

Lily Ciric Hoffmann

Educational designer & culinary therapy advocate

USA

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Lily Ciric Hoffmann is a creative techie who uses cooking and baking as a form of therapy. Lily hails from the Balkans and later moved to the United States in her twenties. She now lives in Maryland with her husband and three pet bunnies. Lily is a passionate advocate for culinary therapy and is the founder of Dishmeetup, a community that brings together people from diverse backgrounds to use cooking as a means of nurturing, healing, and enhancing well-being.


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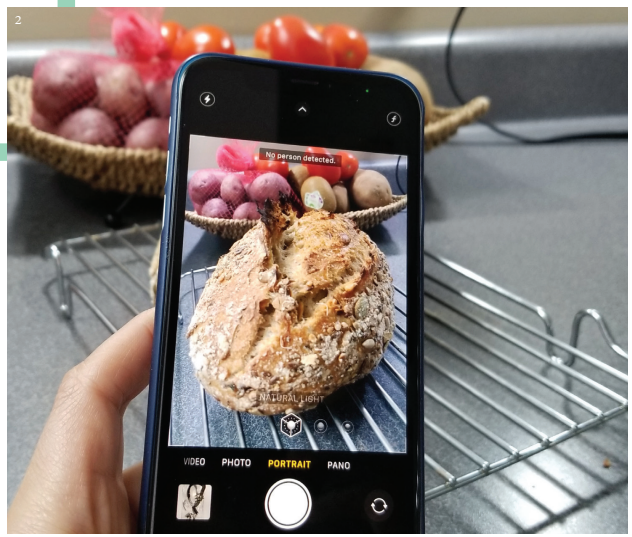
What can Food Design do?

In my view, every dish is a canvas for storytelling. It's about deliberately choosing ingredients, crafting distinctive presentations, and infusing our creations with personal and cultural narratives. Food design, to me, is not just a celebration of traditions; it's a platform to tackle significant issues like sustainability and social awareness. Through food design, I'm able to blend elements from diverse cultures and traditions, creating not only delicious meals but also meaningful connections at the table. This, for me, is the true magic of food design—an extraordinary tool to share stories, spark deep conversations, and cultivate a profound appreciation for the cultural richness that food embodies.

Profile photo credits: Shristi Rajbhandari

1. Aug. 27, 2021. Sweet and spicy tahini noodle dish featuring a blend of spiralized sweet potato, yellow squash, and pad thai rice noodles, complemented by leftover frozen stir-fry veggies and marinated tofu. Sharing this creation with the Dishmeetup community, highlighting the manageable steps taken to inspire others in crafting healthy, vibrant, and delicious meals.

2. March 13, 2021. Leading a virtual food photography class for Dishmeetup members, where everyone learned to capture their mouthwatering dishes using just their phone cameras and natural lighting. An equally vital lesson: taking a moment to photograph their dish, savoring a sense of pride and accomplishment in celebrating their own culinary creations.
Photo credits: Lily Ciric Hoffmann 2021



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What makes a food designer?
Food designers are storytellers. Food designers use food as a powerful medium to convey messages and tell stories that go beyond just sustenance. Whether we're drawing from personal experiences, celebrating cultural heritage, advocating for sustainability, or raising awareness on social issues, food designers have a unique ability to engage diners on a deeper level by creating narratives through our culinary creations. By effectively telling stories, we enhance the emotional connection between the diner and the food, transforming a meal into a meaningful and memorable experience that can last a lifetime.

What is Food Design today?
For me, food design today is deeply personal and goes far beyond the culinary arts. It acts as a bridge, connecting people and ideas. It's a powerful tool for nurturing connections, raising awareness, and sparking vital conversations about issues that affect us as individuals and communities. Food design possesses the extraordinary ability to transcend boundaries and craft meaningful, unforgettable experiences that resonate with people from all walks of life.

What do you bring to the Food Design discipline that nobody else does?
I bring a fresh perspective to the field of Food Design by emphasizing the important link between food design and mental health. To me, food design is more than just creating visually pleasing dishes for others. It is a form of self-care that helps me find comfort and relaxation. Whether I am cooking, baking or plating a beautiful meal, it is a way for me to take care of myself and feel at ease. I see food design as a warm hug, especially after a tough day. It reminds me of the vital connection between my mind, body and gut. By practicing food design, I promote self-awareness and well-being, acknowledging the significant impact that food choices can have on my mental health and general sense of wellness.

Who or what inspires your work?
I draw inspiration for my food design from various sources. Firstly, my inner circle of family, friends, and individuals I admire and connect with influences my creative process. Their perspectives and experiences shape my ideas. Secondly, my emotional state on any given day plays a significant role in sparking my creativity. My feelings and moods guide my creative choices. Additionally, my travels inspire me, particularly the people and places I encounter along the way. The diverse cultures, cuisines, and environments I experience during my journeys inform my culinary creations. Lastly, I'm inspired by homegrown and seasonal ingredients. The freshness and unique qualities of the produce I grow or find locally shape my dishes and guide my creative direction. This blend of personal connections, emotional states, travel experiences, and ingredient choices fuels my creativity.

What would you like to be remembered for?
I aspire to be remembered as a person who celebrates the art of cooking and baking as a therapeutic experience, infusing each dish with love and spreading kindness to others. I aim to be known for my genuine care about the ingredients I use, finding meaning and purpose in each creation. I aspire to be remembered as a warm and welcoming host who makes everyone feel at home around my table. Simultaneously, I hope to be known as a grateful guest who celebrates and honors the dishes created by others.



Right: February 13, 2021. Leading a virtual self-love cooking class for Kama DC, a non-profit organization that empowers immigrants to share their skills and stories. Demonstrating how to make lava cakes with a few simple ingredients.
Photo credits: Mike Hoffmann 2021