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## Childhood Memories of the Domestic Foodscape: The Home as a Site of Mindful Eating

### Résumé

*Cet article envisage le foyer comme un environnement interactif qui exerce une influence dynamique sur les idées et les pratiques reliées à l'alimentation, tout en les reflétant. Nous cherchons à savoir si, et comment, l'architecture et la conception de la maison peuvent favoriser une « prise de conscience de l'alimentation », terme défini ici comme recouvrant à la fois des implications de santé, mais aussi d'expériences alimentaires de qualité sur le plan sensoriel, qui nourrissent le sentiment de communauté et de convivialité. Notre approche est hybride, consistant à appliquer des théories et des méthodes dérivées de nos champs d'études respectifs d'une part en architecture et en design, et d'autre part en analyses de marché : elle part des réponses à un questionnaire portant sur le comportement des adultes face à la nourriture, mais en enrichissant ces participants par des souvenirs liés aux expériences alimentaires de l'enfance à la maison. Nos découvertes suggèrent que certaines caractéristiques de la culture matérielle domestique contribuent de manière effective à ancrer des pratiques alimentaires conscientes, et que la table de la cuisine détient une signification particulière de ce point de vue.*

### Abstract

*This essay explores the home as an interactive built environment that dynamically stimulates and reflects food-related ideas and practice. The question we are asking is whether and how the architecture and design of the home can be conducive to “mindful eating,” a term defined here as having health-related implications but also as related to the creation of richly sensorial food-borne experiences encouraging communality and commensality. Our approach is a hybrid application of theory and methods derived from our respective domains of architecture and design studies, and marketing analysis: it analyzes the answers to a questionnaire that interrogates adult food behaviour, and also prompts the participants to document memories related to childhood eating experiences in the home. Our findings suggest that certain characteristics of domestic material culture do indeed anchor mindful eating practices, with the kitchen table having particular significance in this regard.*

This essay derives from two essential sets of questions. Ostensibly, it interrogates the built environment of the home—its architecture and material culture—as contributing factors in the construction of individuals' attitudes towards food, and in the formation of habits known to influence food behaviour. In order to approach these questions, the concept of the “foodscape” is employed, following Gisèle Yasmeen who uses the term to

“emphasize the spatialization of foodways and the interconnections between people, food, and places” (Yasmeen 2007: 525).<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the *domestic* foodscape takes as its point of departure the assumption that the physical space of the home and the objects it contains—the layout of rooms and furniture; intermingling of work- and leisure-spaces; or the selection and arrangement of the contents of the home, for example—play a dynamic

role in the food-related experiences of members of the household.<sup>2</sup> The term domestic foodscape receives abiding attention in the introduction to this volume, by virtue of it having been the generating force behind a workshop of the same name, held at Concordia University in 2008, and co-organized by the authors of this essay. The first set of questions with which this essay is preoccupied, then, is aimed at supporting the claim that the domestic foodscape is indeed an interactive space embedding cultural practice related to food and eating. Can—and, if so, how—a study of eating memories and experiences in the domestic foodscape offer nuanced readings in support of this hypothesis? More specifically, can the experience of children within the domestic foodscape be seen to have a bearing on their adult eating habits? And, finally, is it possible to consider how the domestic foodscape serves as a site of what might be called “mindful” eating?

The consideration of mindful eating behaviours is of particular interest in this study. The term, taken as the antithesis to that in Brian Wansink’s influential study entitled *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*, is also substantially developed in the Introduction to this special issue of *Material Culture Review/Revue de la culture matérielle* (Wansink 2007).<sup>3</sup> Mindful eating practices are those conducive to maintaining good health, for example by calling attention to the size of a serving portion to avoid overeating during a meal. Consistent with key tenets of the Slow Food Movement, they are also related to the creation of pleasure, by serving as the focus of richly sensorial food-borne experiences and encouraging communality and commensality by situating food as a means of rich contact with family and/or friends. We are claiming that “mindfulness” as an outcome of interaction with the domestic foodscape can be investigated by examining certain routine activities that took place at mealtime for one group of individuals who were the subject of this study, for whom exposure to particular rituals within the domestic built environment seems to have stimulated ongoing mindful attitudes to eating during early adulthood.

The second set of questions addressed in this study has to do with developing a method through which to explore mindfulness in the domestic foodscape. To achieve this aim, it was important, on the one hand, to find a way to study the particular interactions, within the domestic foodscape, of some cohort of individuals: in this way, the subjects themselves could be given a means of articulating childhood memories and practices, and their adult

eating habits could be tabulated against these earlier experiences anchored in recollections of childhood households. On the other hand, it seemed imperative to become especially attuned to how architecture and material culture absorb and display resonances of the experiences gained through interacting with these physical entities, and thereby comprise the food-related components of what Daniel Miller calls “a social cosmology...the order of things, values and relationships of a society” (2008: 294). What was required, therefore, was to interweave two fairly distinct domains of scholarly research.

The collaborators for this project are academics in the fields of marketing, and architecture and design history and theory. Their challenge was to consider points of intersection across these domains, despite the fact that each is based on rather different analytical strategies. The former gathers data by creating questionnaires to be distributed to a particular cohort; such polls are comprised of a series of statements on the themes in question, the response options pre-calibrated and given a numerical range to enable the participant to articulate the degree to which s/he agrees or disagrees with each of those statements. The latter method is primarily qualitative, built on data gleaned from historic or contemporary primary sources as they exist at the time of the analysis, or by making vicarious contact with such sources by encouraging the memories of participants through interviews or oral histories. Prompts given to these participants tend to precipitate more diffuse, and more abstract, responses than the agree/disagree spectrum of marketing analysts. In the project to be presented below, a hand-out with elements from both methodological models was assigned to young adults having just left the family household; it consisted both of a poll asking students to indicate the degree to which they self-associated with a series of statements concerning their current eating styles, involvement with food, and various lifestyle activities, as well as a section in which they were asked to describe verbally, and actually draw, the domestic foodscapes of their childhood based on their most accurate recollection.<sup>4</sup>

The decision to collaborate across disciplines was made on the basis of the recognition that the whole could potentially be greater than the sum of the parts. As will be demonstrated below, a growing body of critical work has been undertaken on the home, and, specifically, on the kitchen, as a site of enculturation and modernization or as gendered and technologically-determined space, for example.

