



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

Most people wait until sitting down before checking out the menu. I prefer to do some research

I know there are people who enjoy being surprised. I'm not one of those people. The surprises I enjoy are a result of having had low expectations. The dinner party wasn't as boring as I thought it would be. Or the sushi at the airport wasn't terrible.

In general, I prefer knowing what I'm getting in advance. Especially when it comes to going out to eat. As soon as someone suggests meeting somewhere new, I go to the restaurant's website and preview the menu. I like to be prepared.

If the menu has options I'm interested in, it's something to look forward to. And if there's nothing I like, then I can suggest we go somewhere else. I previewed one menu recently and as soon as I saw "trotter on toast" as a starter, I knew venison couldn't be far behind. Scanning a bit further down I saw a dish made with "Back Fat". Why not an entire menu of Anguish and Despair?

"For me it's the same as looking at dating sites," my friend Tamara says. "What do I really want, which is usually bad for me, versus what I should have that's better for me."



My friend Carrie was the first person to send me a link to the menu in advance of a dinner plan and it changed everything. One advantage – when we got together, we could spend more time chatting. I didn't have to pause the conversation to read the menu which is like pausing a conversation to study for an exam. I can look at a menu for a lot longer than most people; it's not socially acceptable behaviour.

Eventually, the person I'm sitting with will begin talking to me while I'm reading (especially if we're meeting for lunch and there's a time limit to our meal) and then I'll feel rushed and pressured and get the wrong thing.

So if I consider the menu first, it cuts out my feeling self-conscious and my companion feeling bored and annoyed.

'Ingredients are just too obscure,' my friend said. 'I don't know what samphire is'

Another advantage, Carrie points out, is that she likes to make sure there are items she can eat. "Restaurants are getting too weird – I prefer simple. I hate feeling like I need an encyclopedia at the table – looking up obscure vegetables, unusual cuts of meat, it's too complicated. Maybe it's just me, but I don't know what 'samphire' is."

A quick Google at home and she discovers it's a salty-tasting garnish, usually growing along the British coast.

What did we do before the internet? I don't recall people carrying around an encyclopedia to look up ingredients. Then again, I don't remember seeing crayfish cream as a side dish.

There are a few exceptions to when I'm willing to forgo reviewing the menu. If I see a notice that says, "Menu changes daily", I'll wing it. Although I'll still try to look up archived menus to see what I'm in for and hope it doesn't change too dramatically.

When I'm travelling, I revert to the old-fashioned method and hover outside reading the menu before entering. When I'm in a foreign country and the menu isn't in English, I just look for the "V" sign.

There's always the chance that after researching and having my heart set on something in particular, I'll get to the restaurant only to discover the entire menu has changed. Whenever that happens, I ask why they still have the old menu online and they always come back with the same thing: "We just changed it this morning." Life can be unpredictable. **OFM**

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The Recipe Project

What is it? Spin off from a book of the same name which takes recipes from top American chefs and set them to music. That's right, recipes set to music, by a band called One Ring Zero, who have form for this kind of thing. Previous projects include utilising lyrics from novelists as well as songs that illustrate the solar system. Obviously the book is accompanied by a free CD which

supplies the tunes, which all seems a bit last century. None of that's involved with an app that's free for iPhone, iPod touch and iPad. **Isn't it a bit irritating?** As a satire on the whole chefs are the new rock'n'roll meme, it almost has legs. Enjoyment also depends on your tolerance for accordion.

What about the food? There's a decent recipe search and some good chefs involved. Plus there's a pithy interview with the most music-obsessed chef of all, David Chang. He doesn't sing on his recipe for crab claw, though, which may well be for the best.

THE PIE CHART

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