A Material Menu: Designs for the Culinary Aesthetic
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Introduction

To discover the creative process that brought this book to life, join us in eavesdropping on the conversation between the creative trio behind it: Eli Feiglin, Caesarstone’s Vice President of Marketing; the renowned British designer Tom Dixon; and Francesca Sarti of the food design studio Arabeschi di Latte.

EF: Tom, your four elements themed kitchens, for The Restaurant by Caesarstone & Tom Dixon for Milan’s Salone del Mobile 2016, perfectly expressed the different natures of Caesarstone surfaces.

TD: The idea was to inspire architects and designers by showing them how, through the concept of the four elements, food and surfaces can interact in different ways, delivering a food experience that challenges all the senses.

FS: Once I’d seen Tom’s designs, I started researching a series of ‘edible sculptures’ where the structure and visual texture of the food would be as important as the taste.

EF: That connection - between food and design, the materials we all use - your recipes, our surfaces, Tom’s three dimensional execution... it all comes from the same creative place and it’s what drives us all.

TD: It’s an exercise in materiality, luminosity and texture. The four elements allowed us to create distinctive smells, tastes and visual experiences within each room.

EF: We had created an actual working restaurant in which the elements were celebrated through food prepared in the four kitchens representing earth, air, fire and ice. So why not push the idea and produce a visually inspiring design book - a printed pantry, if you like, with new food stories and images, to bring all our ideas together and celebrate aesthetics, foodstuffs and natural materials?

FS: The book gave me the chance to develop our Milan menu and work on eight new recipes to represent the elements that would not only delight and provoke the taste buds but tantalize the eyes and echo Caesarstone’s work surfaces in a way that would further explore the boundaries between food and design.

EF: The aim was to put into print this perfect pairing of food and the creative space in which it is prepared, photographed in the most visually delicious way, by renowned interiors photographer Tom Mannion.

FS: There’s something poetic - almost emotional - about the way this works - it’s important to keep the right balance between the food, where it has come from, how it is prepared (in the kitchen) and the context in which it is displayed and consumed (in the dining room). I think of this as a feeling of ‘rawness’ - to show the actual material in a way that appeals to all the senses, which really echoes Caesarstone’s aesthetic. In my choice of recipes, I was really inspired by the stone surfaces, picking harmonious textures and colours, from ingredients through to the finished food, to show this close relationship.

EF: What we’ve created is a book of ‘elemental ensembles’ that explore the natural relationship between the food that we eat and the places that it comes from. It was exciting for us to create and, I hope, inspiring for anyone who reads it.
Inspired by Roman aqueducts, Caesarstone surfaces were configured, contorted and curved to show their pliant properties. Ingredients redolent of earthiness are turned into conceptual Stones Sandwiches and Testaroli, a traditional Tuscan dish, cooked in an earthenware pot.

One: Earth
Faceted, jagged structures informed by the idea of ice were shaped using a spectrum of Caesarstone light greys and whites. The theme is played out in a menu of refreshing marine fritters and a surprise for the taste buds, cooling Salty Lemonade.
Charred wood and the ethereal nature of smoke relied on a Caesarstone colour palette of black and grey. Blackened beams with monolithic blocks evoked a striking, modernist forge. Fire was the transformational element in unusual roasted vegetables and a baked cheesecake with a twist.
Four: Air

Slim, vertical slabs of stone featuring rectilinear, airy cut-outs slatted with perpendicular counters evoked the idea of air. The structural properties of this element in cooking inspired a white, light Snow Soup and an edible tower made from meringue and torrone with fluffy clouds of cream.
The Elements of Eating

This book, containing a series of eight recipes, dedicated to the elemental, natural properties shared between food, aesthetics and function was inspired by Caesarstone’s 2016 installation for Milan’s Salone del Mobile. The creative exercise began with a theme: the four elements, which ultimately led to the design of four kitchens and a working restaurant by Tom Dixon with food by Francesca Sarti of food design studio Arabeschi di Latte.