However, having actual access to the inhabitants of the particular environment, in order to explore the way they themselves perceive(d) and engage(d) the space, is not always possible.<sup>5</sup> Marketing analysis has to a significant extent documented the socialization process by which individuals and, specifically children, acquire dispositions toward food and eating habits, but has devoted only minimal attention to the domestic foodscape, in terms of its architecture and material culture, in the formulation of such habits (Moisio, Arnould and Price 2004; Thompson 1997; Mick and Buhl 1992).

In this project, overlapping such strategies affords an opportunity both to carry out nuanced readings of the built environment of the home as accessed through annotated free-hand plans of domestic foodscapes, *and* to juxtapose these readings with interpretations of the food-related preferences of their makers. In this way, it is possible to begin to reconstruct the narrative of their childhood engagement with food, and to extrapolate which aspects of the domestic foodscape might be relevant in a positive projection of mindful eating. As will be shown, such correlations highlight the significance of particular elements of the physical environment of the home, that seem consistently to be identified—either tacitly or blatantly—as attractors contributing to the formulation of potentially mindful eating habits.

### **The Marketing Approach: Food and the Childhood Socialization Process**

Considerable documentation exists in marketing-related discourse, of the influence of childhood food habits on adult food behaviour. In her study of consumer socialization of children, Deborah R. John (1999) notes that these habits are believed to evolve in stages roughly defined by age, and that they are susceptible to a variety of influences. Not surprisingly, parents' influence can be considerable, including their own food repertoire, nutrition and dietary behaviours and mealtime communications, as well as their interaction with children during eating occasions.<sup>6</sup> Children also often imitate the behaviours of peers and siblings, and this can have a profound impact both on everyday eating behaviour and also on the acceptance of novel foods (Salvy 2008; Addessi 2005). However, the impact either of the physical environment in which food is prepared and eaten, or of its material culture contents, has rarely been examined except for the distracting and often negative influence of television viewing

(Davison, Marshall and Birch 2006; Buijzen, Schuurman and Bomhof 2008; Fiates, Amboni and Teixeira 2008). Even examinations of family meals, for instance, have generally overlooked the role of physical surroundings and objects in the socialization process.<sup>7</sup>

What is noteworthy with regard to marketing analysis is the degree to which it tracks the transitions that have occurred in food distribution and retailing and that have infiltrated the household. Such research proves thought-provoking for studies of the built environment inasmuch as it exposes the forces that inevitably alter the physical as well as cultural dynamic of the home—with tangible repercussions to mindful eating. Especially significant is the impact of new foods and food delivery and distribution practices. By 2008, roughly 49 per cent of a household's food dollar in the United States was spent on "food-away-from-home," i.e., ready-to-eat food prepared outside the home (National Restaurant Association 2008). Moreover by that year the majority of restaurant meals were no longer consumed in restaurants; instead, the home was recognized as the most popular location where take out restaurant meals are consumed (followed by the car and the workplace).<sup>8</sup> In recognition of this fact, restaurants and other ready-made food providers on the one hand, and supermarkets, farmers' markets, and the like on the other, have been competing to attract consumers by developing new foods, cooking techniques and delivery modes. These products comprise innovations within the physical landscape of the household; for instance, pre-cooked frozen vegetables packaged in microwavable bags, two-step cake mixes and ingredients like chopped garlic, are now staples in many North American kitchens. All have been designed, and are vigorously promoted, to save precious food preparation time, and require—or no longer require, as the case may be—particular technologies and methods (Sloan 2008). Kitchen architecture (and that of other food-related zones), appliance and storage design, along with the design of cooking and serving implements, have been fuelled by (and also necessitated) these modifications. In addition, meals brought home from restaurants and eaten from their branded packaging have done their part in turning the material and visual space of the kitchen table into mini-landscapes of KFC or McDonalds, with a number of consequences to mindful eating, including (overly large) serving sizes often determined by that packaging, rather than by the eater.<sup>9</sup> Underscoring this competition for

the consumer's food dollar (which occupies a key zone on the radar screen of marketing strategists) is a fundamental displacement whereby convenience and ease of cooking, rather than health and taste, are now the primary factors in deciding what to cook and eat in the home.<sup>10</sup> Given the myriad enticements to spend food dollars in these ways, the wider food environment—both at home and outside of it—all too often results in mindless eating behaviour.

