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Kathryn Rem: Food writer's toolbox: A pen, a camera and a bunch of spoons

Order one dish, but taste everything

We were treated to a meal dubbed the Sugar Baron's Dinner. It was presented at the historic Houmas House, an extravagantly restored 19th century plantation near Baton Rouge.

In a majestic dining hall reminiscent of the grand ballrooms of Europe, the meal began with a curried pumpkin, crawfish and corn bisque. That was followed by a beet-and-crab salad garnished with candied bacon. The entrée was lacquered duck breast with whipped sweet potatoes, and the final course was chocolate mousse-filled crepes. Each dessert plate was garnished with an unexpected baseball-sized bubble of bright green cotton candy. You can imagine the discussions.

Perhaps my favorite quirk of food writers is our penchant for photographing the food served to us. Sometimes this is done for professional reasons; we may need to describe what the dinner looked like. Often, a visual record is made to show others and spark a conversation. And sometimes — as the chef/writer sitting next to me admitted — it's simply to help recall a meal that was memorable.

Just as you may take a photo of a towering tree or a baby's smile, a food writer may snap the shutter on a tangerine-and-jicama salad simply because . . . it's sublime.

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