

Water

General Introduction:

I enjoy food as such in a more private, familiar, and informal setting. Once the setting becomes formal, I do not think about food or eating at all, but all my attention is focused on behaving properly and on keeping up with the exigencies of the occasion—including consuming food in the most polite way possible. Since I first started thinking about this project, I could not bring myself to think about a dish at all. My first reaction to the idea of the experimental dinner was to think about the etiquette and manners for proper dining, both as a dinner and as a server, and all the mechanics and protocol surrounding this kind of social gathering. My apprehension of officialdom and light aversion to formality and formalisms come in part from growing up under the certain guidance of the *Manual of Urbanity and Good Manners* by the Venezuelan Manuel Antonio Carreño.

Chapter V

On Table Manners

I. - The table is one of the places where the degree of education and culture of a person is most clearly and promptly revealed, because they are so many and so severe in nature, and above all so easy to break, the rules and prohibitions to which they are subjected.

II. - According to this, the care that we put in the way of conducting ourselves on the table will never become excessive, manifesting in all our acts that delicacy, moderation and composure that always distinguish the truly fine individual.

My dish is then a procession of elements that takes place between dishes to properly serve and consume water. An interim server will be busy with passing quasi-holder/trays-type of items. The solicitous server will also provide napkins, coasters, cups, and other containers transported in some of the small quasi-holder/trays mentioned above. The interim server will deliver short clear directions, auto corrections, and standard apologies when he or she sees fit. Attendants, while waiting for the interim servant to give them a cup, or to fill their empty containers with water, might notice that some coasters have short adequate and slightly altered quotes in English translated from the original Spanish text of Carreño's Manual.

The purpose is to necessarily prolong the expectation and elongate the process of serving and consuming water. Attendants will anticipate their turn as items are passed around the table. Water as such may never arrive if the interim server is overwhelmed, distracted, or pressed for time. But that might not even matter if attendants get lost or distracted in the accumulation of material that was meant to prepare them for the upcoming drink. Maybe dinners will have the opportunity to focus on the display of *delicacy, moderation, and composure* as Carreño intended.

Suggested order:

- Pass some napkins around or place them on the table before hand.
 - o Oversized cloth napkins with cut-outs. Interim server could advise some attendants to place them on their lap. He or she could choose to contradict the norms of etiquette by proposing other dinners to wear them tugged in their shirt's collar.
- Cups and other containers for water are placed on the table

- o Coasters with written portions of sound advice like when it is and it is not appropriate to drink liquids or liquor.

The interim server decides when to place on the table the first table centerpiece – which is in the form of a chair or something like that. I would like to mention that there is not much distinction between the appearance and function of the table centerpieces and the quasi-holder/trays kind of objects. All of them will carry cups and other containers for water. Please place the table centerpieces on the table, one at the time, while passing the rest of the items to each attendant. When a second centerpiece is added, please move the first one forward to make room for the new one. Every time a new centerpiece is placed on the table, the previous one is moved forward. In this way the center pieces will travel or will be moved from one end of the table to the other. At the end of the procession of the centerpieces, when the last centerpiece is removed from the table, stop pouring water and make room for the following dish. (The server decides whether to take all the items away or to leave some of them on the table).

Other suggestions:

- Please place holders/trays with containers and coasters on the table in different order and intervals.
- Disparate containers for water are first empty. Add water in between passing other items, like napkins, centerpieces, and coasters. In this way the cups will be filled in increments. The cups could be left half empty. It is ok if you forget to pour water for some of your guests. It is hard to keep up.
 - o These cups are of uneven materials. I associate formal dining with matching utensils, plates, and napkins. But I envision a lot of mismatching happening with the containers, napkins and coasters.
- Add more napkins or more cups. You can also change the size of the napkins. (Some suggest cutting them with scissors on the spot and dividing them as one sees fit).
- Feel free to add redirections, pleasant short comments, or polite rehearsed apologies.

At this stage, each individual dinner should be over-equipped to take a sip of water. This is a good moment to start removing the table centerpieces one by one. It is up to your sensitivity to find the best way to transition out of this water pouring dish. You could also take everything away little by little at the same time that the center pieces are removed. Think of it as a rewinding effect. Undo what you did before. The table would look as it did before the sequence started (unless you choose to leave some items on the table to help a smoother transition). You could allow a pause before serving the next dish.