What can be gleaned from studying the domestic foodscape from a marketing viewpoint? Such a perspective endorses the need to look to wider cultural signals that literally drive home trends and patterns of behaviour derived from the social network of everyday life. Marketing analysts are centrally concerned with degrees of appropriation and negotiation of messages gathered by individuals through a variety of stimuli and filters. Such data offers significant contextualization to a nuanced reading of the home as a built environment of architecture and material culture. The incursion of convenience foods into the home at the rate cited above, for example, suggests the likelihood that in many homes food preparation is approached, not so much as the creation of meals from scratch, but rather as the assembly of at least partially pre-treated and often branded ingredients. With this in mind, it would be inaccurate to conceptualize the kitchen as a site, in the privacy of the home that exists in haven-like opposition to the advertisement-ridden arena of, say, restaurants in a city. Remarkably, this conclusion reinforces the perspective of at least one architectural researcher, Sigrun Bülow-Hübe who, from 1967-1970—a pivotal time in the introduction of new food to the Canadian domestic repertoire—surveyed thirty-seven kitchens in and around Montreal as part of a project for the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Concerned with charting the efficiency of the homemaker in fulfilling kitchen-related tasks, and in standardizing kitchen cabinetry units and equipment, Bülow-Hübe asked her participants to list all their grocery purchases including their brand names, and then designed their optimal placement in kitchen cupboards and pantries as part of her fieldwork.<sup>11</sup> It seems Bülow-Hübe was ahead of her time in acknowledging the role of such products in the daily life of modern families.

## The Domestic Foodscape From an Architecture and Design Perspective

Theories on optimal kitchen size and behaviour by architects and other design experts have generated their share of prescriptives to modulate activities undertaken within the domestic foodscape. For example, research originally conducted in Europe at the turn of the 20th century led to a prototype known as the Frankfurt Kitchen (Freeman 2004: 39-40). With an optimum size of 1.9 m x 3.44 m (roughly 6 feet x 11 feet), further diminished by appliances, cabinets, and so on, this galley-style kitchen was conceived as a laboratory-like, rationalized, intricately delineated environment, sometimes depicted with a stool at the centre, set up so that the occupant of that seat would have everything within reach to fulfill her task of nourishing the household.<sup>12</sup> Originally, the Frankfurt model was promoted as an isolated space, which made sense given its status as a specialized work environment; later, its proximity to a window through which the user could watch children playing outside, was recommended. Small kitchens of this type, a precursor to the galley kitchen found even in model domestic architecture such as Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 project, separated cooking and eating functions. A second thread of influence, derived from the philosophy of Taylorism, contributed a further imposition to the household. Time-motion studies and other evaluations of various tasks (such as making beds) were undertaken, including careful monitoring by so-called experts, of the steps women took as they prepared a meal—i.e., from stove, to sink, to refrigerator, to storage areas and so on. Recommendations were then made to interfere with existing patterns of navigation through that space by the homemaker, if those patterns conflicted with scientific management practices (Bullock 1988; Lupton and Miller 1992; Sparke 1995). Indeed, Bülow-Hübe's mid-century research extends this analytical bent. Such outside stimuli, however, were not always accepted as is. For example, Mark Llewellyn's study of families living in experimental working-class housing in 1930s England exposes antagonism to the small kitchens in these residences: families who were determined to eat within the kitchen proper subverted existing conditions by defiantly squeezing in facilities to do so, even if that meant "perching children on top of work surfaces and the cooker [stove]" (Llewellyn 2004: 48).<sup>13</sup>

To the inhabitants of the domestic foodscape, then, as Sandra Buckley articulates so well, "the

kitchen is far more than architecture, it is a concept which defies material limits to become a space of domestic fantasies, both homely and unhomely, of the family and the nation-state” (Buckley 1996: 441). As both domestic fantasy and reality, the findings of researchers desiring to understand as-found conditions (rather than prescriptives), demonstrate the kitchen to be a physical landscape of interaction, enculturation and socialization. Researchers have isolated particular characteristics or elements of this space—Helen Watkins (2006) takes a microscopic view of the refrigerator door in British kitchens as a site of self-expression for women—or have applied a more holistic perspective, including a fairly extended history of the kitchen edited by Klaus Spechtenhauser (2005). Thematically, it has been explored as a backdrop for examining individuals’ preferences as they design their own kitchens (Freeman 2004); as a gendered landscape (Llewellyn 2004; Domosh 1998); or as a domain central in the integration of modernity and especially new technology within the home (Cowan 1985; Hand and Shove 2004; Parr 1999). Studies of the kitchen as an emotional and/or sensorially-perceived space also exist; the metaphor of “kitchen as home,” for example, is captured by Sean Supski (2006) in her analysis of the kitchens of immigrant Australian women after the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Judith Attfield (1999) and Janet Floyd (2004) are among those who have exposed it as a domain reflecting and activating self-expression or the projection of lifestyle. Much more than simply a room in which to prepare and serve food, the kitchen is the interactive stage on which “chemistry and passion intersect, where conflicting sensibilities coexist. ... [It is] all about the possibility of transformation. ... egg whites. ... beaten into *soufflé praline*. ... the kitchen is the place in the house where the ordinary become extraordinary” (Busch 1999: 50).

If the kitchen is often seen as the hub of the home, one might argue that the kitchen table serves as the hub of the kitchen. The kitchen table is routinely acknowledged as a significant piece of domestic real estate, both spiritually and metaphorically—a “kitchen table approach,” for example, describing a strategy that is both sound and logical, but unintimidating and not over-burdened with complexity. Kitchen tables figure in the creation myths of a variety of undertakings. Record has it that Martha Stewart began to develop her business while seated there (*USA Today* 2002), as did other entrepreneurs including the ones who started Burt’s

Bees, a well-known company that sells personal care products (Tanner 2003). John Adams wrote the Constitution of Massachusetts at his kitchen table (Homans 1981) and mathematician George R. Stibitz used relays to build a binary adder constituting an early step in the development of the computer, while at his kitchen table.<sup>15</sup> Christopher Alexander, an influential architectural theorist during the 1970s, writes that the kitchen table “will be the first and most important centre. ... The table is the source of pleasure and of practical work together” (qtd. in Kähler 2006: 77).<sup>16</sup> The table is also a means of giving some relative order to the context of the space in which it is located: David Leatherbarrow’s reading of the table in a restaurant pertains to that of the kitchen or dining room as well, as concentrating the surrounding visual field so that the individual elements of the vista around, above, or below the table “constitute something like an atmosphere, a disposition, or mood that is not easy to describe but is never unclear.” The collective visual and, indeed, sensorial experience, is, he observes, “often what is memorable about settings” (Leatherbarrow 2004: 219). Bringing the spotlight back to the home and specifically to children, David Bell and Gill Valentine, in their spatially-oriented study *Consuming Geographies*, identify the dinner table (whether in the kitchen or elsewhere) as particularly important for the socialization of children (Bell and Valentine 1997: 63-64). The kitchen table, it can thus be suggested, is a critical element of what makes the domestic foodscape memorable and conducive to mindful eating.

