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Etiquette of the Tajine

In Moroccan cooking, the Tajine represents a staple of the culture, diet, and cuisine (Lahlou). The cone-shaped vessel sports a shallow stewing pot base that contains the tajine stew. This dish is usually served with couscous and flatbread in a group setting. In this prompt response, we will explore how the etiquette, dispersal, and manners illuminate foods to place in Moroccan culture. For this work, I will be referencing my time cooking at Mourad San Francisco under chef Mourad, and learning from him about his culture.

Meals focusing on a Tajine stew will generally have circular seating and are meant to feed groups of 5 to 8 people. The seating will be on rugs on the floor with the ordering determined by the family group and then guests. A decided patron usually the patriarch of the house will have the bread next to them for distribution. The stew will be placed in the center of the circle for all to reach. This setting structure is designed for equality and community, to bring everyone guests and all as family.

For dispersal, a single dedicated patron is responsible for the distribution of bread, and couscous. The bread and couscous are your main tools for consumption; reaching and grabbing from where it’s easiest to reach from the tajine. These rules are all aligned to the structure and gratitude the meal represents. The food is a gift to be enjoyed but not greedily ingested.

The set protocol or manners for this meal derive from traditional tenets of Islam, but also reflect the Moroccan sense of community. The meal is eaten by hand and in particular feeding directly to the mouth should only be done with the right hand. Traditionally the left hand is used for sanitation as such it would be rude to use it for eating. When grasping food we use the thumb and two fingers, any more would be gluttonous (Lahlou). Never reach across the tajine as this is also considered greedy. Don’t worry though you will be prompted to eat, and do so until you are full. After which it is advised to keep nibbling, as full dismissal of your food may cause a sudden halting of the meal.

The tajine represents community and tradition in Moroccan cuisine. The great equalizer to bring everyone together. The balance between gratitude and greed is well represented. Where one can always get all they need without being gluttonous or rude. The meal all together illustrates the cultural influences that have created the experience of Moroccan Tajine!

Work Cited

Lahlou, Mourad. *Mourad: New Moroccan* Artisan, October 2011.