



Getting started in food styling

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Chocolate Artisan

Ever wondered how to build a portfolio, plan a test shot or organise a location shoot involving food? Read on for a theoretical guide to creating your own appetising art.

As long as I can remember, I have had a strong passion for all things in the making of great-tasting and tantalising food. My cracker combination of being an artsy girl and having a solid background in the culinary world has been a key contributor in my life as a "food stylist".

When it comes to food styling, there are two crucial ingredients needed: Experience and knowledge.

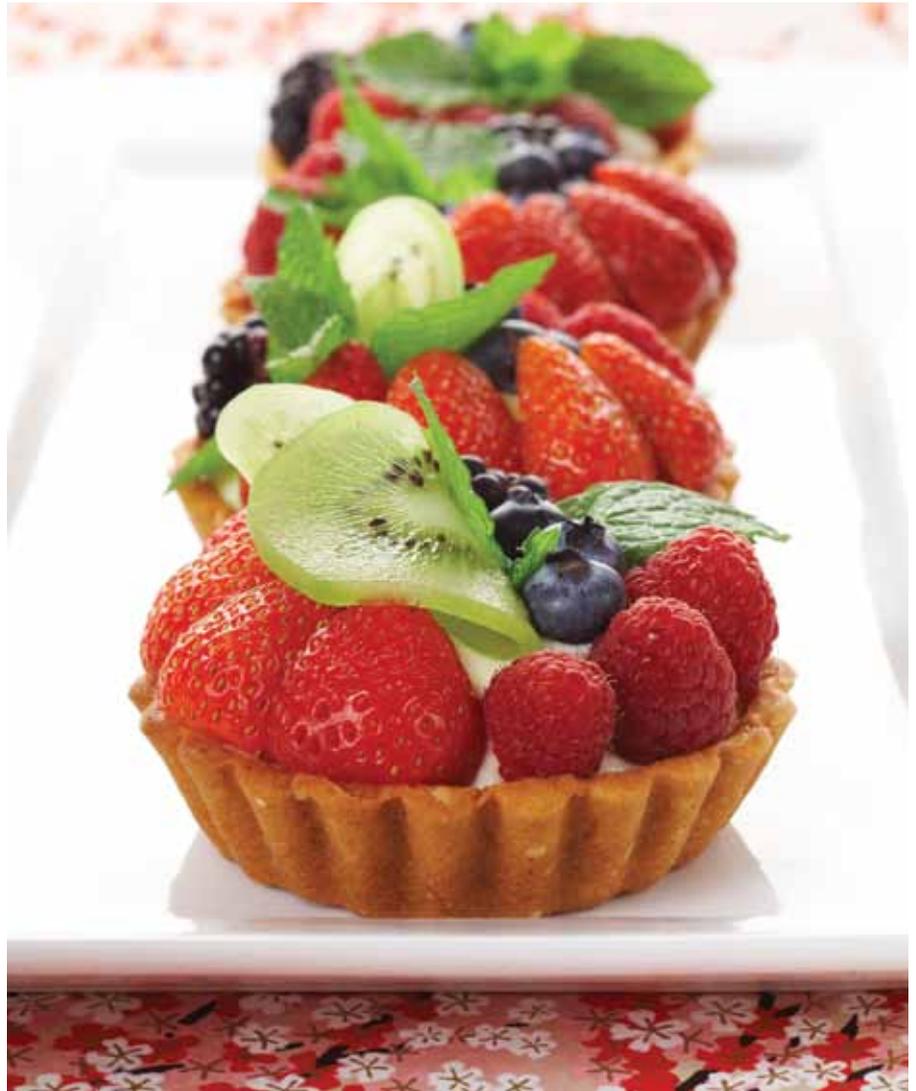
In today's economic climate more than ever, budget cuts are playing a role in what is being paid for and project outcomes. Industry professionals are arming themselves with a broader skillset and platform to operate, giving themselves vantage over other competitors in the field. This creates greater flexibility with clients' requirements and needs for the project at hand. I have been blessed by informal learn-by-watching-when-you-can to work with so many professionals who have been so generous in letting me observe while they do their thing.

When starting out, I strongly recommend trying all kinds of projects to get a feel for what's out there and to build some experience. They don't have to be cash paying jobs as learning alone can be worth more than money and work experience roles can lift the pressure associated with employment expectations.

Any responsibility can be just as serious if you set your mind and focus. Mock-up projects, experimental jobs and recipe testing at home are all great ways to get a feel for food styling. Build on the job training and pitch yourself for work experience with photographic companies and food styling businesses. Where there's a will, there's a way. I'm a big believer in putting in a bit of effort and setting goals. Take workshops, courses, start a blog and start a food styling journal.

When building a portfolio, consider it from a photographer's view, an agent's view and your view. As a freelancer not signed to any agency or publishing company, I need to present and pitch for all kinds of unique briefs. This isn't for everyone, but it is also quite common. If you want to secure a position with a particular 'foodie' publication house or agency, you would benefit to at least cater some part of your portfolio to the specific culture of the brand.

Arm yourself with as much knowledge as possible, about the next task, the next client, the direction of the team you will be working



with, what you will need to take to set, etc. It's about preparation, practise, organisation, sourcing tools and equipment.

A lot of the food I make requires a recipe – a recipe that I need to develop and provide as part of my role. Thorough preparation is vital. I could provide food preparation, food styling, presentations, product development and testing. I do my best at working in and with new teams, which may comprise photographers, assistants, art directors, prop stylists, clients, agency and more – experts who all get together to nail the 'hero' shot or

the 'money shot'.

I want to evoke the senses and I want people to salivate when they see my work. I've witnessed clients telling photographers their product was "simple" food, easy to be styled, photographed and refusing to provide funds for a food stylist. As an experienced food stylist, I know first-hand that "simple" food can often be the trickiest and a complete nightmare to style.

The very best ingredient to take to set is confidence. Under-sell and over-deliver. ■