

**LAWS AND PRINCIPLES  
OF FLAVOUR**

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Over eons of time the human species has evolved from the dust of the stars. We are ruled by the laws of nature. Isaac Newton's laws of motion are well understood. Here are some laws of flavour.

### ~Style of the taster~

There is no absolute human palate. Even top tasters have off days and are not consistent. Nobody has ever accused me of avoiding the seductions of teleology but there are natural laws, the causes of which are reasonably well understood. Conforming has natural benefits. We may disobey such laws for a specific gain and be prepared to pay the price. The Pill is the most obvious recent example of this.

What we call flavour is the brain combining the input from sensors in the mouth, tongue and throat (taste) with that from the nose (smell). Taste with mouth, smell with the nose. Flavour is smell+taste.

No wine has ever been made specifically to go with a certain dish and not all food created to match a particular wine ends well. So much for wine/food nuptials. Laws of flavour apply to humans, and are as constant as the laws of motion. They are marshaled here under a single banner. Food writer John Newton mentions some laws of taste by Grimod de la Reynière (1758-1837). I have been unable to trace Emma Spary's 1996 *Making a Science of Taste*; she explored dietetic recommendation for the culture of the mind. So *pace* this polymath and the dictates of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1775-1826):

## LAWS OF FLAVOUR

### 1. Less is more.

A paradox of any pleasure. Flavour is best enjoyed at threshold (just able to be perceived). This law highlights the beauty of simplicity. There are rare exceptions. More can rarely be more. Appetite influences threshold.

**Corollary:** Positive (enjoyable) aromas have negative (repellant) levels. There is wide individual variation between what is a tempting whiff and what proves to be a sickening excess of the same substance. This can be amazing.

## **2. What we eat tastes of what it eats.**

Flavour of living things derive from their food source. The six specific single feeds (e.g. rosemary) of different Merino lambs was instantly identified in racks roasted by Tim Pak Poy. The flavour impact recalled that of an imported Brazilian herb near Rockhampton on which Brampton Red beef grazed.

## **3. Mood subdues (flavour).**

Memory emotion and ambience influence appreciation. The attention span must be switched on to flavour or it is not perceived. Simple as that. How often have you looked at your empty glass or plate with no idea of the flavour, after a riveting table exchange? Pay attention! You owe it to the cook.

## **4. Sight dominates smell.**

(except an override like the warning smell of burning) The eye has the first bite. Japanese chefs currently lead the world in presentation.

## **5. Mixtures in excess of 3-5 cancel.**

The average person can identify three separate aromas in a mix. A trained sniffer rarely exceeds five. A perfume Nose may get even more. Like colour mixes, an excess goes grey.

## **6. Taste is the frame, smell the cladding of flavour.**

Think of the internal girder structure of a building. Sweet taste increases perception of fragrance. Umami enhances flavour. Sourness lifts the middle flavour. Low acidity flattens it. 5% vinegar is a strong commercial (can be natural or manufactured) kitchen acid, lime juice the strongest found naturally in food. The sequence of perception of the individual components defines the pattern of sensation which we call a flavour. The senses of taste and smell combine in the brain to give flavour its structure.

## Bylaws

- A.** If you like it, and are in reasonable health, evolution has ensured that, in moderation it is good for you.
- B.** Sharing food and drink at the table causes a rise in happy hormones (endorphins). May come to be called 'social hormones'.
- C.** Age affects preference. Youth seeks sweetness (energy marker), age seeks bitterness (digestif). Moncrieff recorded young babies enjoy their own poo. Their milk diet produces something not unlike smelly cheeses. I haven't personally compared.
- D.** The pleasure profile from matching a wine with a food, and vice versa, can be reduced to a few equations :-

**Synergism  $1+1=3$**

**Antagonism  $1+1=1/2$**

In response to Gawen Rudder about his concept of 'polyfood': Although the science behind polyfood is applauded, I prop at the clumping of food with pharmacy, as unlikely to enhance enjoyment.

The laws of flavour have been defined. They may be flouted for a specific benefit. Common sense still has a place. For instance why would anyone add a substantial amount of an expensive wine to a recipe, as some continue to do, and then boil the bejesus out of it? Is any improvement proportionate to such a costly manoeuvre? Adding a spoonful or two as an essence at the moment of service is a different matter.

Mea culpa. I confess to serious 'label-drinking', more susceptible than most to the operation of the fourth law. The eye does have the first taste. Puréed asparagus tasted as wasabe is my worst sin. What a paranoid palate. I have also smelled violet in a posy of odorless African violets. Like the lady who got an asthma attack from imitation flowers, the natural ones to which she was sensitive.

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The above has been collected over half a lifetime. Some is original. My aim will have been realised if it contributes to the pleasures of the table. Permission is freely given to everyone for it to be used for whatever reason. Hopefully with attribution. Not long for this mortal coil, it would be good to be remembered.

The shared table has become my religion, one that is possibly 10,000 years old. Break bread and share drink with a stranger and you will never want to harm them, nor they you.

May these principles enhance your pleasure, shared when possible.

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