“Once at least in the life of every human, whether he be brute or trembling daffodil, comes a moment of complete gastronomic satisfaction. It is, I am sure, as much a matter of spirit as of body. Everything is right; nothing jars. There is a kind of harmony, with every sensation and emotion melted into one chord of well-being.” (Fisher 2005, p. 325).

What is the perfect meal? We can probably all think of at least one especially memorable dinner that we have had in the past. For some it might be something as simple as a picnic in a beautiful summer meadow or else fish and chips by the seaside (while listening, of course, to the sounds of the sea). For others, it will be that once in a lifetime trip to one of the world’s top Michelin-starred restaurants. Wherever it was, we would argue that what made it so special was not just the food (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014). Of course, the food itself does matter. Food, after all, is one of those multisensory experiences where if you get even just one sensory element wrong, serve something cold that was supposed to be hot, then the whole experience will likely be ruined. In this talk, we want to argue, though, that what makes for a great eating experience depends on ‘the everything else’: It depends on the company we keep, the mood that we are in, the environment in which we eat and drink, and a host of other factors. We will take a look at the emerging body of evidence from the field of gastrophysics that is helping to illustrate just how important a host of product factors are to our perception and enjoyment of food and drink. We will take a look at the role of naming and the description of a dish; we will critically evaluate the role that glassware, plateware, and cutlery play in delivering the experience; we will discuss some of the latest examples demonstrating how we really do ‘eat with our eyes’. And, finally, we will take a look at the recent studies demonstrating just how much of an effect the environment has on the taste/flavour of food: Everything from the lighting, to the background music, and even the feel of the chair you happen to be sitting on. Throughout the talk, we will try to highlight some of the most exciting recent examples of the dynamic interplay that is now increasingly taking place between chefs, designers, and sensory scientists and which is giving rise to exciting new immersive, experiential, (possibly experimental,) and most definitely multisensory, dining experiences.
