



Culinary Institute
of America

Food Presentation, Photography, & Social Media

Day 4



Learning Objectives

- Explain the difference between food styling and food plating.
- Describe food styling and different industry-wide hacks.
- List the four facets of food photography and describe each element in-depth.
- Explain the “Rule of Thirds” when it comes to food photography.
- Discuss the ever-growing role of social media and how it can be used to reinforce a personal brand.
- Explain how to navigate social media effectively.
- Explain how your image and your mission create your personal brand.
- Create a mission statement using formats provided.

Food Presentation

- **Food styling:** the art of arranging food for visual appeal
 - May include props, nonedible elements
- **Food plating:** the art of arranging food for customers, combining visual appeal + dining experience



Food Styling

- Make sure it ladders up to your brand image and style
- What story does the dish tell through the human senses?
 - Colors & lighting
 - Shapes & textures
 - Height
- Props are just as important as the food itself



Visual Composition Hacks

- **Fresh ingredients as props:** taste and flavor hints
- **Layers:** create intrigue, depth
- **Garnishes:** help the eye focus on the food, interesting texture
- **Direction of props:** align utensils, napkins, or boards to guide the eye toward the dish



Structure & Preservation Hacks

- **Sponges and toothpicks:** discreetly prop/support food for better angles
- **Cooking oil spray:** adds moisture and restores a freshly cooked look
- **Undercook slightly:** maintains moisture and prevents shrinkage/dryness
- **Secure small garnishes:** use wax or putty to hold in place
- **Prevent browning:** mist or soak produce in acidic solution
- **Thin wire support:** suspend ingredients mid-air to create the illusion of floating



Beverage Styling Hacks

- Fake ice will keep a beverage from looking watered down as it's being photographed
- A spray bottle of vegetable glycerin can create beads of moisture on the outside of a glass, giving a strong impression of refreshing and chilled
- If a beverage does not have visual layers inside the glass, add interest through fresh garnishes





Food Styling Kit



Food Plating

- Plate patterns affect perceived tastiness and healthiness of food
- We “eat with our eyes”
- There are many techniques, pick what suits your concept

Consider:

- Height
- Textures
- Colors
- Garnishes



Food Plating Techniques

Classic clock method

- Ingredients arranged like a clock face (protein at 6 o'clock, starch at 9, vegetable at 3)
- Consistent presentation, easy plate balance



The rule of thirds

- Plate divided into thirds
- Food arranged off-center for a modern, asymmetrical style



Food Plating Techniques

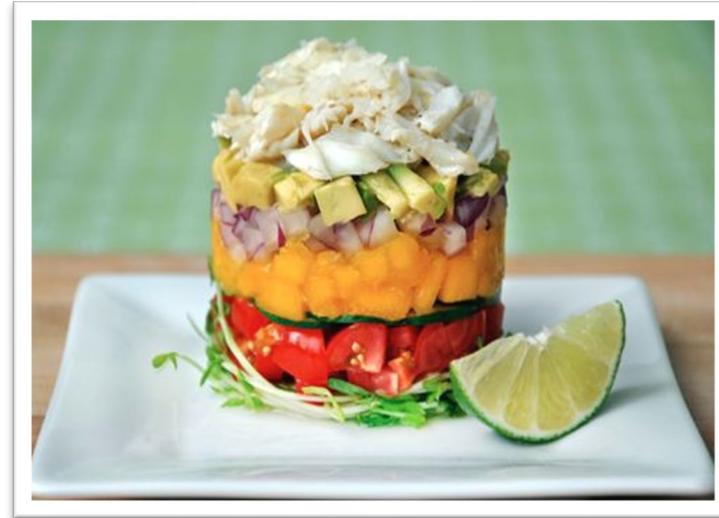
Linear or row plating

- Arranged in straight/slightly curved line
- Long rectangular plates, tasting menus



Stacked or vertical

- Elements layered to create height, dimension
- Draws eye upward, adds elegance



Freeform/organic presentation

- Natural flow, visual storytelling
- **Fine dining:** evoke emotion, inspiration