Design and food: two subjects that inspire an almost religious fervour, especially when the venue for The Restaurant by Caesarstone & Tom Dixon for Milan’s Salone del Mobile 2016 was a deconsecrated church. It was the cruciform shape of the Rotonda della Besana, a Milanese landmark, that proved ideal for Caesarstone’s 2016 ‘four elements’ theme with each kitchen created using complementary ranges of Caesarstone surfaces, and each occupying different branches of the cross-shaped building.

“Reflecting on the four medieval elements of earth, air, fire and ice, we created totally distinctive smells, tastes and visual experiences in four different kitchens,” says Dixon who collaborated with Arabeschi di Latte to bring to life the timeless fundamental relationship between aesthetics and food.

“The home kitchen has become the immersive, experiential platform where food creation, dining and design harmoniously meld to create an ideal multi-sensory experience,” confirms Caesarstone VP Marketing, Eli Feiglin.

Exploring this sensorial, emotional, uniquely human response to food – the delight and pleasure in choosing and gathering ingredients, preparing, cooking, presenting and consuming, Sarti devised a series of food installations made of ingredients representing the four elements.

“When you remove the barrier of a plate and present each ensemble on the material that inspired it, the fundamental relationship between the natural surfaces and food is inextricable,” says Sarti.

Having devised a menu that would complement the stone surfaces of Dixon’s four elements kitchens for the Milan show, Caesarstone offered Sarti the opportunity to develop the idea. “It was a treat to be able to progress the ‘food sculptures’ idea we had for Milan and go further, to research eight traditional recipes that I could modernise by taking them out of their historical context, and present them in a beautifully modern way,” she says.

“These recipes were also grounded in the idea of the four elements and visually resonated strongly with the Caesarstone surfaces that we wanted to showcase them with, but each had a different story to tell,” she says. “I love research; it’s the most exciting part of the creative process; making this web of ideas and stories,” she comments, describing her working preference for using ‘simple things that become powerful tools which are capable of evoking memories and emotions’, from the ingredients themselves to the final assembled dishes, right down to the selection of surfaces and accessories for presentation. For Sarti, creating a recipe is a design process, selecting colours, textures and a means of preparation that will affect visual change, such as heat to alter colour, or air to provide structure. The ingredients may be simple materials but they are chosen with specific aesthetic values in mind and combined to create sculptural delights.

But Sarti’s food is not just about visual appeal: taste, of course, is fundamental, as is the engagement of our other senses: “It’s about all of the senses coming into play,” she confirms. “The sonic snap of a crisp pancake; the visual delight of slicing into a blackened cake and discovering its pure, white heart; teasing the taste buds with alternating sweet and salt flavours; the fluffy, sticky texture of meringue – each recipe is a story for the body and the soul,” she says.

And what stories: for the earth recipes, the symbiotic relationship between soil-dwelling plants and animals inspire pebble shaped bread sandwiches as well as terracotta baked Tuscan pasta. “I was thinking about the ancient practices of mudlarking and truffle hunting, digging around in the ground to unearth some unexpected treasures,” says Sarti, who researched ground-dwelling creatures and traditional recipes that rely on the earth to provide ingredients and that even form the materials for the cooking vessels themselves.

For the breathtaking air recipes, a lofty structure relies entirely on the incorporation of oxygen to support a tower made of nutty, chewy, Italian torrone; meringue and frozen egg white, while air lends a mushroom and coconut soup its light texture. “We think of air as nothing but its very invisibility becomes its strength when combined with certain ingredients,” she says.

The transformative effects of fire in all its aspects, from smoke to flame, embloazons everyday dishes from vegetables to cheesecake, turning them into dramatic statements. “I was fascinated with the idea of the ancient, mystical practice of using sage smoke to purify both people and interiors,” says Sarti. “Because it was also believed to give wisdom, I decided to use sage smoke, not only to add flavor but a spiritual element too, as part of the cooking process.”

