



cultureCUISINES
Jennifer Matsumoto } Spring 2012

How can a TV Dinner be redesigned to make the individual experience reflect a family dinner and act as a learning tool for cuisine and culture of various countries?

In our constantly growing and evolving society, people are losing their cultural ties and traditions. As individuals relocate and move away from their families, they become removed from their culture. It becomes the responsibility of the individual to maintain culture themselves.

Family dinners become difficult to maintain, especially with no family at home to have dinner with. Younger generations suffer by not having the same conversations around the dinner table as the generations before them. This simple ritual of eating together helps to teach younger generations about etiquette and tradition. However, as we live in a world of growing technologies and the attraction to convenience the family dinner becomes lost amongst other things. Instead, we look for what is convenient.

Convenience can be represented by the popular frozen TV Dinner--made for one and an easy thing to fix up for dinner. This project will propose a way to promote and maintain ethnic cultural identity through a redesigned TV Dinner. My solution can be translated to fit many different countries. I want to provide a way for a person to explore their own culture or learn about a different country and cuisine unfamiliar to them through a cultural TV Dinner.

My process first began with an examination of culture. What is culture? How does one define culture? Where do we find culture? By asking these questions, I was able to uncover the generalizations of the composition of a culture. Through my own investigations I concluded there are three main aspects that make up any culture--language, food, and customs. Often intertwined within one another, they are the common thread that can be related to many different cultures.

Language, food, and customs or traditions have a unique place in different cultures around the globe. The one that I want to focus on is food. The ability to speak a language of a different culture is difficult, but to be able to eat a culture can be done by anyone. Food knows no language. I can eat foods from a different culture everyday. I do not need to know how to speak Mexican to know enjoy an Enchilada. I love Pad Thai, but I don't know any traditional Thai customs. However, it should be important for the consumer to understand the traditions and culture behind the food. They should at least be aware of the traditions and making a conscious effort to learn about others.

Another part to consider is where the food is consumed. Traditionally, family dinners provided a time for families to come together at the end of a day and talk over a meal. Family dinners allow for conversation about the cuisine, and culture.

Growing up, my regular family dinners taught me etiquette, customs, and tradition. The same type of experience happens in other households.

Unfortunately, family dinners are difficult to maintain. Increasingly, schedule conflicts, social media, and geographical separation make it easy for families to disregard the importance of family dinners. An increase in technology causes people to engage more in cell phones and televisions instead of each other. Family dinners are also difficult for those who live alone. Many students, like myself, are relocated and do not have a steady routine. Individuals find the convenience in single meals, like a TV Dinner.

TV dinners enhanced the experience of eating dinner and watching TV. The tray allowed for each person to have their own meal, minimizing discrepancies over what to eat and also not having to deal with dishes. TV Dinners were one product that helped to isolate the individual from a family dinner.

The issue of bridging generational gaps and culture became important to me because people will not miss it until it is gone. Eating alone, people often read or watch TV, but what if they could take this time to educate themselves about another culture?



A typical TV Dinner that can be bought today.



Taking that and making it into a 'Swedish' version.

köttbullar swedish meatballs

Swedish meatballs are probably one of the best-known Swedish cooking specialties, definitely a necessity on the smörgåsarbord. Remember that meatballs were probably a way to use up leftovers, and then the mystery of all the different recipes clears up. The cook used the meat that was on hand as filler that was available and ingredients for the sauce based on not only regional or family preference but what was handy.

mashed potatoes

A potato a day, it seems, will keep the doctor away in Stockholm. Swedish find potatoes to be nutritious!

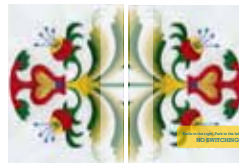
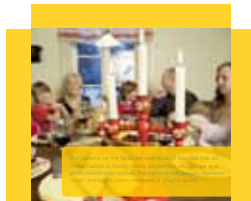
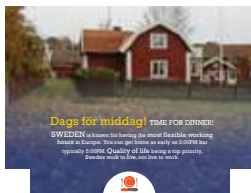
lingonberry jam

A Wild Natural Treat From The Swedish Forests. Lingonberries are rich in fiber, vitamin E, and many other nutrients.

PROCESS



A new iteration that includes utensils and opens up like a book.



Final layout of the box. Outside, inside, flaps, and bottom.



My solution is Cultural Cuisines. Cultural Cuisines is a proposal to create a TV Dinner that puts an emphasis on both cuisine and culture. At the same time, the meal is convenient and can be an individual experience.

Culture Cuisines are a taste of a culture's customs and cuisines. The cuisine is represented in the food in the box, and the culture is represented through descriptions. As one opens the box, they unravel more about the given culture. As a starting point, I chose to represent three countries for my working prototypes. They are Sweden, Mexico and Mongolia. I chose these three countries, because they represent countries in three separate areas of the world--Europe, North America and Asia.

When buying a TV Dinner, the outside of the box usually gives a picture of what is inside, but no history behind it. Although it may be a 'traditional' meal, the consumer may be left in the dark about what that tradition is and why people in that culture eat those meals. Cultural Cuisines bridges that gap by providing a short story of what the meal is and how or why it is eaten in that given country.

