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Camera Cuisine

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GOOD-TO-EATNESS—that appetizing look—is the secret of a successful food photograph. To achieve this appearance in their illustrations, leading magazines employ special workers including a foods staff to arrange the subjects, photographers who take the pictures, and color technicians who make the color separations.

The foods staff prepares dishes that are practical for the average homemaker to duplicate, and arranges them with an eye to the art principles practiced at Iowa State College. Firstly, the arrangements must have unity rather than a hodge-podge effect. Secondly, they must have simplicity yet avoid plainness and sparseness. Backgrounds and dishes that are plain and of interesting texture have proved most satisfactory. Low dishes are desirable, and those of square or oblong shape are easier to arrange, for round ones leave holes that are difficult to fill in. Although some contrast of tones in food is needed, too strong contrasts should be avoided, especially directly next to each other. The camera cannot register a jump from very light to very dark as, for instance, a cream sauce over a dark meat or vegetable. To bring out highlights food may be brushed with oil.

Small details must be watched carefully. There must be no smears on the plates. Parsley must not be too dense, leaving white to show through. Sauces that move must be watched carefully; they are difficult to photograph. The subjects must be perfect but not too perfect, for they should look as if a human hand had arranged them. Keeping the foods fresh-looking until they are photographed presents a problem. Paper towels dipped in ice water protect lettuce from the heat of the powerful lights. Often greens are changed several times before the shot is completed.

A good food set-up goes a long way in obtaining an effective picture. A skillful photographer does the rest. He needs a thorough knowledge of lighting, for without it he will never be able to record the textures in food and give the sparkle to the picture that is its final need. Too, the photographer needs a knowledge of composition so that he may arrange the foods into a pleasing whole. He needs a knowledge of how various colors will photograph. Some color combinations cannot be photographed effectively in black and white, for example, an orange and grapefruit cocktail. The colors of these two fruits photograph the same, and the picture loses its story completely.

Photography in advertising has been rapidly growing in importance. A few home economists have attained prominence in this field. One is now a partner in a studio which specializes in food pictures. Her job is to prepare the food to be photographed, to set it up, to provide backgrounds and accessories, and if models are needed have them ready in appropriate costume. She knows how to make dishes quickly and successfully and make them look attractive in a correct setting. She knows the qualities of fabrics and how to drape them; she also knows clothes and style values. Her job is to interpret the woman's and the home economist's point of view in terms of photography.

This woman pointed out that the new color photography makes all details more important: "I am convinced that more photographers will need trained home economists to help in handling their work as the use of color increases. The work is so intricate that literally you have to grow into it and keep acquiring new techniques. I take courses every winter—advertising, household decoration, chemistry, modern art, economics, display, stage setting—I need them all."

To be a real success in the studio, the home economist must be quick, observant and quiet. Success in advertising photography depends largely on the speed, the reliability and the artistry of the work done.

So far not many women have become well-known photographers, but there is no reason why women cannot if they have natural ability and the willingness to serve a long apprenticeship under someone who is already a master of the profession.