### **The Project: Reminiscences of Childhood Domestic Foodscapes and Mindful Eating**

The cohort studied in this project was roughly half men and half women (numbering twenty-four and twenty-nine, respectively), and their mean age was 18.9 years.<sup>17</sup> Keeping in mind that this collaboration was even more of an experiment than such surveys normally prove to be (i.e., when they are not subjected to the challenge of overlaying two essentially different paradigms for collecting and interpreting data), the goal of this investigation was to see if it could generate productive correlations between retrospective perceptions of the domestic foodscape, and adult habits related to food.

The questionnaire was comprised of two separate sections, namely the marketing portion, and the portion that directly addressed the built

environment of the childhood home. The first subsection of the marketing part of the questionnaire asked each participant to indicate the amount of pleasure s/he derived from twenty-three lifestyle activities or objects (e.g., shopping, reading, movies, sports, going out to bars, etc.). In the second subsection, participants completed what is known as a Food Involvement Scale (FIS)<sup>18</sup> that consists of twelve items (scored on a 1= disagree totally to 7= agree totally scale) covering five food domains: acquisition, preparation, cooking, eating and disposal. Participants then completed a thirty-three-item subsection assessing general levels of restraint in eating (e.g., “Do you try to eat less at mealtimes than you would like to eat?”); the degree of emotionally-triggered eating (“Do you have the desire to eat when you are irritated?”); and the extent of externally-motivated eating behavior (“If food smells and looks good, do you eat more than usual?”).<sup>19</sup>

In the section addressing the home as an environment for food-related activities, participants were asked to describe the kitchen and dining areas in the home where they grew up. Certain prompts helped guide them through the process (e.g., was the meal generally a formal occasion, or a casual one and how so? Did you eat in the same room in which the food was prepared? Who prepared your meals? How were cooking/serving/food acquisitions functions allocated?). Participants were then instructed to “sketch or briefly describe the layout of the kitchen/dining spaces” where they grew up. It was implied that they would use the blank space remaining below the wording of this last request, on standard letter-sized paper, to draw the space. The idea was to avoid making them feel intimidated by insufficient drawing skills such as might happen, had they, for example, been issued with special paper or drawing implements, but, rather, to encourage them to see this part of the questionnaire as simply another element of their overall evaluation.

Naturally, these findings had to be interpreted within the limitations of this chosen sampling frame. The participants were not extraordinarily versed in making architectural drawings, and so their drawings had to be treated more as a product of the imagination than an accurate portrayal. This circumstance had a certain advantage, in that the participants would likely have been unaware of the need to adhere to drawing conventions (for example working to scale or assigning a hierarchy of line thicknesses) that architects depend on to

communicate precisely. Hence, what was on the page was, essentially, what the participant wanted on the page, in response to the questions being asked. The decision of what to include, then, and the prominence it received in the drawing consequently became, in and of themselves, factors through which to evaluate the emphasis given by the participant to a particular part of the drawing’s content—and hence became a variable for understanding the significance of the domestic foodscape for that participant.

Analysis of this material occurred in two stages. First, each submission was closely scrutinized in order to identify any patterns, consistencies and differences that arose across the cohort. Careful readings were given to the floor plans<sup>20</sup>, noting all discernible communicative signals—textual notations (for example of who normally sat at which chair around a table); inclusions of minutiae such as particular foods or ornaments; indications of the circulation between rooms within the household; or level of detail (drawings were sometimes sparse and at other times particularly fulsome). Analyzing the written recollections that accompanied the drawings (in ways that would be familiar to literary critics and historians), a nuanced analysis of written answers was undertaken regarding such matters as the location of meals in the household during the participant’s childhood, the degree of formality associated with this activity, and the presence or absence of distractions such as the television, during meals. Then, in order to gain a more finely-grained perspective on the patterns that emerged, the ten most detailed and descriptive drawings were extracted and studied as a subset, primarily because these seemed to signal a higher level of concentration or interest or remembrance, on the part of the participant, of particular aspects of his or her childhood domestic foodscape.

In and of themselves, the findings from each section are revealing. Taken together, however, they prove remarkable inasmuch as they seem to confirm the significance of the childhood domestic foodscape as built environment, as playing an important role in the development of mindful eating habits.

In the marketing-related section, participants were demonstrated as having eating styles in line with previous investigations with similar age-groups (Dubé, LeBel and Lu 2005). As with previous studies, participants “sometimes” restrained themselves from eating foods they believed not healthy or not in their best interest; “sometimes”

ate in direct response to a perceived emotionally-taxing situation (this is referred to as “eating one’s emotions”); but were a bit more sensitive than the norm to external cues such as appetizing smells or other visual food-related cues.