And finally, ice, the cooling, soothing element, using water in both its states - liquid and frozen, offers up both the sustenance of marine delicacies and liquid refreshment via an alternative lemonade. “It was a traditional Vietnamese drink that initially inspired me and got me thinking about salt,” comments Sarti. “Nearly all the water on earth is saline and this recipe uses salt to draw out the juice of the lemon.”

“The recipes use simple ingredients, but each is a powerful tool to create a relationship so that there’s something poetic in the preparation and presentation,” says Sarti. And in the eating too: bon appetit.

“The relationship between natural surfaces and food is inextricable.”
Earth is perhaps the most deeply warming, comforting and homely of all the elements. It is the perfect starting point for all recipes because without the earth to grow crops and nurture animals, there would be very little to cook. These recipes for Stones Sandwiches and Italian Testaroli pasta are a witty expression of the very nature of earth and some of its ground-dwelling inhabitants.
The idea for these terra firma inspired treats came about through musing on the idea of mudlarking and truffle hunting, seeking out treasures from the ground. Each ingredient in this subtle combination has a deep relationship with the earth itself. The black chanterelle mushroom only exists by its symbiotic relationship with trees nourished by chalky or sandy earth. Cereals and herbs may be more prosaic fruits of the earth but their very abundance makes them staple ingredients in many recipes.

For the sourdough starter
Day 1: add 1 tablespoon of water and 1 of rye flour, stir well and keep in a covered, sterile container. Day 2: add 2 tablespoons of each ingredient again, stir well, keep covered. Double up portions over the next 3 days. The sourdough starter should start to smell acidic.

For the bread
Mix half the sourdough starter with 4 cups of water and allow to rest for half a day. Next, mix in the spelt flour until the dough has a yoghurty consistency. Add 3 tablespoons of salt. Divide the dough to make individual flavours and add the spices separately, along with a small handful of oats. Keep adding flour until the dough comes cleanly from the sides of the bowl. Allow to rest overnight in the fridge. Make into individual panini, shaped like stones. Place on a non stick baking tray and leave to rise for 20 minutes. Preheat the oven to 190°C. Cooking time may vary, up to 20 minutes, depending on the size of the panini.

For the filling
Clean the fresh mushrooms, or re-hydrate then drain the dried mushrooms. Peel and chop the garlic clove, heat a glug of olive oil in a frying pan and add the garlic and the thyme sprig. Add the mushrooms then quickly fry everything for a couple of minutes. Season with salt and pepper and keep warm.

To assemble the sandwiches
Slice the buns horizontally, butter both sides with a herb butter made from blending together softened butter, crushed garlic, sea salt, black pepper and a few sprigs each of finely chopped fresh tarragon, flat leaf parsley, rosemary and thyme and the zest of an unwaxed lemon. Place some pickled walnuts or pickled onions onto one buttered half, add some warm black chanterelles then top with the other half of the panini and serve.

Stones Sandwiches
Serves 4

Ingredients

Sourdough bread
750g spelt flour
720ml water
Rye flour
Spices: licorice or coffee powder, turmeric, poppy seeds
Handful of oats
Sea salt

Filling
100g fresh or dried black chanterelles
Olive oil
1 clove garlic
1 sprig thyme
Sea salt and pepper
Pickled walnuts or pickled onions
A very simple, traditional dish from Lunigiana, Tuscany. Originally this mix of pasta/pancake batter was cooked in pans with a flat base made of terracotta and a domed lid called a ‘testo’. This gave the dough its characteristic shape and texture. ‘Terracotta’ in Italian means ‘cooked earth’. In this recipe, two old varieties of grain - spelt and buckwheat - are used, and the testaroli are served with a pesto made from the rustic Piedmontese Castelmagno cheese.

