



Building a Meal: From Molecular Gastronomy to Culinary Constructivism (Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History)

By Hervé This

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An internationally renowned chemist, popular television personality, and bestselling author, Hervé This heads the first laboratory devoted to molecular gastronomy—the scientific exploration of cooking and eating. By testing recipes that have guided cooks for centuries, and the various dictums and maxims on which they depend, Hervé This unites the head with the hand in order to defend and transform culinary practice.

With this new book, Hervé This's scientific project enters an exciting new phase. Considering the preparation of six bistro favorites—hard-boiled egg with mayonnaise, simple consommé, leg of lamb with green beans, steak with French fries, lemon meringue pie, and chocolate mousse—he isolates the exact chemical properties that tickle our senses and stimulate our appetites. More important, he connects the mind and the stomach, identifying methods of culinary construction that appeal to our memories, intelligence, and creativity. By showing that the creation of a meal is as satisfying as its consumption, Herve This recalibrates the balance between food and our imaginations. The result is a revolutionary perspective that will tempt even the most casual cooks to greater flights of experimentation.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. French chemist This, co-creator (with fellow scientist Nicholas Kurti) of the kitchen science discipline known as molecular gastronomy, offers readers a window into his world through this wide-ranging, deeply engaging scientific deconstruction of classic dishes. Those hoping to find recipes for concoctions like wasabi foam or celery "caviar" will be disappointed; This dismisses such cuisine as parlor tricks for foodies. Instead, he examines what he calls "culinary dictums," such as adding salt to water when boiling eggs or starting a stock with cold water, using science to confirm, disprove or update common kitchen wisdom. Beginning with the humble hard-boiled egg, This explains food concepts thoroughly but plainly—among them why creamy sauces "break," the proper time to salt a steak, and the importance of soaking sliced potatoes in water before French frying them. This's tour is frequently fascinating, and his digressions on a host of topics (from cooking trends to proper mayonnaise-beating etiquette to noted French mathematician Blaise Pascal) lend charm and warmth. For anyone expecting a clinical approach buttressed by equations and formulas, the biggest surprise isn't This's dedication to good old flavor, but his insistence that love is a cook's most important ingredient.

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Review

Hervé This takes virtual cliché dishes and tells you what scientific principles go into their successful preparation. His book, while erudite, allusive, precise, and full of cultural insights, also has charm, wit, and brevity.

(Albert Sonnenfeld, translator of *Food Is Culture* and *Culture of the Fork: A Brief History of Everyday Food and Haute Cuisine in Europe*)

Hervé This's major contribution is that food is an act of love and is linked to the pursuit of happiness. *Building a Meal* is the book of a 'bon vivant' and provides an excellent antidote to despair and depression. Its pages celebrate food and life.

(Jeanine P. Plottel, Hunter College)

[A] wide-ranging, deeply engaging scientific deconstruction of classic dishes.

(*Publishers Weekly (starred review)*)

A beautifully written treatise on the tenets of molecular gastronomy and cooking's role in modern society.

(Natalie Fasano *Eats.com*)

This wonderful book by chemist/chef This continues the exploration of this profound way of looking at eating, cooking, and science.

(*Choice*)

Anyone with a passion for cooking or science is sure to find this a captivating and effortless read.

(*Sacramento Book Review*)

For those who have heard the term 'molecular gastronomy' but don't really know what it entails, this is a highly recommended book that will serve as a great starter to a relatively new subject. For everyone else it is just highly recommended.

(*Yum.fi*)

About the Author

Hervé This is a physical chemist on the staff of the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique in Paris. He is the author of *Kitchen Mysteries: Revealing the Science of Cooking* and *Molecular Gastronomy: Exploring the Science of Flavor*, among other books.

M. B. DeBevoise has translated almost thirty works from French and Italian in every branch of scholarship, including Hervé This's *Molecular Gastronomy* and *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman.

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