served from the side tables of the reception room, or in the anteroom before the guests entered the large dining hall... At this time, French culture and language were very prominent in Russia—as elsewhere in Europe—and the *cuisine française* was highly regarded as part of good culture and good living. French chefs were accustomed to the highest praise for the composition of their dishes, the skill with which they combined flavours, and the absolute artistry and splendour of their service and presentation.” See Willi Bode, *European Gastronomy: The Story of Man’s Food and Eating Customs*, 2000, 132.

10 Bode, 2000, 134-135. Published in Paris, Francois Massialot’s *Le Cuisiner royal et bourgeois* (1691) specifically refers to culinary dishes as *hors d’œuvres*.


14 See Note 3 in Jean-Francois de Bastide, *The Little House: An Architectural Seduction*, translation and introduction by Rodolphe el-Khoury, New York:

10 Les Premier volume des plus excellents bastiments du chateau de Cerceau’s *Le Plus Excellents Bastiments*, noting garden buildings as dehorces—meaning outside. Also, see Jean-Marie Perrouse de Montcalm, *Methode et vocabulaire*, 1972. De Montcalm’s villas or interior walls enclosing staircases within a tower or a house, *Description du Chateau de Cerceau*, in his *Chateau de Cerceau* (1875), the celebrated French architect and patron of the palace outside the main building and elsewhere in the text. Viollet-le-Duc also identifies constructions, separate from the main part of the structure, as *hors d’oeuvres*.

115, 256. Willi Bode and others wrote: “hors d’oeuvres” are served from the side tables of the *cuisine* before the guests entered the large, French culture and language were everywhere in Europe—and the *cuisine française* of good culture and good living. French chefs reserved the best for the composition of their dishes, combined with their appearance and presentation.”


121 Ibid.

122 On porcelain figures see Hilary Young, “Porcelain for the Dessert,” in *Elegant Eating: Four Hundred Years of Dining in Style*, 2002, 90-91.


126 Ketchum, 1994, 1. The building’s authorship is unclear, but Ketchum believes Morville was responsible for its design, and others attribute it to Francois Barbier. Ketchum, 1997, 14, 32, fig. 7.


129 The Projects for the Architectural Embellishment of St. Petersburg (1821) and *The Projects for the Architectural Embellishment of Paris* (1826).


135 Ibid, 131.

136 Ibid.


138 Fletcher, 2004: 203.