**For the testaroli**

Pour the water in a bowl. Slowly add both of the flours, whisking constantly to avoid lumps. Add the salt. Heat a flat cast iron pan over a high heat. Lightly grease with olive oil. When hot, pour enough batter to form a disc of around 3-5mm thickness. Cook for 2-3 min. When the bottom starts to brown, turn with a flat spatula and cook the other side until lightly brown. Remove from the pan and place on a flat surface. Cut into diamond shapes of around 5cm diameter. Heat a large pan with salted water. Once boiled, remove from the heat, add the testaroli and leave them in the water for around 3 minutes. When they start to float to the surface, take them out and drain.

**For the pesto**

Blend together all the ingredients until smooth. This is a simple, basic pesto where cooked spelt grains, used as a substitute for the pine nuts, impart their particular nutty taste. If you can’t find Castelmagno cheese, use a mature farmhouse cheddar such as Montgomery. Serve the testaroli with the pesto, decorated with a few torn basil leaves.

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Water is the basis of life on earth. In its natural state - sea or freshwater, liquid or frozen - it always contains some dissolved salt. This fact - and the coolness of ice - inspired the recipes for Salty Lemonade and Icefish Fritters to represent this refreshing and essential element.
Water and salt have an enduring elemental relationship: 96% of the water in the hydrosphere (all water on earth, including ice and clouds) is saline. This recipe for Salty Lemonade pays homage to this partnership. Inspired by Vietnamese Chanh Muoi pickled citrus fruit, the lemonade uses lemons preserved in salt, or more precisely, by the water that gets drawn out of the lemons via the salt.

**Salty Lemonade**

Makes 1 glass

**Ingredients**

**Salty Lemonade**
1 salted lemon wedge (see Salted Lemons recipe below)
2 tbsp lemon balm syrup or honey
Sprig fresh lemon balm
Sparkling water or soda

**Salted Lemons**
12 medium unwaxed lemons
350g coarse sea salt
4 fresh bay leaves
Handful coriander seeds
10 cardamom pods, lightly crushed

For the Salty Lemonade
Take a Kilner jar or highball glass. Spoon 1 salted lemon wedge into the jar or glass. Crush the wedge with a cocktail muddler or pestle. Add the lemon balm syrup or runny honey and the lemon balm. Top up with your favorite sparkling water and give everything a final stir before serving.

For the Salted Lemons
Split 6 lemons into quarters, but keep each fruit joined at its base. Open each lemon carefully, pack some salt into the center and press back into shape. Fill half a 1 litre preserving jar with half the remaining salt. Pack the lemons in tightly, together with the bay leaves. Sprinkle over the coriander seeds and cardamom pods and top up with the remaining salt. Squeeze the juice from the remaining lemons and add to the jar. Seal and leave in a cool place for at least 1 month.
Fire is a mesmerising and fascinating element, mystically transforming many unpalatable foods into highly delicious treats. Sage smoke adds an aromatic note to the often disregarded cauliflower, crowned by roasting to achieve a nutty taste. Meanwhile, the sweet goat’s cheesecake, Torteau Fromager, elicits a delicate kiss of bitterness when lightly charred.

Icefish Fritters
Serves 4

A dish made of fish and seaweed, two ingredients that depend on water for survival. Icefish are a marine delicacy ideal for these aqua-inspired fritters due to their watery name and appearance (these tiny southeast Asian natives are translucent, earning them the name ‘glass fish’). As ‘neotenic’ organisms, they retain some characteristics of their early development; the adult icefish has undeveloped scales and hard bones which means the entire fish may be eaten.

For the fritters
If using fresh seaweed from the fishmonger, soak for 24h in cold water, then chop finely. Otherwise finely chop a handful of blanched rock samphire and set aside. Defrost the icefish, if necessary, and drain. Prepare a batter by mixing the water and eggs. Slowly add the flour and baking powder, mixing everything with a whisk until smooth with no lumps. Add the seaweed or rock samphire, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour sufficient sunflower oil in a frying pan to shallow fry, then bring to a high heat. When the oil begins to smoke, dip a spoonful of fish into the batter, then transfer to the pan and fry until golden. Sprinkle with more salt and serve immediately with lemon wedges.

