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Culinary Originality: From Unusual Ideas to Functional Transformation

A proposal by Ahmad Issam Maadarani separating novelty, contribution and quality in innovation assessment

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An unfamiliar combination is not automatically valuable innovation, and an understated dish is not necessarily unoriginal. This article examines how an idea transforms a dish's function, separating what changed, what the change contributed and whether the result suited the task. It is a proposed critical framework, not proof of worldwide priority or legal ownership of an idea.

1. Novelty relates to a known reference

“New” requires a reference: a cook's menu, a panel's familiar patterns or an examined collection of works. A judge's first encounter does not establish that nobody used the idea before. Use bounded descriptions such as “unfamiliar within the cases presented in this assessment” when supported, rather than worldwide priority. Familiar components do not

establish imitation; originality may lie in their relationship or in solving a particular problem.

2. Four layers of transformation

Transformation may concern material, where a familiar ingredient changes role; structure, where relationships within a bite change; time, where stages of an effect change; or service, where access to the experience changes while preserving its function. These proposed analytical layers may overlap, are not exhaustive exclusive categories and earn no automatic points. Counting transformations cannot establish value: explain what they enable and what becomes harder or deteriorates. A small change can contribute more than many task-irrelevant modifications.

3. Separate originality from execution quality

An unfamiliar idea within a defined reference can be poorly executed; familiar technique can produce an excellent dish. Innovation should not compensate for every defect, and mastery does not negate a new transformation. Assessment follows the brief: if originality is declared, specify weight and evidence; otherwise it remains descriptive information rather than a retrospective bonus. Separate creative explanation from the quality of experience the dish actually provides.

4. Hypothetical case: vegetables become a carrier

Suppose vegetable slices previously served as accompaniment, then become a carrier allowing a bite combining main component and sauce. The change is not merely using vegetables: it transforms their role in eating. Examine whether the carrier retains suitable cohesion, combines accessible proportions and contributes flavour without masking the rest. If it succeeds photographically but fails during eating, visual transformation occurred without achieving its declared function. Solving a specific eating problem offers describable value in the tested case, not proof of global precedence.

5. Comparison needs a fair question

First specify the problem the new version addresses; then compare it with an appropriate reference under declared conditions. Do not intentionally choose a poor reference to

manufacture superiority, or attribute benefits to one ingredient when recipe and service changed together. There may be a trade-off: easier bites but reduced texture contrast. Do not conceal its cost beneath “innovation”; decide acceptability within the task. Further redesign need not claim every successive change is necessarily better.

6. A disciplined creative claim file

Record transformation, comparison reference boundaries, intended function, supporting observation, trade-offs and limitations. Dated versions and development records can document the creator's process, but must remain separate from establishing priority over others. An older photograph than the current version does not justify “first.” Authorship attribution in an article cannot establish a monopoly over the ingredient, technique or general idea.

7. Test value without rewarding spectacle

Train judges to describe a specific transformation before scoring originality, then review reasoning on new cases. Can they state function, reference and trade-off, or do they rely on strangeness, height and component count? Define review methods beforehand and preserve cases where transformation exists but its benefit remains unclear. The framework does not eliminate differences in knowledge or taste; its proposed benefit is making innovation rewards intelligible and contestable.

8. Conclusion: originality that explains its value

A strong idea need not claim superiority over culinary history. It can show a specific transformation, achieved function, examinable result and acknowledged limits. This respects creativity by recognising contribution while retaining quality assessment and preventing surprise from becoming immunity to criticism. Creative value is an explainable relationship between change, experience and task, rather than a title the creator awards themselves.

9. A concise working sheet

Field	Review question	What to record
Reference	New relative to what?	Define the comparison set without assuming worldwide priority.
Transformation	Which role changed?	Describe material, structure, time or service.
Function	Which problem does the idea address?	Link change to a requirement rather than unusual appearance.
Test	Is the comparison appropriate and fair?	Do not choose a weak reference to manufacture superiority.
Trade-off	What improved and what deteriorated?	Show costs and judge acceptance within the task.
Claim	What does the evidence permit?	Separate development documentation from priority over others.

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