

## DECORATION

# How decorating with food can bring fun and humour to an interior

Designers are putting a fresh spin on the relationship between food and interiors – and we should be taking note. Are you ready to be decorating with pineapples, pomegranates – and pizza?



By Fiona McKenzie Johnston

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While [food](#) and interiors have always been related – both via the areas of our homes devoted to former, and the fact that we might take [colour scheme](#) inspiration from, say, rhubarb and custard - the decorating landscape has recently seen an increased emphasis on edibles beyond what might be considered usual. [Susan Deliss](#)'s latest fabric is called 'Simit' after a sesame-sprinkled Turkish bagel, and [Richard Smith](#) of Madeaux has named his new 'Petits Fours' collection for French patisseries. Paint brand [Little Greene](#) has a 'Sweet Treats' collection, with hues such as 'Madeleine', 'Ganache' and 'Affogato', while the colours in [Atelier Elizabeth Rose](#)'s lampshade palettes include 'Confiture Maison', and 'Croissant.' There's [Octavia Dickinson](#)'s charming [ceramic chillies](#) that she makes herself, cult stationery store [Choosing Keeping](#)'s selection of [candles](#), which run from the gamut from a hot dog to a banana split via a bowl of spaghetti Bolognese, and [John Derian](#)'s seasonal ornaments: think [eggs and bacon in a frying pan, or pepperoni pizza on a board](#). Then, if you've got young children you'll doubtlessly know of the brand Jellycat – and that it's now possible to cuddle up to a fluffy milkshake at night, or a bowl of popcorn, before arranging it in pride of place on your bed in the morning. There's more, besides.

We all know about the importance of the presentation of food for its appeal – but this is the inverse: food to improve the appeal of a room's presentation. And not only do today's interpretations on the age-old marriage put a fresh spin on past practice, but there is also much that is covetable – whether you, as John Derian does, think that "a fake cake is pretty and at the same time a gag, and I like humour," or prefer a subtler, less representational approach.

Using food in textile production used to be standard: “some of the earliest dyes came from fruit and vegetables,” points out Susan, and vegetables – potatoes, turnips and beetroot – once had a place in commercial [block printing](#) too, certainly in the early days in Europe. Artist [Georgie Hopton](#) began using potatoes in a similar way when she realised she had become so devoted to her [garden](#) that she was working “less and less and less. I thought, somehow life and art have to conjoin. So I took a wheelbarrow of vegetables into the studio.” Describing the process as “liberating, so joyous,” the result is not only prints, but also wallpaper and fabrics, available from [Lyndsey Ingram Gallery](#) (proving perhaps it’s a worthwhile pursuit for others who struggle to leave their gardens for their desks?)

There’s also a lengthy history of fruit and vegetables being used in their literal form for decorative purpose: in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, [pineapples](#) were status symbols and confectioners would rent them out to households, to be used purely for display, before being sold to more affluent customers who would eat them. They developed into an architectural trimming, used on gateposts, and also carved and moulded into rooms – where we’ve yet to tire of them; witness wallpapers by, among others, [Soane Britain](#) and [Barneby Gates](#). Pomegranates are another popular fruit; revered by some cultures as being symbolic of fertility, they’re a regular motif on [suzanis](#), Iznik tiles and ceramics. See also lemons, oranges, artichokes, cabbages, and the Portuguese company Bordallo Pinheiro’s much-imitated tableware which has developed into candlesticks, occasional bowls – actually, we’ll be here all day if I start listing them. That said, look out for Lady Ann Gordon’s vibrant vegetable ceramics, which occasionally come up at auction, John Derian recommends – and [stocks – fruit by Penkridge](#), while the porcelain pea pod on [Rita Konig](#)’s sitting room mantelpiece is from *I vetri a lume di Amadi* in Venice, where you can also find versions of fruit and vegetables in [Murano glass](#).

It was Murano glass green beans – specifically, some belonging to [Penny Morrison](#) – that inspired Octavia Dickinson’s endeavours. Besides chillis, Octavia has also made “a gourd, fried eggs, mushrooms, peas, figs, quails’ eggs, gulls’ eggs, olives, radishes, cherries, green beans, and carrots. I have always been fascinated by [trompe l’oeil](#) – and nothing fills me with more joy when someone thinks the bowl of olives is real and tries to pick one up to eat,” she explains. Interestingly, food featured in the earliest known instance of trompe l’oeil – which was a contest between two prominent artists, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in Ancient Greece. One of them painted grapes with such skill that, so the story goes, birds flew down to peck at them. Food was a common subject matter in those times – feasts and banquets were often celebrated in paintings and mosaics – and it’s a theme that has continued through the history of art, becoming a staple for still life from artists from Rembrandt van Rijn to Lucian Freud, via Paul Cezanne, Andy Warhol (those tins of Campbell’s soup!), John Singer Sargent, and many others.



But it was not that tradition that influenced [Kate Jenkins](#), whose charming, life-sized model Fish Counter is currently set up at Air Contemporary in Ham Yard, adjacent to the [Ham Yard Hotel](#), stocked with knitted, sequin-adorned seafood which can be selected, and framed. More, she sees her pictures as fun, “conversation pieces – a bit like a novelty jumper” – her background is in fashion. The same goes, perhaps, for those [hot dog candles](#) that John Derian reminds us we don’t *have* to light; “I’ve had a cake candle sitting on my counter for 16 years.” He quotes Henry David Thoreau: “it’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.”

Which is pertinent, and perhaps particularly applies when the relationship between food and item is less literal: the earlier mentioned Madeaux fabrics do not feature actual cakes, but are “a celebration of intricate design, luxurious textures and delicious colours” of French patisseries. Similarly, Susan’s new weave is a bagel-free stripe, but “the deep red and indigo and natural linen colours are as reminiscent of antique Anatolian textiles as simits are reminiscent of my textile travels in Turkey, for they’re as evocative of [Istanbul](#) as the Bosphorus, and I have often picked up a simit along the way to nibble as I rummage through piles of textiles and [kilims](#).” And in that description, we too are taken on that exotic adventure, just as colours named for croissants and *confiture* might transport us to [Paris](#), rural Burgundy, or a post-ferry crossing breakfast in a port-side café in Dieppe, with all the associated anticipation of a holiday to come. In appealing to other senses – and, at times, to our sense of humour – so these food-infused items add more [layers to our interiors](#). And isn’t that what we all want?