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Here's a Job In- Food Photography

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COOKING and art walk hand in hand through the pages of good food advertising. Take a close look at the next attractive food ad you see: not only will the pictured product make you want to find the nearest kitchen and prepare it, but also the lay-out will observe the same art principles that make a painting outstanding.

Some of the best food advertising done today is prepared under the guidance of Miss Ellen Pennell, Director of Pillsbury Mills Home Service Center. Miss Pennell spends much of her time combining art principles with food knowledge to produce pictures that are superior products.

All artists work with color, line and texture. But a food artist also faces the problem of making his subject look good to eat. The brown of a chocolate cake must not only be a good brown, but must look like rich, delicious chocolate. The shape of the cake must not only be well defined and nicely proportioned, but must also show how high and evenly raised the layers are. The texture not only provides its usual function of contrast, but must also show the delicate crumb of the cake or the flaky crispness of the pastry.

Greater Opportunities

If you like working with food and believe that a good background makes even the best product look more delicious, you might well consider a job as home economist in food photography work. As color printing becomes more and more popular, there is increased need for home economists who are not only good food technicians, but also artistic food technicians.

Working with food in color requires imagination as well as regular art sense, says Miss Pennell. A hue that looks good in a landscape painting might not look good to eat; some deep tones cast undesirable reflections. In addition, advertising often requires that the colors be seasonal. But once you get the perfect picture, advertising readership surveys show that all the work that went into it was worthwhile. One of "Pillsbury's Best" in color pictures was a cake ring filled with ice cream which appeared last year. The delicate pink and white of ice cream in a green-iced white cake ring made a picture that rated tops in readership in several national magazines.

Lighting and composition are vital factors. Miss Pennell emphasizes, "You can't sell a picture of flour," she says. Composition must play up the portion of the product which contains flour—in a cake, the fine crumb must be the center of interest. Lighting helps composition emphasize this part. In Pillsbury ads, you will always find a slant shadow playing up the cake texture with its eye-catching diagonal strength.

"We don't fake foods," says Miss Pennell. But her explanations show how carefully techniques have been developed to get food photographed while it's at its peak of good looks. To avoid mishaps at the studio, several cakes—or pies—or rolls are made. This takes care of possible cutting accidents. Then one of the extras is used as a "stand-in" for the several minutes it takes to focus the camera and arrange the hot, drying photographic lights. At the last moment, the star is whisked into position and immediately photographed. Arrangements take time, but the photographer works fast and accurately.

Practice Makes Technique

After considerable experimentation, food workers have developed a technique for keeping ice cream looking like ice cream and not soup under the hot lights. The ice cream is scooped up while only semi-hard, so as to get the best possible "flaky" texture. Then the scoops are bedded on a layer of dry ice and stored in a freezing cabinet until they reach brick-like hardness. They are arranged on more dry ice, sprinkled over with a layer of shaved dry ice, and rushed into position before the camera. Just as the last grain of dry ice evaporates off the surface, the picture is snapped. And the result? You've seen it yourself—ice cream that's really pretty as a picture.

Special Problems

Black-and-white photography takes special considerations. Because these are usually reproduced on rough-grained newsprint, the picture must be strong in contrast, decided in texture. Again, no ordinarily fair product will serve the purpose. It takes a super piecrust to sell its main ingredient—the all-important, but hard-to-picture flour.

Experience, new ideas, striving for perfection—all these are important in the home economist's role of preparing foods for photography. And the reward is not only in the challenge, says Miss Pennell. Opening a magazine to see "your" cake sells you on your job as much as you hope it will sell other women on your product and recipe.