



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

Who dreamed up the misery of the tasting menu? Sharing just makes me anxious – and then hostile

There's a new trend in the dining industry. Small plates. What used to be known as the side dish is now considered an entrée. Essentially, an entire menu of appetisers. Or, another way to put it: an assortment of overpriced snacks.

This disturbs me. To begin with, the small plates of food cost the same as the large ones. So unless that sea scallop is sprinkled with emeralds I can take home and bead into a necklace, you're getting less value for your money. In no other business would this be acceptable. Smaller house equals smaller price. Smaller seat equals less expensive ticket. Smaller shoe equals discounted shoe. Oh wait, never mind. That one was just wishful thinking.

I went out to dinner the other night to one of these restaurants with a friend. It wasn't a tapas place. It wasn't a bar. It was a restaurant with a fancy chef and a "tasting" menu. The idea of having a five or 10-course "tasting" does not appeal to me. Why? Because it requires sharing.

Sharing food is stressful. Before the food arrives there's an obligation to make a mutual decision on what



to order. I like to avoid this and get my own thing. But with small plates, that's conspicuously anti-social. So I'm forced to engage in the "what do you want to share" conversation. Invariably, whenever this takes place, I find myself repeating: "I can't eat that."

Now we're faced with two choices. Order twice as many dishes and go into debt or choose the food I can eat which naturally tilts the order in my favour and establishes a hostile tone for the dinner. And how do you possibly know if you've "ordered enough". As soon as the waiter or waitress asks this I become anxious. What will be enough? And leaving the menu behind "just in case" doesn't help. By the time we know it's not enough, it's too late.

Once the anxiety and hostility sets

in, the order arrives. I'm forced to eat at an accelerated pace just to get a bite in. Suddenly, what was once a leisurely meal turns into an aggressive eating competition. You have to race through your meal or you'll go home hungry.

There's no way to have a meaningful conversation either because if you're the one talking you lose out. Here's an excerpt from the dialogue between two people sharing small plates:

"That's your piece."

"No, you have it."

"No, you have it."

"No, you have it."

Then what happens is there's always one bite left on the plate because no one wants to be the pig who eats it. That's 20% of the bill right there.

In theory sharing is a good idea but it never works out. There's the subtle spoon-jousting over who gets the extra drizzle of sauce and latent aggression comes out over the single pea pod.

My friend Carrie is convinced they mess with you. "Have you ever noticed if there's four people, they will give you five pieces? And if there are three people, they will give you four? It's like Survivor: The Restaurant."

Especially when it comes to dessert. I always eat so much more than I want because I don't have the time to linger. You'd think I love the chance to eat less but I don't.

All of which leads to the most trenchant point. There's never enough food, the experience is taxing and costly and perhaps worst of all? It's over too quickly. **OFM**

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Foodspotting

What is it?

If Twitter lets you broadcast what you're doing and Foursquare where you are,

then Foodspotting is the food you've ordered and where. It's free, too.

How does that work?

Take a snap of your burger or sushi, whatever, and it's posted to Foodspotting's cloud of dinners. Fool-proof foodblogging, in other words.

What's the point?

The idea is that next time you're stuck for somewhere to eat, rather than search local restaurant reviews, you side-step all those pesky words and look at snaps of food instead.

What if the menu has changed?

Well done, you've spotted a potential flaw. Also phone photos don't flatter – the food at Moro is made to look a bit Subway by Foodspotter. Photographic skills rather than culinary can determine how appetising something looks.

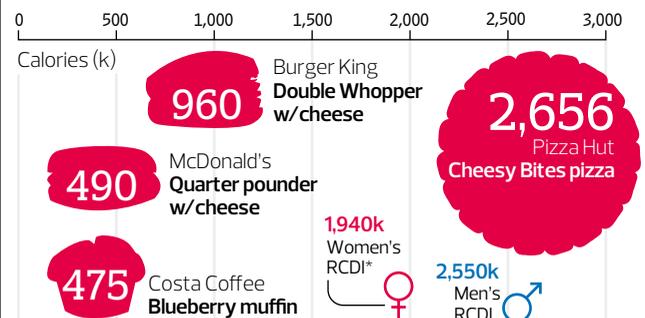
Will it catch on?

Like fungus on week-old pizza, it's inevitable.

THE PIE CHART

The month in food, at a glance

High calorie items on the high street



*RECOMMENDED DAILY CALORIE INTAKE SOURCES: FSA, THE INDEPENDENT, MEN'S HEALTH