Opening the meal is like stepping into a new culture. First, the viewer is confronted with an image of the country, and a short anecdote of the lifestyle. Open the box and the inside cover shows another image of the country or the dinner table giving more insight on etiquette and lifestyle. Continue to open the box and step into the 'home.' There will be cultural patterns and colors used below the food, like a tablecloth. For certain ethnic meals, special eating utensils, will be included in the box. Printed beneath the meals, there will be a short explanation of the history of the cuisine. These anecdotes are important because they describe the history of where it began or maybe how to make it. For foreign names, there are translations into English.

The prototypes I made are filled with information that I extracted from my research. However, I do believe there is room to strengthen the narrative I have presented by relating these stories to a specific person or family. This would tap into the actual emotional and history of another family as if you were actually going into their home to experience another cultural dinner. Personalizing the experience will strengthen the overall meaning of opening the box making the user feel they were 'visiting' a new place.



MONGOLIA
 Guriltai Shol: Mongolian noodle soup
 Boorstog: Deep-fried cookie dessert



MEXICO
 Tamales: 'wrapped food'
 Tortillas: 'flat cake'
 Flan: custard dessert



SWEDEN
 Köttbullar: Swedish meatballs
 Mashed Potatoes
 Ostkaka: Cheesecake

Looking forward, I think this concept of blending something very popular with a narrative about tradition and history is a unique juxtaposition that can provide insight to new cultures. Changes in technology and lifestyle are things that cannot be controlled, but the products and interactions can be.

By creating the Culture Cuisines, the user is prompted to enjoy the whole experience of eating the meal. The dinner in a box is still convenient, but overlays a new cultural aspect to the experience. Of course, this idea may not work well in the marketplace, but maybe it is not something commercially sold for everyday consumption. Culture Cuisines can be something special that once bought, can be kept as a souvenir. The information can be similar to what is found in books, but more enjoyable. The form of the box, and practice of eating and experiencing the meal represents a new form for younger generations to engage and learn from. Maybe an adult version, for someone who is traveling to another country or is in need of cultural stimulation can be a cooking kit. Culture Cuisines can be a recipe list of how to go about making these meals from scratch. There could also be levels of information. Foods and information can be basic for children and more complicated for adults.

In the many forms that Cultural Cuisines can take shape, the goal will always be to bring people closer to their own, and other cultures through the consumption and understanding of traditional foods and customs.

Cinotto, S. (2006). 'Everyone would be around the table': American family mealtimes in historical perspective, 1850-1960. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2006: 17-33. doi: 10.1002/cd.153

This article discussed the evolution of family dinners historically stemmed from the Victorian era but have become embedded into the American culture.

Gills, J.R. (1996). *A world of their own making: Myth, rituals, and the quest for family values*. New York: Basic Books.

This book uncovers the reality of the symbolic definition of family and how the reality of a 'family' may just be a myth that needs we need to actively engage in to change.

David, Laurie, and Kirstin Uhrenholdt. *The Family Dinner: Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids, One Meal at a Time*. New York, NY: Grand Central Life & Style, 2010. Print.

A book discussing the struggle of the family to organize and maintain family dinners and how to struggle with the changing dynamics of family dinner.

Henderson, H  l  ne. *Swedish Table*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Web.

A book describing the Swedish cuisine, holidays, and celebrations.

'History of Mexican Cuisine.' *History of Mexican Cuisine*. Web. 10 May 2012.

<http://www.iccjournals.biz/StudentScholars/Undergraduate/history_of_mexican_cuisine.htm>.

A brief history of Mexican cuisine with recipes.

'Mexico -   Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette.' *Mexico*. Web. 5 May 2012.

<<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/mexico-country-profile.html>>.

An overview and history of Mexico.

'Mongolian Culture : Arts, Language, Food, Tsagaan Sar & Nadaam.' *Mongolia Culture, the Mongolian Art, Food & Traditions*. Retrieve the Main Festivals in Mongolia on Our Website: Naadam & Tsagaan Sar. Web. 5 May 2012.

<http://www.e-mongol.com/mongolia_culture.htm>.

I found a lot of websites like this one on Mongolian traditions and nomadic lifestyle that I read through to get a better understanding and grasp of their culture.

Shortridge, Barbara Gimla., and James R. Shortridge. *The Taste of American Place: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998. Print.

This book discusses that America is becoming a place full of many ethnic cultures and as we travel out of the US we seek to find the same rich cultural experiences in restaurants in America.

Spiegel, Alix. 'The Family Dinner Deconstructed.' NPR. NPR, 07 Feb. 2008. Web. 5 May 2012.

<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18753715>>.

A manuscript discussing the general importance of family dinner time when raising children to make good decisions.

'Sweden : Daily Life and Social Customs.' *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 5 May 2012.

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/576478/Sweden/30545/Daily-life-and-social-customs>>.

An overview of life in Sweden and cultural traditions.

'SWEDEN.SE - the Official Gateway to Sweden.' *SWEDEN.SE*. Web. 5 May 2012. <<http://www.sweden.se/>>.

This website provided a broad range of information about Swedish customs and lifestyle.