Ingredients
- 300g icefish or sardine whitebait
- 100ml water
- 3 eggs
- 150g flour
- Handful of chopped seaweed or rock samphire
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- Salt and pepper
- Sunflower oil for shallow frying
- Lemon wedges
What could be more majestic than a sage-smoked and roasted triumphal cauliflower? This simple recipe has its roots in ancient mysticism as sage smoke is one of the oldest methods of purifying people and interior places. Sage, when burned, is also believed to impart spiritual wisdom and clarity which is why we refer to wise people as ‘sage’. The potency of sage combined with the element of fire combine in this recipe to transform flower buds into flourishing delicacies.

**For the cauliflower**

Light a fire on an outside, open fireplace. Drizzle the whole head of cauliflower with the olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Put the sage sprigs into the fire and smoke/roast the cauliflower over the open fire on a roasting spit, until tender. Serve dressed with the lemon juice and sprinkled with lava salt.

**Alternatively**

Preheat oven to 200°C. Place the whole head of cauliflower on a baking tray lined with greaseproof paper. Rub the cauliflower with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Arrange the sage sprigs around the cauliflower. Roast in the oven for 15 minutes. Lower the temperature to 150°C and roast for an additional 30 minutes. Test with a skewer; the cauliflower is ready when tender but not soft. Serve dressed with the lemon juice and sprinkled with the salt.

**Ingredients**

- 1 purple cauliflower
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp black lava salt

or rock salt

- Juice of 1 lemon

Bunch of fresh sage
This intriguing cake, from the Poitou region of France, was traditionally served at weddings, but is now a celebratory treat for any occasion. The cake gets its name from torteau, the French for 'crab' as it looks like a crab's shell. The sweet, goat's cheese cake has a purposefully charred, almost black surface but with the unexpected contrast of airy whiteness inside. The heat gives this cake its characteristic colour as well as distinctive taste and appearance: it's a real burnt, edible sculpture. Incidentally, ‘torteau fromager’ was a code name used during WWII on a Free French radio channel to pass messages to the Resistance.

For the cake
Start by making shortcrust pastry, mixing flour, butter, egg yolk, salt and water together. Use sufficient water to get a smooth dough. Wrap in cling film and put to rest in the fridge for an hour. Preheat the oven to 180°C. Make the filling by mixing the goat’s cheese with 125g powdered sugar and the egg yolks. Add enough milk to bind. Add the potato starch. Whisk the egg whites with the remaining sugar until stiff and lightly fold into the cheese mixture. To perfume, add the vanilla seeds and cognac, lightly folding in. Roll out the dough and line a special ‘torteau’ plate or alternatively use a pie dish. Fill with the cheese mixture and bake for 50 minutes until very black on top. The cake makes a delicious dessert, served with fresh goat’s cheese or ricotta and honey.

Ingredients
Shortcrust pastry
250g flour
125g butter
1 egg yolk
Pinch of salt
2–4 tbsp of water

Filling
250g fresh goat’s cheese
5 eggs
150g powdered sugar
2 tbsp potato starch

Seeds from 1 vanilla pod
1 tbsp cognac
A little milk

Air

Invisible, uplifting and essential for life, air also serves as the elemental structural ingredient in the following recipes for Egg Tower and Snow Soup. Air may seem like nothing, but without it, these recipes – and life itself – would simply not exist.
Imagine a fantastical edifice of torrone and meringue made of raw, cooked and frozen egg whites, constructed using eggs from different birds. Neither the cooking, baking nor freezing determines the final character of this delicious tower, but the incorporation of air into the egg white.

