



## ***What is finger food?***

By Marco Valletta

### **Introduction**

The term *Finger Food* was formally introduced into the professional culinary world between February 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 2002 during *Expo-Gast* in Salzburg whose classic triennial competition rules included a specialist Finger Food programme for the participating National Chef Teams. In the somewhat vague rules, finger food was specified as a structured gastronomic concept, to be eaten *with fingers*, designed to be served at the start of the meal. After that, many chefs enthusiastically dedicated their time to seeking out recipes, inspiration, delicacies and aperitif snacks which would provide the best expression of the finger food concept. The "*petites bouches*" concept did however already feature in the cultural heritage of the food and wine of classic cuisine in the form of bite-size aperitif snacks with no basic rules regarding size or overall structure. A scientific committee, backed by two specialist industry magazines, *Zafferano* and *L'Arte in Cucina*, has now decided to set out some common guidelines for finger food, after analysing everything that has been said, done, seen and presented on the subject over the last seven years. The scientific committee's research was inspired by the many international and national events where finger food has been evaluated by the judges. The scientific committee has in particular defined a rational, precise system that will prove useful to those who wish to promote and develop the finger food gastronomic concept in their restaurant and catering businesses.

Under the guidance of Food Science and Technology graduate ***Sonia Re*** and *Zafferano* magazine Executive Director ***Ferruccio Ruzzante***, chefs ***Roberto Carcangiu***, ***Gianluca Tomasi*** and ***Marco Valletta***, all experts in different areas of the gastronomic and culinary industry, have established a set of rules with precise standards regarding the entire concept of finger food for the "*Chef in punta di dita*" (*Finger Food*) event. Their work has certainly been welcomed by many other colleagues in the restaurant and catering industry, providing useful common guidelines for correct finger food preparation.



### **The purpose of finger food.**

Finger food is a gastronomic creation in small, *bite-size* dimensions, requiring some sort of structured presentation . Finger food can be served in any kind of restaurant or catering outlet, whether it's a homely provincial bar, a chic city centre bar, a high class restaurant or a sea-front kiosk, complying with hygiene and sanitary regulations, yet always presented invitingly as it should entice you into eating it. A series of bite-size morsels are a common feature in Italian gastronomic culture, and particularly in regional cuisine. We only need mention *bruschette* from Tuscany, *spunciotti* or *cicchetti* from the Veneto region, *fritti* from Naples and *focaccine* from Liguria. Finger food is actually something else! What we should always therefore remember is that finger food has to be presented in small quantities, but that doesn't mean that anything can become finger food. Furthermore, the diner or customer has to elicit gastronomic sensations from finger food's various multi-coloured forms. Once selected from the tray, each finger food should deliver *a mouthful for the five senses to savour.*

### **Guidelines for a finger food system.**

- The finger food gastronomic concept suits every form of restaurant and catering.
- Finger food can establish a gastronomic exchange between businesses who serve and sell food and those strictly tied to food production;
- The finger food gastronomic concept creates a qualitative opportunity to introduce any kind of "menu";
- Finger food creates the opportunity to produce and sell foods and products whose preparation brings an element of the spectacular, rather similar to a *Chef on Show* philosophy.
- Finger food is a small-size gastronomic concept that you eat with your fingers or special utensils, preferably in one bite.
- Finger food is never a dessert or bite-size confectionery, because the codified "*mignonne*" culture of miniature tartlets and pastries already exists.



### Definition of the rules for finger food.

- It's a product that is consumed in one bite;
- It is composed according to extremely precise logic. The ingredients used in finger food production can be combined by similarity or contrast (sweet/sweeter; savoury/more savoury, soft/crisp; sweet/savoury and so on);
- Finger food must be easily created, without requiring excessively lengthy prep time, simply because it is consumed in one bite;
- Being bite-size means that finger food can be picked up with your fingers or special miniature equipment;
- Finger food can include liquids, gelatines and accompanying sauces, as long as they harmonize with the principle of one-bite pieces that can be picked up with one hand;
- It must be underlined that finger food is eaten with "*mise en bouche*" (literally placed in the mouth):
- Finger food must contain a minimum of 3 harmoniously combined ingredients.
- Finger food is not classified with one single cooking method. It can be cooked or raw, but always with a defined food combination;
- Finger food may be both hot and cold, independently of the cooking methods employed;
- Each finger food is always neatly presented, cut evenly and displayed in a precise overall presentation.
- Finger food is to all intents and purposes a culinary preparation and must be constructed in careful observation of the principles of a healthy, balanced diet.
- Finger food presentation must take into account its visual dimension.
- The structure must therefore consider the shapes and various colours of the foods employed;
- As a sensorial expression finger food must allow defined tactile and visual perception and in the same way as its olfactory aspect must be recognisable;
- Finger food is a way of interpreting gastronomic and culinary vision and is thus an element of taste: This is why finger food is a clear expression of balanced flavour.
- Finger food is not just a reduced quantity of any given recipe.



This document was compiled by the Technical Commission on behalf of the Organising Committee of the “*Chef in Punta di dita*” Finger Food Championship.

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