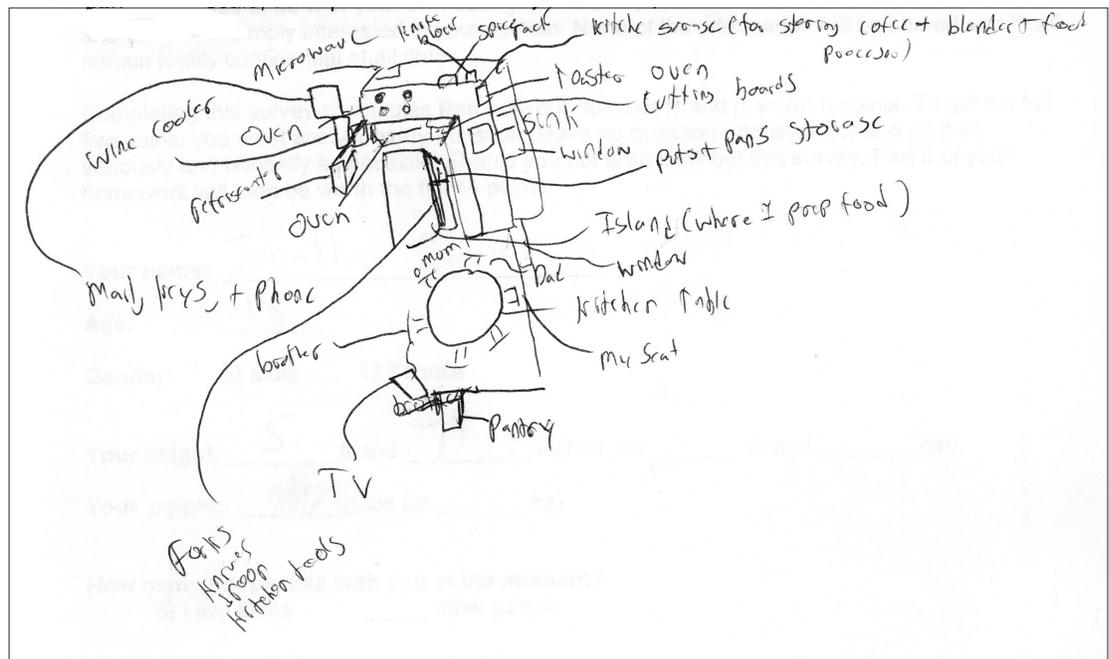
With regard to the sections targeting the architecture and objects of the remembered domestic foodscape, the level of detail captured in the text and drawings proved remarkable. One participant went so far as to draw the food on the table in his/her dining room, noting the chair for the “head of family,”—the only one of nine chairs with arms. Many participants identified specific elements of the space, for example a spice rack (Fig. 1); one noted “chotchkys [kitschy ornaments] on window sill.” “Inedible fish” sitting on a plate on the kitchen counter were pointed out by another participant, along with a pair of candlesticks (with a caption nearby signaling their use “one night per year”) and a television was drawn with waves radiating from it (Fig. 2). Another participant added an additional page to his questionnaire so he could illustrate the kitchen and dining room separately, and drew the “tooth pick [sic] container (shape of rabbit)” on the table. The same participant explained that if his grandparents came to visit, his parents and sisters “move one seat each to [background?].”<sup>21</sup> Normally, however, he “sat on the center seat [at the head of the table] because I am the eldest son of the family → family tradition”<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 3). Two participants drew flowers on the kitchen table and

one of these added drawings of little animal ornaments on the shelf above the kitchen sink.

What soon became evident, in the second section of the study, was that roughly three-quarters of the participants reported that they had habitually shared the principal meal of the day with their family. While some specified that the television had been kept on during the meal, a surprising number reported that the focus was on the table (and this seems in most cases at the behest of the parents). A few indicated that prayers were part of the ritual; that proper table manners were expected; that the participant wear a shirt to the table; and that, once seated, no one could leave the table until everyone was finished. In short, the participants in this questionnaire either over-reported the domestic foodscape as more focused and family-oriented than the norm, or seem anomalous vis-à-vis the anecdotal assumption that turn-of-the-21st century homes are characterized by a less structured domestic foodscape, with individuals routinely eating in bedrooms, in living rooms in front of the television, and so on.

The ten submissions culled as having particularly expressive drawings revealed an even higher incidence of family meals without distractions. Remarkable is the number of these families who reportedly ate their main meal without outside intrusion: five specified that the television was turned off; two additional participants did not specify whether there were distractions, but

**Fig. 1**  
Detail of drawing submitted by Respondent #6, identifying “spice rack” (note text at centre-top of image) situated on kitchen counter.