Accent Techniques

- **Sauce smears or dots:** applied with spoons or squeeze bottles for artistic flair
- **Microgreens and herbs:** add freshness, color, and height
- **Powders or dusts:** finely ground dehydrated ingredients sprinkled for contrast
- **Foams and gels:** used sparingly to add innovation, texture



Key Elements of Successful Food Photography

- **Equipment:** basic lighting setup with cell phone for smaller photos, digital camera for larger
- **Lighting:** artificial > natural, more reliable
- **Position & angle:** "Rule of Thirds", balance
- **Post-production editing:** brightness, contrast, saturation, vignette spotlights, etc.
 - Can use Adobe, Snapseed, etc.



Effect of Lighting



“Rule of Thirds”

- Focus on the points at which the lines meet, place subject on or near one of these points

Start with these questions:

- What angle will you shoot your photo at?
- What is your main subject (focal point)?
- Where are you going to place your subject?

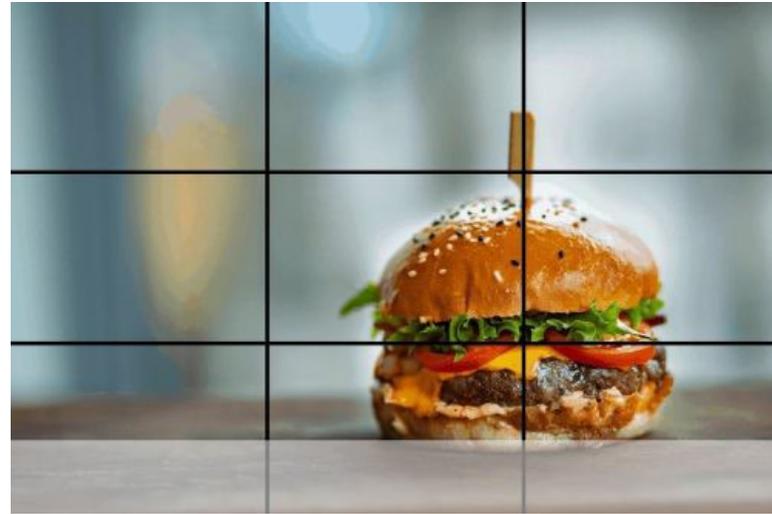
Decide which of the lines and points you will place your subject on

