

Recently there was a column in the O-A News that basically slammed the hard work that fine chefs do. I admire Rheta Johnson's writing. But her view of fine cuisine needs to be seen from another angle.

Apparently Rheta is very concerned about portion size. I write every week and enjoy it. I equally enjoy all the great comments I hear from so many of you. But writing does not require lots of calories. As long as you eat two or three modest meals every day, you will be fine. You don't have to worry about seconds or snacks.

It is interesting that one of the things I hear all the time at Jimmy's is "your portions are so right." Our position is that we serve what we think is an adequate amount of each food item. If guests want more, all they have to do is ask.

Want more potatoes? OK. You ordered 12 shrimp and for some reason need 2 more. OK. We operate similar to the buffet people. You get what you want. But we don't make you serve yourself or eat after others have played with the food.

So why do we need more?

Often we want more because what we are eating lacks flavor and/or quality. Food that has little flavor makes us want more of it to satisfy our appetites. Simply, it takes more bland mac and cheese to be enough than a tasty version.

Food with sufficient and interesting seasoning is more satisfying. We also perceive quality food as better. A nicer texture or intrinsic taste makes us satisfied quicker.

The speed you eat dramatically effects satisfying your hunger. If you take large bites and swallow them quickly, it will take more food to quench your hunger. If you take smaller bites and actually chew them, you will enjoy your food more and satisfy your hunger with less food.

Remember your brain has to be satisfied along with your tummy. It takes longer to do the first than the latter.

The simple act of keeping food in your mouth helps a lot. Once you swallow your food, you will taste it no longer. What ever lingers is it. If

your food lacks flavor, you don't want to taste it very long. Mediocre food swallowed quickly is a big reason you want more and wind up eating too much.

If you take the time to savor the flavor and texture of your food, you will enjoy it more and be satisfied with a proper portion.

Also gulping extra liquid while you eat makes you want more flavor and more food is your way to get it.

At an evening meal, order in courses and get a variety of foods. A first course or appetizer has a purpose – in fact two of them. This course both stimulates your appetite and begins to satisfy your hunger. The same is true with a cocktail or glass of wine.

Another way to enjoy your food more is to resist drinking a sweetened beverage with it. Have some before you eat and after if you wish. Wine or water is all food requires.

It's so true that very plain food doesn't look as good as that which is more carefully arranged and garnished. Big spoons of bland fare is what it takes if your eyes aren't satisfied before you start to eat. Greasy plates don't help either.

That column I was talking about criticizes what is perceived as small portions and inventive combinations.

The restaurant that was never named is probably Bayona in New Orleans. The chef/owner at Bayona is Susan Spicer. She is one of the best in America. We have had several meals there over the last 15 years and found the place to be outstanding. What's even better is that others have told us the same thing.

We were never unsatisfied with our courses. The food was always inventive and very flavorful. Yet if your mind and body are programmed for quantity, you will gulp down fine intensely flavored cuisine and never allow yourself to enjoy it. It will be in your throat in a heartbeat and never have any mouth and tongue time.

As with many restaurants, Bayona is a great value at lunch. Go there the next time you visit the Quarter in New Orleans. The beauty of your surroundings let you know a treat is to follow.

If a combination sounds strange, go for it anyway. Several professionals have tried it and liked it. You should too. Don't be scared or prejudiced. Otherwise we would have nothing better than gourmet gruel to delight our tummies.

Writers work at an economy of expression and finding the perfect word or phrase to describe an item or circumstance. The well-turned set of words is the goal.

Shouldn't a chef be on a similar mission? Isn't the pristine flavor of a perfect taste what you want? It's easy to throw a one-pound potato at a diner. How about doing it better and serving up a modest amount of beautiful perfectly cooked and seasoned quality potato? That's how a writer would do it.

Now some will say, "You just told us about this large meal you prepared for New Year's Eve." You are right. It was a special occasion. It also consisted of several courses of quite modest portions of very flavorful food served over a six-hour period. This was not an "eat and run" meal. And we won't do it again for another year.

I don't know about the others but I had just one meal the next day. And it was a modest one. Over a two-day period I had little more food and calories than usual.

So what's the answer? Eating less and still being satisfied certainly seems like a nice road to travel. Experiencing taste delights sounds good, too. Seek out those places that find this the way to go. You will be pleased and so will your body and soul.