For the torrone
Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Whisk the duck egg whites (or use 3 standard egg whites) until soft peaks form. Put the sugar, glucose, honey and 4 tablespoons of water into a pan. Stir over a low heat until a drop of the sugar mix turns crunchy when dripped into a glass of water. Take off the heat and slowly pour the sugar mix on to the egg whites, whisking all the time until the mixture is glossy. Toast the nuts then add. Spread the mixture at around 3cm thickness over the parchment paper on the baking tray. Leave to cool and firm up overnight, then cut into squares.

For the meringue
Preheat the oven to 130°C. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla pod. Put the egg whites into an absolutely clean and dry bowl. Add the sugar and whisk until stiff peaks form. Add the vanilla seeds. Fold in the cornflour. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper and place the mixture on it in about 6 heaped spoonfuls, or pipe the mix into 6 mounds using a piping bag with a plain nozzle. Bake for 50–60 minutes until crisp but still pale on the outside and slightly gooey on the inside.

For the frozen egg white
Slit open the vanilla pod and scrape out the seeds. Whisk the ostrich egg white (or use 15 standard egg whites) until stiff. Carefully fold in the sugar and the vanilla seeds. Put the mass into a rectangular form and freeze for at least 3 hours. Take out of the freezer, cut into squares. Get creative and assemble your tower: each part is stackable and surprisingly strong so go big, go bold!

Serve with Fresh Air Flip
Cream together the egg yolk, muscovado sugar, Marsala wine (or use maple syrup instead) and sour cream. Pour into 4 highball glasses.

Egg Tower
Serves 4

Ingredients

**Torrone**
2 duck egg whites
500g icing sugar
2 tsps liquid glucose
4 tbsp chestnut honey
200g hazelnuts

**Meringue**
6 egg whites
200g caster sugar
1 vanilla pod
1 tbsp cornflour

**Frozen egg white**
1 ostrich egg white
220g white sugar
1 vanilla pod

**Fresh Air Flip**
1 egg yolk
40g muscovado sugar
60ml Marsala wine
60ml sour cream
Fine, delicate flavours and almost invisible white mushrooms, spooned out of a coconut shell, make for an entirely heavenly experience. This airy recipe relies on white fungus, which looks like a sponge, with its body of pores and channels, which allow water and air to circulate through. When soaked in water, the fungus turns translucent, which explains why it is also known as snow fungus due to its soft, white, fluffy appearance.

For the soup
Empty the coconut of its juice. Mix the egg whites with the coconut juice. Heat the milk with the panela sugar until the sugar has completely melted. Remove from the heat and whisk into the egg white mixture. Cut up the fungus into individual petal shaped pieces and place inside the empty coconut. Pour over the milk mix until the coconut is 2/3 full. Add the pandan leaves or lemongrass stalk to taste. Cover tightly with aluminium foil and place in a bain marie of simmering water for about 45 minutes.

Snow Soup
Serves 4

Ingredients
1 fresh, shelled coconut
1 white fungus, soaked and puffed up
2 egg whites
100ml coconut juice
100ml milk
20g panela sugar or brown sugar
A few pandan leaves or 1 small stalk of bruised lemongrass
Caesarstone surfaces

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6134 Georgian Bluffs
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6003 Coastal Grey
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Earth

p.20 - 21
Metal dust and gypsum shallow bowls, Rust by Ariane Prin
p.26 - 27
Pressed glass carafe courtesy Momosanshop.com

Water

p.28 - 29
Top row, second from left: Else porcelain pot by Michael Fargo; second row, left, glass spoons courtesy Momosanshop.com

Fire

p.34 - 35
Black basalt crockery by Max Lamb for 1882 Ltd; brush, courtesy Momosanshop.com

Air

p.44 - 45
Top row, left and second row, right: Else porcelain pots by Michael Fargo

Commissioned by Caesarstone Ltd.
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Jacob Peres Office
Printer: ArbiterDrucken
Paper: Fedrigoni Xper paper
Typeface: Publico
Published November 2016 ©Caesarstone
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