- Use other props, garnishes to frame subject and create shape in your photo



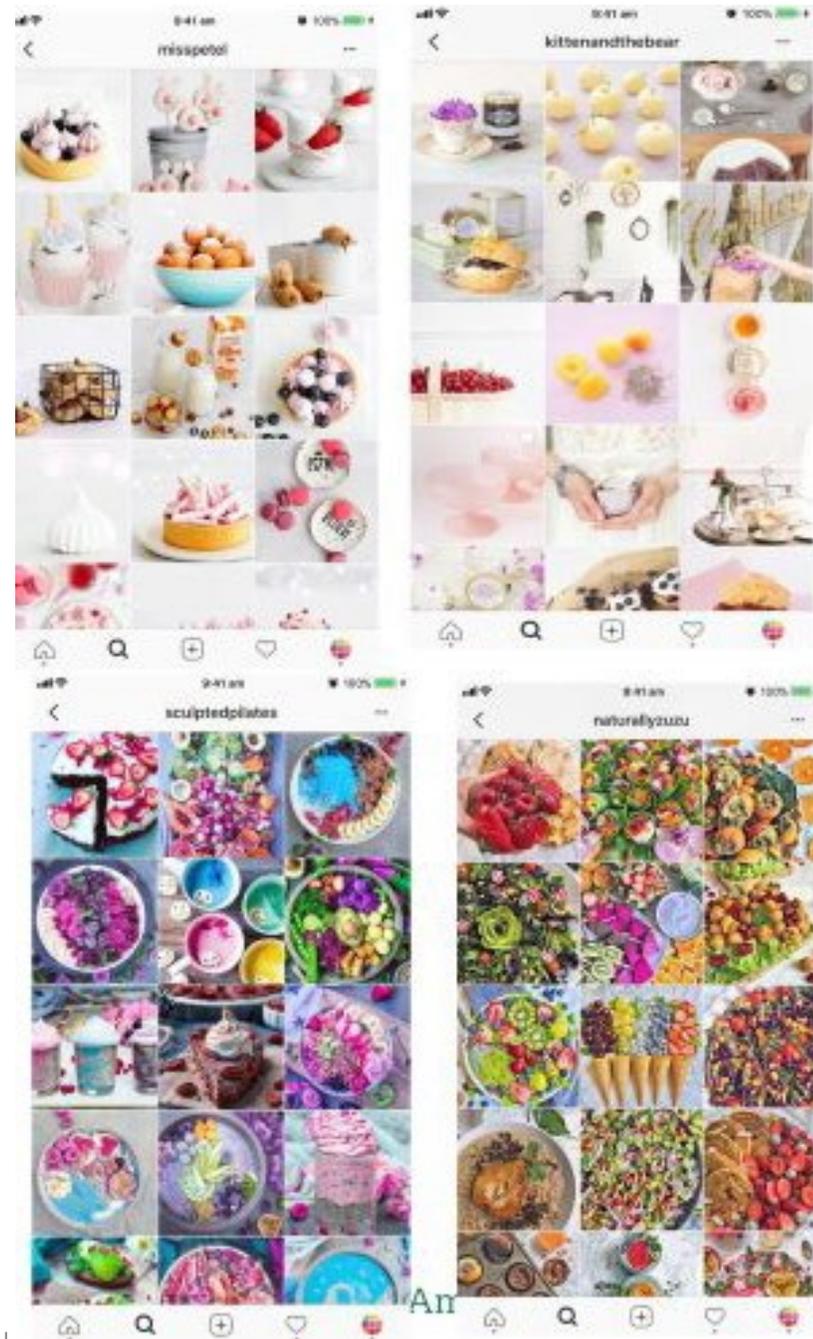


“Rule of Thirds” Examples



Social Media

- Used to reinforce your personal brand
- Let the content sell you and tell a story, but make it interesting
- Plenty of channels, Instagram is high impact and simple
 - Posts, stories, reels, recipes, demos, music
 - Engage with hashtags, comments
 - Give credit where it's due



Social Media Etiquette

- **Treat it as your digital portfolio:** avoid personal or controversial posts
- **Post regularly to stay visible and engaged:** photos, videos, reels, stories, recipes
- Always credit others' content properly
- **Be respectful:** no trolling or rude comments
- Stay intentional in what you share