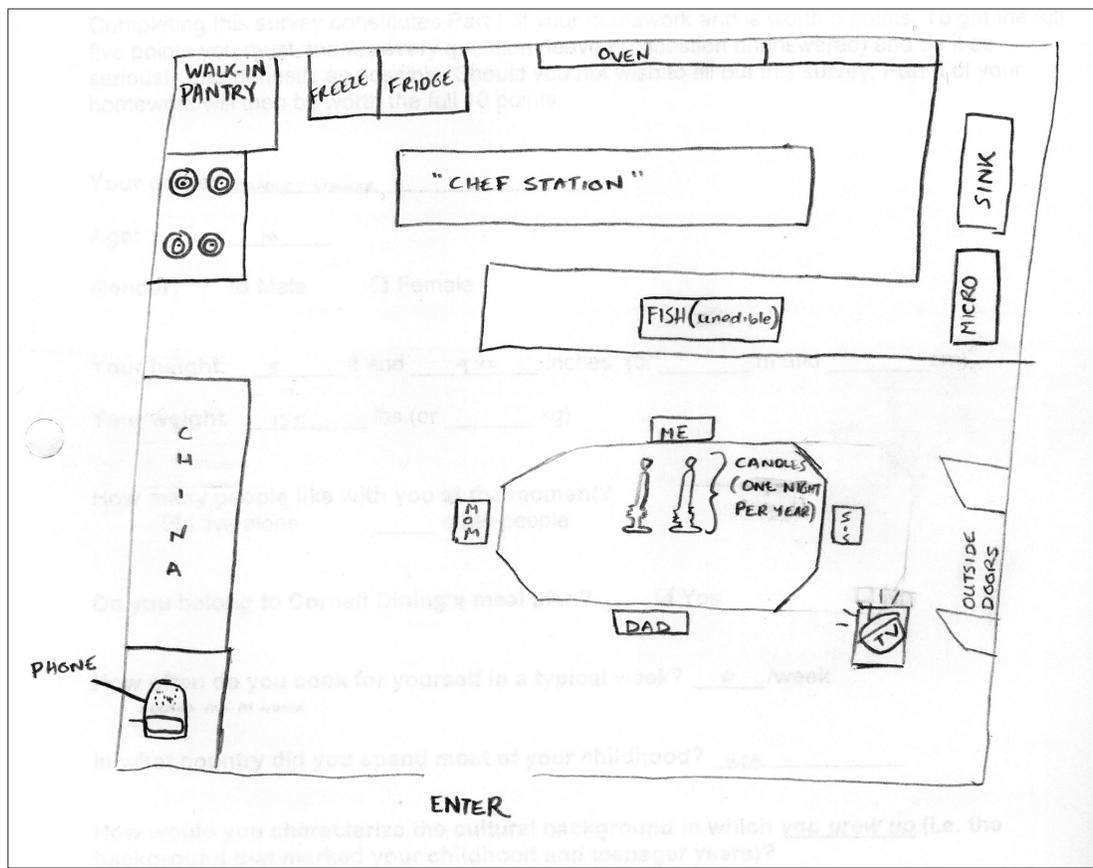


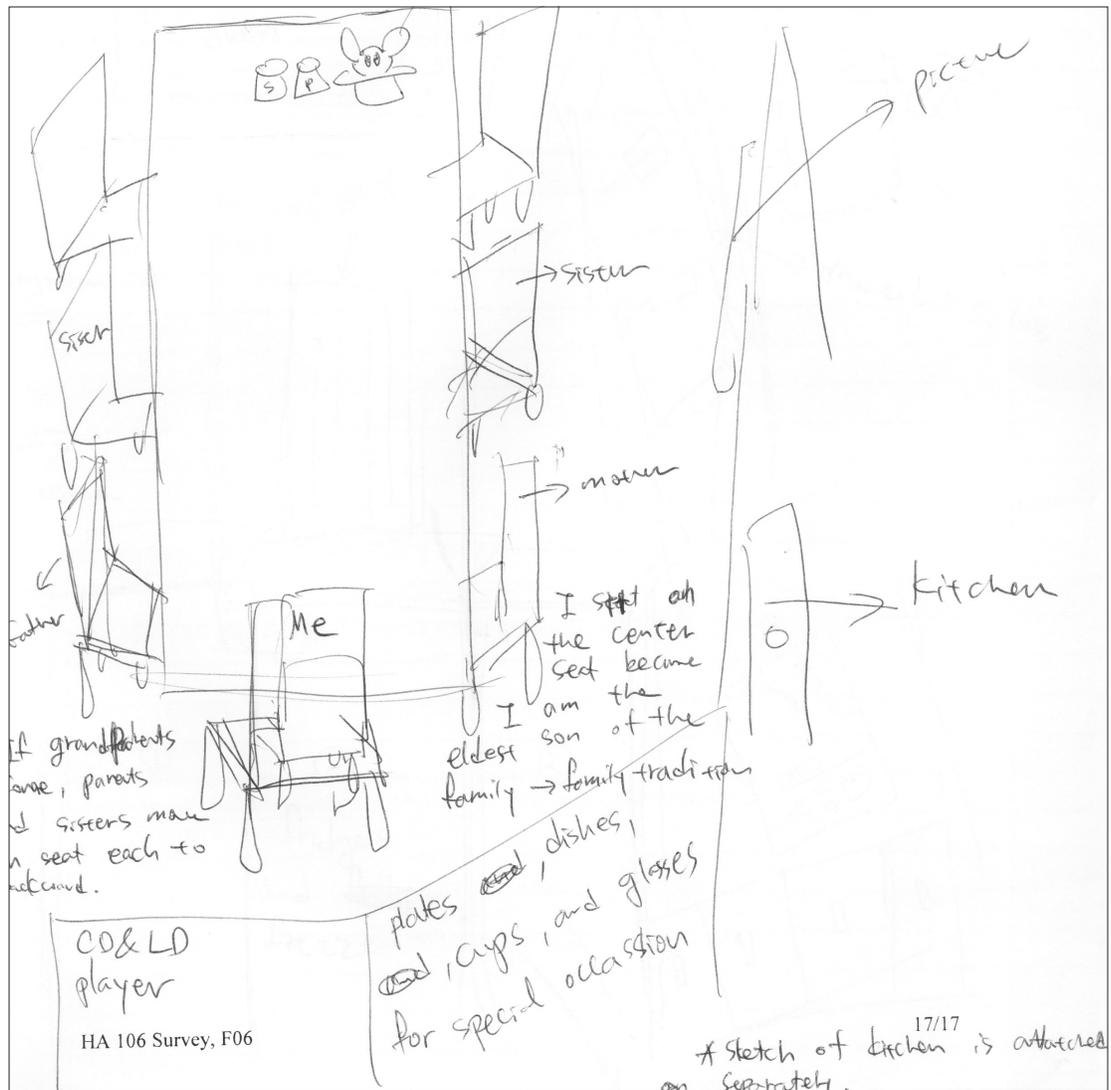
Fig. 2  
 Drawing of domestic  
 foodscape submitted  
 by Respondent #30,  
 showing radiating  
 waves of television  
 situated in proximity to  
 kitchen table.

reported that their family (in one case) discussed the day's activities and (in the other case) spent two hours eating dinner, and a third hour eating dessert. One participant did in fact indicate that the television was always on during the meal, however, and another explained that it was normally on but turned off during more formal gatherings; the tenth did not eat with her family.

