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# THE RUBBER BAND DOOR KNOB

April 2, 2015



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## Finger Food

These so-called little bites seen on many catering menus are numerous and designed for the enjoyment of partygoers and guests. A morsel of food full of flavor you pickup with your hand and easily place in your mouth with one bite. This idea is really appealing for event planners, hosts and guest alike. I have seen these range from simple cheese cubes to highly constructed and intricate ones on the international culinary competition circuit. Even at that level, many didn't understand the concept of what this really means. At the competition level, there is a very precise goal of specific weights and size as well as the minimal use of picks, spoons and dishes. For the average dinner, it is as simple as a bowl of cherries in the summer by the pool or a bowl of potato chips during the football game. This simplistic approach really started what finger food is about.

I have competed as a member of the ACF Regional team at the Culinary Olympics in Germany as well as trying out for the current national team. Creating elegant one-bite dishes always had me stumped. I don't know if it was the detail of the assembly and preciseness of the presentation, but I couldn't overcome the feeling of having two left thumbs as I stumbled through it. It is really a tremendous skill to have, and other chefs I know are very proficient at this and my hat goes off to them.

I understand the idea of finger food as an elegant presentation, how it's used for entertainment or providing the visual "wow!" appeal. To understand this more, I wanted to breakdown an item and its construction to its essential building blocks. There are several pieces such as the main item, an accent piece, garnish, sauce and then the conundrum of the "delivery vehicle." This is like the cracker for the cheese, the frill pick with the meatball or the highly ornate silver piece designed to hold up the beautiful piece of food. I think the only reason we use this is to keep our manicured fingers and \$1000 suits clean. I don't know about you, but I, for one, like eating really delicious foods with my hands. No fork, knife or little pick! You can't tell me that pulling meat of an awesome chicken wing or picking up the shell of a freshly shucked oyster isn't fantastic.



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Check out this great magazine, [Four](#).



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If you look around the world, many cultures eat food with their hands for all of their meals. This act of connecting with your food with your hands is not seen as uncivilized. Curries in India are eaten with a piece of simple Chapatti or Naan bread; Tagine in Morocco is eaten with your hands. What about what we eat with our hands? Aren't most of our favorite foods from the cheeseburger and pizza to BBQ and fried chicken all finger foods?

I really appreciate beautiful looking food that is artistically plated and presented however, some of my best meals have been real finger foods. The other night, I was sitting at a bar enjoying a selection of craft malt beverages and I only ordered from the appetizer menu. I wanted small tastes and was going to match flavors. My first course was shrimp and grits. The shrimp were perfectly cooked and had the tails on. I dropped the fork, grabbed the tail and used the shrimp and grilled bread as my utensils. Next, it was wings with a red chili glaze that was sweet, salty and sticky. No fork needed here. Finally, I had the poutine with duck confit and gravy. You guessed it, no utensils or a delivery vehicle here either. I ate the whole meal with my fingers and I didn't spill a thing! I could feel the crispy fries, the tackiness of the glaze and the feathery char of the shrimp tails. It was a wonderful dining experience. For some reason, the food even seemed to taste better. Doesn't that hold true for many other dishes? I was never a fan of "The Sopranos" television show, but I could get through a binge-watching session with just a bowl of the Sunday Sugo and a loaf of bread.

The connection of touching food with our hands is a "touchy" subject, especially in the professional kitchen. The Health Department would have many comments about the restaurant staff but not for our guests. If you can provide your guests with the experience of connecting with their food, it would be a great challenge. I am well aware that many of you may say this is not civilized, but just look around how it is in our world. As a society, we do worse things and we accept it by doing nothing. I say, let's do something like breaking down the norms and dive in to dining with both hands!

- Chef John Reed, CEC, CCA, ACE

## CHEESE

### Epoisses

## BEER & WINE

**As the sun Comes out,  
and you want to sit out  
and Chill with a  
beverage...**



Try a Klössch to cut the richness. This is one where you can grab a few.

**If you want to elevate the ripeness and earthiness with a touch of fruit, try it with this Chicago favorite...**



If you can get your hands on one.



A cheese to enjoy with bread alone. Make sure it is ripe and runny and let it sit out for a while.

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