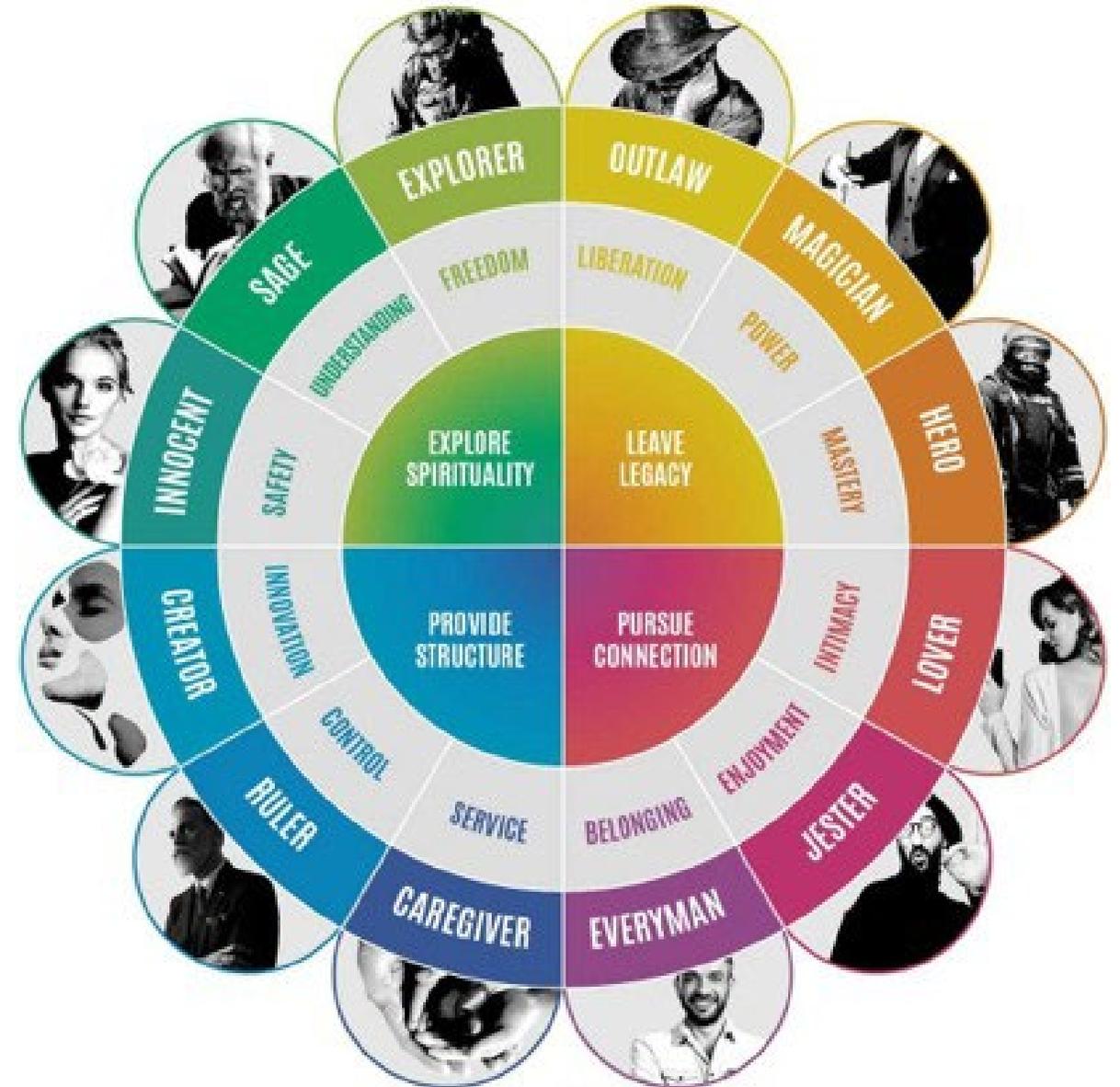


Your Image

- Consistency across platforms is key, stick to a theme
- Maintain your voice

Consider:

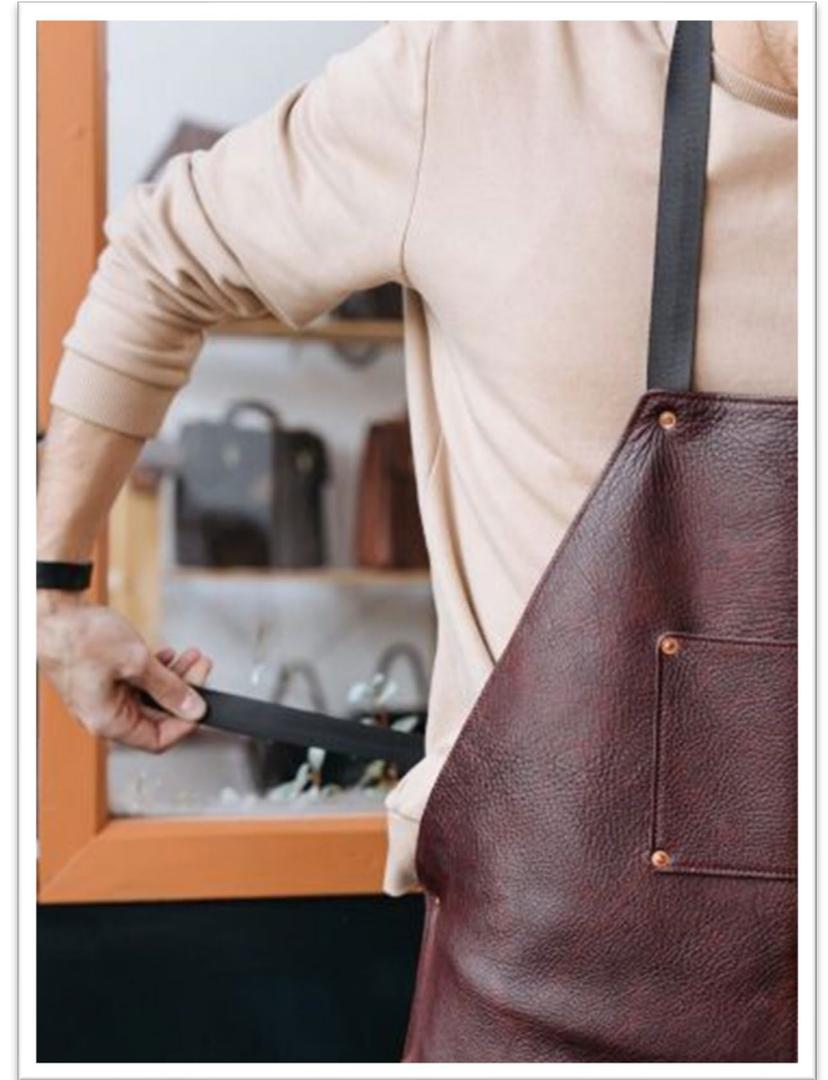
- Who are you as a chef?
- What are you selling - product or personality?
- What is your style?