Equally important was the discovery that over half the participants of the full cohort reported eating their principal daily meal either at the kitchen table, or at the dining room table (in the four instances in which there was no table in the kitchen proper). That is, twenty-four routinely ate at a table in the kitchen, seven in the dining room, and ten in an open-plan configuration. The participant drew a table, and also specified his/her designated seat, in roughly two-thirds of the questionnaires submitted. Only five participants usually ate in rooms designated as other than kitchen or dining areas (in the remaining cases, the location was either unknown, or not consistently in any given room). Hence in only a few cases did participants report a disbursement to spaces beyond the kitchen or dining room after the food was prepared such that "we would serve our

food and go where we felt comfortable. I ate in my room on my bed in front of the TV." With regard to the ten most detailed drawings, only one participant usually ate away from the kitchen or dining table. When she did join her family at the table, she usually brought a book to read and remembered that "sometimes my family would not even talk. Sometimes we fought. ... We never had guests. I was embarrassed by our dinner practices." Of the others in this subset, eight had their meals at the kitchen or dining room table, while the ninth ate at "a" table (there are four in the drawing: in the kitchen, dining room, closed-in porch and outside deck, and "chairs and table" were even drawn in the "hot tub room").

What happens when the findings of both sections are juxtaposed? The ten focal participants did not exhibit any difference in terms of body weight and their profile was in line with the larger sample. Results for the twelve-item Food Involvement Scale, while based on too few participants to be scientifically meaningful expressed as a statistic, reveal nonetheless that the ten focal participants enjoyed cooking, food shopping and a nicely laid table to a higher extent than the overall sample. In



**Fig. 3**  
 Detail of drawing of dining room, submitted by Respondent #39, noting the seat he normally occupied by virtue of being the "eldest son of the family."

the subsection that tested for degree of pleasure taken from "lifestyle activities," the ten focal participants expressed appreciation of the pleasure associated with food more or less to a degree equal to the full cohort, but showed a higher score as deriving pleasure from cooking. Other examinations of the data suggest some differences more challenging to explain but perhaps due to each group's socialization years. For instance, the ten focal participants got more pleasure from school and reading than the overall sample but less from going out to clubs, shopping and watching television.<sup>23</sup> When the marketing section and the built environment section are superposed, then, there seems to be a consistent family intimacy in operation around the kitchen or dining room table, that in turn suggests the pivotal role of this micro site within the domestic foodscape. Especially

for the focal group of participants, extended time and attention given to family food-related rituals undertaken with children at the kitchen table seem to contribute in a positive way, at least to some extent, to how these individuals treat food and eating after they reach adulthood.

### Implications on the Domestic Foodscape

This study seems to reinforce the importance of the built environment of the home as a space of enculturation with regard to food practices, in which participants in this cohort seem routinely to have spent structured time with their families during meals. What are some implications that arise from these findings?

For scholars interested in studying the culture of food, they support the efficacy of looking to the domestic foodscape as a telling site of identity formation, in line with the findings of researchers already mentioned above.<sup>24</sup> Microcosmic studies of the food-related spaces of the home seem to deserve abiding attention, especially the kitchen table. Interestingly, over thirty-five participants admitted, on the questionnaire (the last item of the Food Involvement Scale), that table settings mattered to them; this was even more the case for the focal group that submitted the ten more detailed drawings. Is this the residue of childhood eating habits centered on the table, or does it speak to the power of the tabletop design and table objects in triggering mindful eating? Designers such as Russel and Mary Wright, for example, were aware of the centrality of the table and its material culture in the construction of modern eating patterns in the 1950s, but more research in this area is advisable (Wright and Wright 1951).<sup>25</sup>

If this project does indeed have merit in evaluating as-found conditions in past or present domestic foodscapes, an additional important outcome must be the potential usefulness of such a study to architects and designers whose future products might be brought into or constitute that eating environment. This study encourages consideration of the kitchen as a site—whether as a room by itself, or in a more open-plan configuration—that deserves special consideration as a subset of the domestic foodscape that can facilitate the interaction of the household. While this seems obvious, it needs to be understood, for example, in the context of well-intended 20th-century experiments with the kitchen as a segregated food-preparation space, or a galley-style kitchen, neither of which was designed to accommodate a table at which diverse domestic activities, including eating, could take place. The findings of this study might also induce designers to think about the comfort associated with the routine designated eating space—the selection of materials that do not require extreme caution against soiling or breakage; ergonomic or padded seats; or tables without sharp edges are design issues that come to mind. A perusal of design books and magazines that currently proliferate in the market seems to confirm that such concerns are not generally prioritized.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, the design of kitchens, utensils, appliances and other artifacts used in preparing meals deserves consideration. Although this was not a major finding in itself, many participants noted that they took part, albeit in modest measure, in meal

