



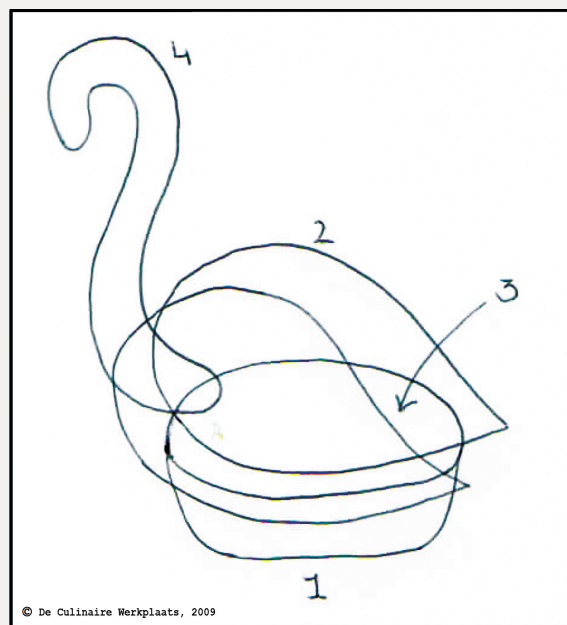
Learning by doing it yourself

Not all restaurants succeed, but the aim usually is to please the visitor by spoiling them as much as possible, seeing the customer's wish as a command and treating him as a lazy king. The Culinary Workshop in Amsterdam is an exception. There, they expect the customers to make an active contribution to their own meals. "We want people to think about what they eat."

The Culinary Workshop (de culinaire werkplaats) in Amsterdam is a design studio for food and dining facilities. Since its founding one and a half years ago, the company of Marjolein Wintjes and Eric Meursing has become well established with unique ideas and designs like edible clothing for the Amsterdam Fashion week. Even as a catering establishment, they have built their name in a very short time. The Culinary Workshop is nominated as The Best Vegetable Restaurant 2010 in the Benelux and the enthusiastic reactions of customers. A review on the culinary consumer site lens: "Trendsetting in terms of presentation, creativity and pushing culinary boundaries."

The combination of food design and a restaurant is fruitful, Meursing says: "Thanks to the restaurant, we can test our designs on the public and refine our products based on the responses we get." One of the conditions is, of course, that the audience gives useful comments. Wintjes and Meursing have several methods to lure people out of their comfort zone. Thus, they serve dishes with very surprising products – with an ingredient like black flour, for instance, or food that's wrapped in edible paper.

Even more important is that they let visitors do a lot on their own. Where most restaurants treat their customers as passive consumers, Meursing and Wintjes let them step up as co-producers. "We have an open kitchen so that everyone can see how a meal is prepared," they say. "We tell a lot about food and encourage people to ask questions. We expect people to get their own drinks and bring their plates to the dishwasher



after a meal. Sometimes we go even further and let them create a dish. Not too long ago we had people make a baked swan out of strings of dough: we gave them the dough strings and recipe, they had to form the swan themselves." Finally, the visitor can decide what they want to pay for a meal – except for the drinks the price is 'do it yourself' as well.

And guess what? It turns out that The Culinary Workshop not only learns from their customers, the customers learn from The Culinary Workshop as well by doing a lot themselves. "And in the end, that's our goal" says Wintjes. "Letting people think, make them aware of what they eat."

Jan Bletz