Your Mission

Develop a personal mission statement:

- Define your values and what success looks like to you
- Articulate what matters most to you professionally
- Guide your professional decisions so your career path aligns with personal goals



Mission Statement Writing Tips

- **Reflect:** think about who you are and who you want to become
- **Write down what matters most:** your passions, goals, and the legacy you want to leave
- **Think big:** long-term dreams > short-term tasks
- **Mentors:** ask them what your greatest strengths are and what makes you stand out
- **Impact:** think about the impact you want to make + how your skills support that
- **Brief mission statement:** summarize in 5, then 2, then 1 word
- **Stay true to yourself:** reflect your passion and long-term purpose

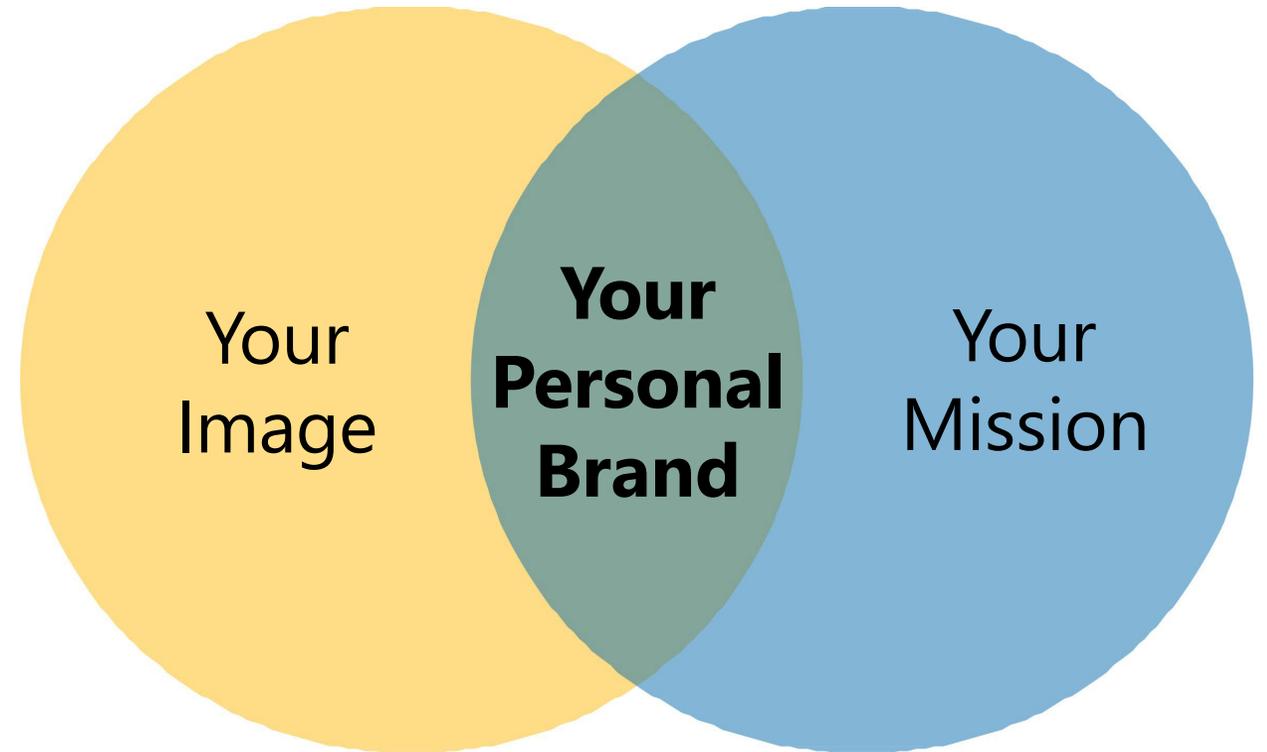
Mission Statement Templates

- **To** [what you want to do] **by** [how you'll do it] **so that** [what impact you hope to make].
- **I value** [one or multiple things you value] **because** [why it matters to you]. **To do this, I will** [how your professional path will align with these values].
- **To use my** [skills or expertise] **to inspire/lead** [group of people] **so that** [ultimate goal].

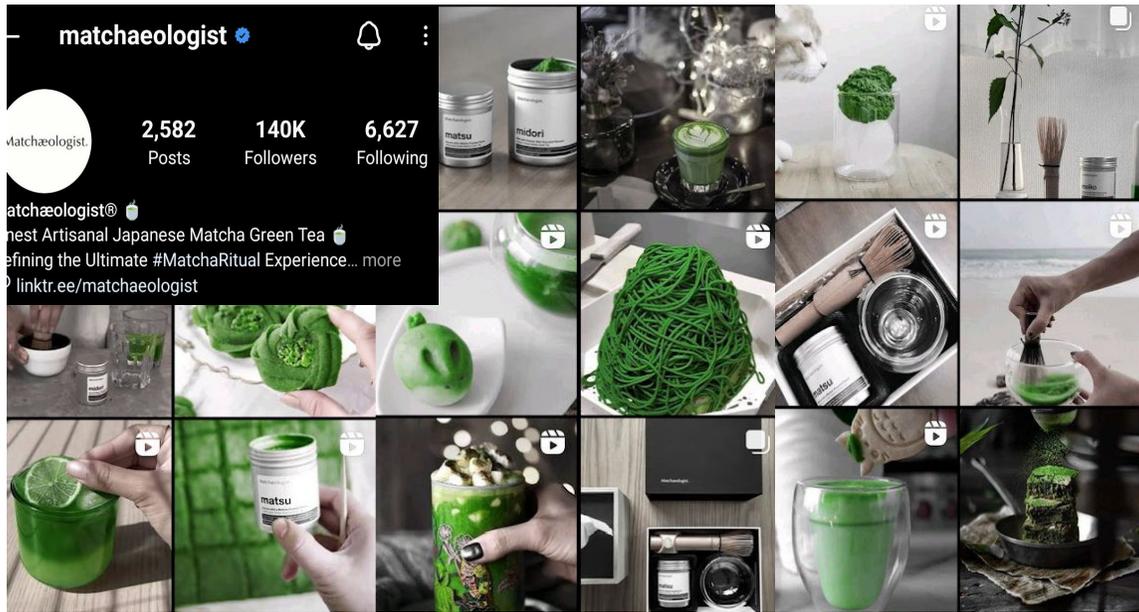


Personal Branding

- Helps you stand out from the crowd
- Leads to opportunities
- Gains trust from your audience, cater to them (you can choose who your audience is)
- Gives you control of the narrative about yourself
- **Remember:** nothing goes away