preparation (often in the form of washing or peeling vegetables). To what extent do domestic foodscapes facilitate the acquisition of food preparation skills? The focal group of ten participants who submitted more detailed drawings also expressed more involvement in cooking and derived more pleasure from it than other participants. Was this due to parental coaching, or might it be attributed to some feature of the domestic foodscapes? Do professional-quality stoves and ovens, and other equipment that require more than average skill and are now featured in high-end kitchen design, stimulate cooks to rise to the occasion, or do they intimidate the user and ultimately reduce the possibility that meals be prepared from scratch? And how does gender figure in such analysis? Observations of children at play in a toy kitchen revealed marked differences between boys' and girls' behaviours: girls tended to involve the doll (even carrying it while cooking) in their activities and prepared complicated recipes or multi-course meals, while boys were more likely to engage in repairs and use the microwave, would serve snacks (rather than prepare a meal) or served excessive amounts of food (Matheson, Spranger and Saxe 2002). Some design firms have tried to recast the domestic foodscape as a male domain: witness the Poggenpohl Porsche Design Kitchen, described as “engineered, not simply designed. . . . Its origins in automotive construction open up a whole new dimension: Movement. Opening. Closing. . . . An experience in technological and functional perfection.”<sup>27</sup> The table and chairs offered as part of the ensemble are rigidly orthogonal and hard-edged and -surfaced, so it would be difficult to imagine such an environment as welcoming or relaxing either for cooking or for eating. All-in-all, the potential of the domestic foodscape to invite and promote exploration and development of cooking skills warrants further inquiry.

Investigations into the home as personal territory for the purposes of food studies and otherwise have, in recent decades, attracted much nuanced attention across many fields of knowledge. In an extraordinarily sensitive gesture of understanding Seamus Heaney, the Irish Nobel poet laureate, writes of the childhood home:

The rooms where we come to consciousness, the cupboards we open as toddlers, the shelves we climb up to . . . it is in such places and at such moments that ‘the reality of the world’ awakens in us. And it is also at such moments that we have our first inkling of pastness and find our physical

surroundings invested with a wider and deeper dimension that we can, just then, account for. (Heaney 1985: 110)

Such spaces have an abiding influence, it seems, on who we are, on how we live and, as this tentative step into an undeveloped interdisciplinary realm suggests, on the rituals that characterize that most essential activity of human survival, namely our complex relationship with food.

## Notes

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1. See also Yasmeen (2006: 2-3).
2. The domestic foodscape includes the general location (e.g., the house as a whole or a room within it) and a specific place (e.g., in front of the television) as well as the condition of the physical environment (e.g., temperature); see Bisogni (2007). To date, micro-level analyses have examined specific areas within the home and focused on issues such as pantry management: see Baranowski (2008). Another approach has addressed food availability and visibility within the kitchen, table, and plate: see Sobal and Wansink (2007).
3. The use of the term “mindful” in this way was inspired by Brian Wansink’s study of “mindless eating.” Wansink centralizes overeating as the principal negative associated with eating mindlessly. Our use of the term recognizes this and other unhealthy attributes as derived at least in part from the distractions while eating or ignorance about food or carelessness of eating habits that Wansink isolates, but also takes into account the behavioural considerations enumerated here.
4. The subjects for this study were 53 undergraduate students in an introductory foodservice management course at Cornell University, who were given credit for their participation. The study was conducted in 2006.
5. Those who do convincingly address the user in their material culture analysis include Kostof (1995), Upton (1998) and Mellin (2003).
6. In addition to John, see Guidetti and Cavazza (2008), Orrell-Valente et. al. (2007) and Hays, Power and Olvera (2001).
7. An example of a study of what constitutes a meal in the minds of participants, in which space is not the focus, is Bugge and Almas (2006).
8. For example, the Mintel International Group Limited reports that fully 54 per cent of all food from fast-food takeout establishments is eaten in the home. Please see <http://www.mindbranch.com/Off-premises-Eating-R560-2959/> (accessed June 14, 2010).
9. In the US, such chains as Applebee’s and Outback Steakhouse offer ‘curbside delivery,’ where customers need only to drive into specially marked parking bays (after phoning in their order) and a staff member takes it out to their car.
10. See The NPD Group, Inc. press release, Convenience Trumps Health as the Driving Force Behind How America Eats, dated October 24, 2006 at [http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press\\_061024a.html](http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_061024a.html) (accessed June 4, 2010).
11. See Tabulations of Questionnaire Findings, CMHC Kitchen Research Project, Sigrun Bülow-Hübe Archive in the Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University.
12. Indeed, as early as 1869, Catharine Beecher had advocated a ship’s “galley” (32) as a desirable model in terms of kitchen efficiency. See also Lupton and Miller (1992). Another innovative way of analyzing the domestic foodscape appears in an earlier issue of this journal: see Cromley (1996).
13. See as well Cromley (1996) and Johnson and Lloyd (2004).
14. See as well Pascali (2006).
15. See <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/george-r-stibitz-wcs/> (accessed June 6, 2010).
16. See also Rolshoven (2006).
17. Admittedly, the cohort of individuals who participated in this study was already pre-selected as interested in food, is university-educated, middle class, and can afford an Ivy-League education. Future research could extend this investigation to households of different socio-economic backgrounds, that are equally, if not more, at risk of developing negative health consequences related to mindless eating.
18. See Bell and Marshall (2003).
19. This is known as the Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ); see van Strien (1986).
20. The format of the submitted drawings was as floorplans, rather than sections or elevations. In a few cases attempts were made to add three-dimensionality by building up vertical planes.
21. Handwriting is illegible.
22. Reproduced as communicated by the participant.
23. Even the participant in the focal group who felt uncomfortable around her family table as a child gave responses to other parts of the questionnaire that suggest that she enjoys cooking and is otherwise positively stimulated by various aspects of food, even caring about a nicely laid table.
24. For an example of such a study by one of the authors of this paper; see Richman-Kenneally (2010).
25. For a detailed analysis of the role the Wrights ascribed to habits of the domestic foodscape, see Wright and Wright (1951).
26. These are available at home improvement centres, on bookstore stands, and also exist in formalized hardcover formats; see, for example, Mielke (2005).
27. See <http://www.poggenpohl-porsche-design-kitchen.com/> (accessed June 7, 2010).

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