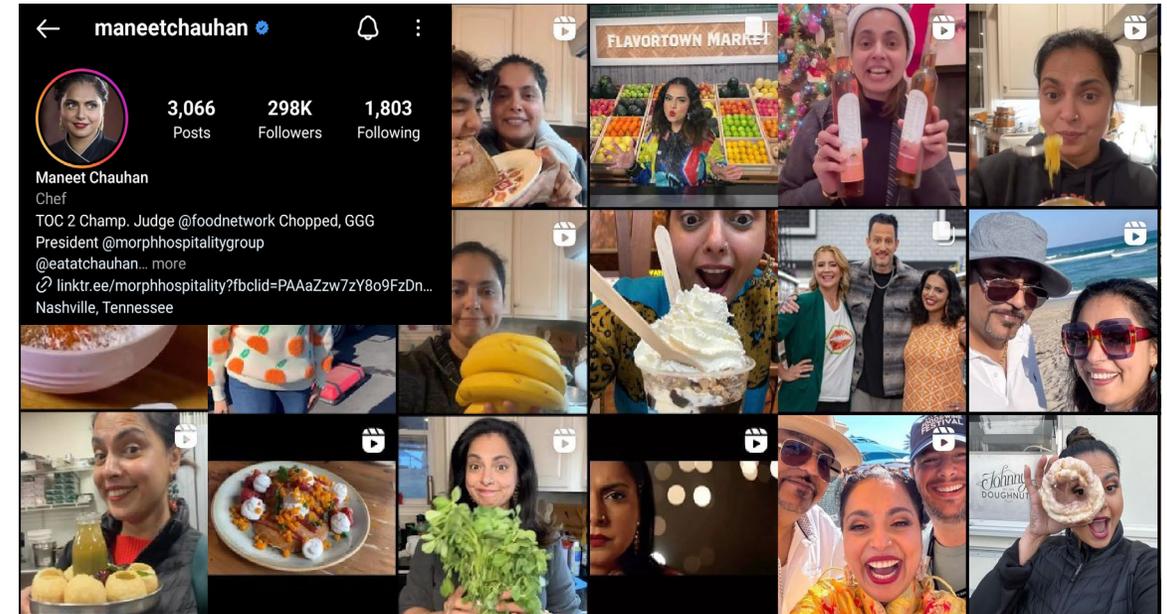


Aesthetic



- Curated, visually cohesive
- Polished, styled content
- Consistent color, tone
- Feels elevated and aspirational
- Strong personal, visual identity

Authentic



- Not overly curated
- Real and everyday moments
- Honest, not polished captions
- Genuine glimpse into their life
- Builds stronger, more human connections with the audience

Presenting Yourself

- **X/Twitter:** engage with tweets, hashtags, replies
 - Stay up-to-date, real-time info
- **Tik Tok:** short, low-quality videos
 - More casual, behind-the-scenes
- **Instagram:** engage with followers, post consistently, utilize captions
 - Business functions
- **LinkedIn:** professional presence, networking
 - Posts, articles, discussions

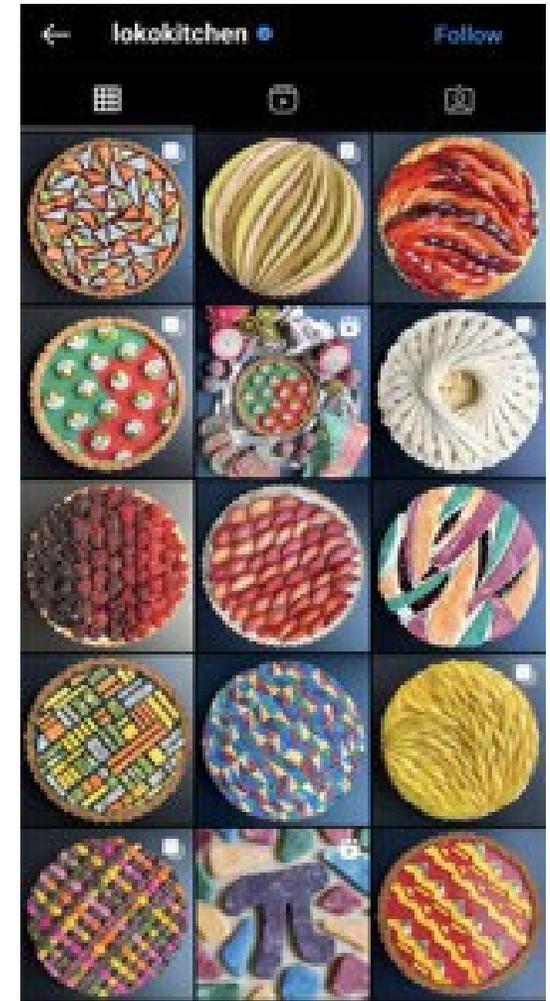
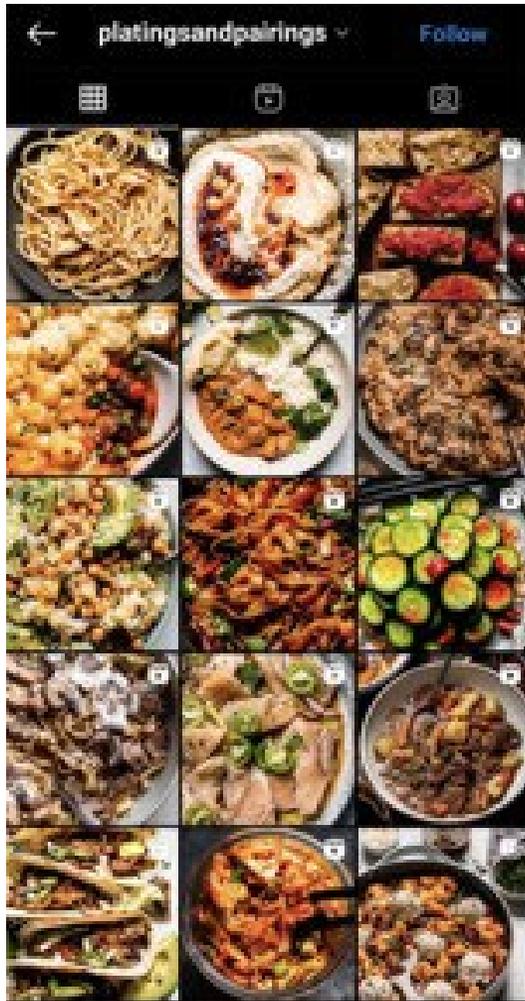


Gaining Attention on Social Media

- **Show personality:** be authentic, use bold visuals
- **Post consistently:** 2–3 times per week
- **Use strong visuals:** quality photos, short videos, reels
- **Tap into trends:** challenges, seasonal content
- **Share value:** skills, tips, behind-the-scenes
- **Engage your audience:** ask questions, reply, use polls
- **Boost visibility:** hashtags and tags (brands, tools, locations)



Post-Production Photos



Videos: Reels & TikToks

Pick a focus

- Highlight one dish, step or transformation

Film vertically

- Use appropriate lighting
- Keep it steady

Hook fast

- Catch attention in 3 seconds
- Show something unexpected/satisfying

Use sound

- Use trending music/kitchen sounds

Caption

- Short, relevant captions
- Hashtags increase visibility: #cheflife, #foodtok

Be real

- Show personality, does not need perfection
- Humor and chaos increase engagement

Edit tight

- Quick cuts, smooth transitions
- Focus on action: flip sizzle, plate
- Short and sweet, time depends on platform

Video Examples



- World-renowned celebrity chef
- Massive social media following
- Shares cooking tips & challenges online
- Known for bold, engaging personality
- [Example](#)



- Engaging food content creator
- Shares quick, approachable recipes
- Active on Instagram & TikTok
- Combines chef skills with storytelling
- Inspires home cooks online
- [Example](#)



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Any Questions?

Contributing Sources:
Barbara Alexander, CEC, CHE
Roselyn Darling, *Darling Culinary LLC*