



Ken Rexford

**MODIFIED
ITALIAN CANAPÉ
SYSTEM**

AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Text © 2010 Kenneth J. Rexford

All rights reserved.

Honors eBooks is an imprint of Master Point Press.

Master Point Press
331 Douglas Ave.
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5M 1H2
(416) 781-0351

Email: info@masterpointpress.com

Websites: www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.masteringbridge.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication has been applied for.

eISBN: 978-1-55494-500-9

MODIFIED ITALIAN CANAPÉ SYSTEM

An easy, more effective, and GCC legal core structure
for a strong 1♣ system with canapé openings

Kenneth J. Rexford
2010

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	7
THE ONE CLUB OPENING	8
THE OPENING BID OF ONE NO TRUMP	9
OPENING BIDS OF ONE-OF-A-MAJOR	10
Theoretical Concerns of Canapé Bidding	10
Early Discovery of the Four-Four Fit	11
Concealment of Fit Strength (passing the 5-2, 5-3, or 5-4 fit).....	16
General Pattern Concealment (When they get the contract or we find the four-four fit)	17
Maintenance of Lead Acceptance	19
Disruption of Standard Overcall Practices.....	20
Early Suggestion of a Misfit.	21
The Opening Bid in First or Second Seat	22
Distribution	22
Strength.....	23
Summary	24
Responding to a First-or-Second-Seat One Spade Opening	25
Two-Over-One Responses	25
Opener Rebids after 2/1 Response.....	25
Responder's 2NT Rebid After Opener Repeats his Major	28
Interference After a 2/1 Response.....	28
The Special Case of the 2♥ Response to a 1♠ Opening	29
One No Trump "Semi-Forcing"	29
Natural Rebids by Opener.....	30
The Two No Trump Rebid.....	31
The Three No Trump Rebid.....	32
Raises	32
Other Major Jump Shifts.....	34
Other Responses.....	35
Special Concerns for Dealing with the Overcall.....	35
Responding to a First or Second Seat One Heart Opening	36
Indicating a Void and a Fit - The Alternative Treatment.....	36
The One Spade Response.....	37
The Opening Bid in Third Seat.....	39
The Opening Bid in Fourth Seat	39
OPENING BIDS OF TWO-OF-A-MAJOR	41
Theoretical Concerns of Intermediate Two-Bids.....	41
The Direct Benefit of Two Hearts and Two Spades Openings.....	42
The Indirect Benefit of the Roman Two Hearts and Two Spades Openings.....	47
Why We Do Not Miss Weak Two Bids.....	48
The Opening Two Heart and Two Spade Bid.....	49
Requirements for the Opening Bid	50
Responding to the Two Hearts Opening.....	51

Responding with Intermediate or Better Values	51
Two Spades	51
Two No Trump	53
Three Diamonds	54
Immediate Slam Exploration	55
Responding with Weak Hands	56
Handling Interference	58
After the Double	58
After the Suit Bid	58
After Artificial Two-Suiters	59
Other Interference Situations	59
Responding to the Two Spades Opening	60
THE OPENING BID OF ONE DIAMOND	62
Theoretical Concerns Regarding the One Diamond Opening	62
When Opener Has the "Normal" Canapé or Long Diamonds Hand	62
When Opener Has the Long Clubs Hand	64
Requirements for the One Diamond Opening Bid	66
Responses to the One Diamond Opening Bid	67
The One, Two, and Three No Trump Responses	67
The 1NT Response	68
The 2NT Response	69
The 3NT Response	70
The Constructive Minor Responses	70
The Game-Forcing Two Clubs Response	71
The Preemptive Major Responses	72
The One of a Major Responses	72
Responder with a Weak Hand	72
Responder with a Constructive Hand	73
Responder with an Intermediate Hand	73
Responder with a Strong Hand	74
Opener's Rebids after One-of-a-Major Response	74
Handling Interference After a One Diamond Opening	76
If Opener's LHO Interferes - Responder's Options	76
Reopening/Rebids by Opener	79
The Lebensohl Convention by Opener	80
Reopening "Michaels" Cuebid by Opener	81
"Reopening" Double by Opener	82
THE TWO CLUBS OPENING BID	83
Theoretical Concerns of the Two Clubs Opening	83
Two Clubs as a Better Three-Suiter than Two Diamonds	83
Why Use a Three-Suited Opening at all?	84
Requirements for a Two Clubs Opening Bid	85
Responses to the Two Clubs Opening Bid	86
The Two Diamonds Asking Bid	86
Opener Has a Minimum	87
Opener Has a Maximum	89

Interference after the 2♦ Asking Bid.....	90
The Weak Responses	90
The Unusual Leaps	91
The Leap to Three No Trump	92
Handling Interference	92
The Special Circumstance of the Third Seat or Fourth Seat Two Clubs Opening	93
Optional Idea for Expanding the Utility of a 2♣ Opening.....	93
MINOR-SUITED OPENINGS: TWO DIAMONDS AND TWO NO TRUMP.....	95
Requirements for the Two Diamonds Opening Bid	96
Distributional Requirements	96
Strength Requirements.....	97
Fourth Seat	97
Responses to the Two Diamonds Opening Bid	98
Responding with Weak Hands.....	98
Intermediate Hands	101
The Natural and Invitational 2♠ Response.....	102
The Natural and Invitational 2NT Response	103
The Artificial 2♥ Asking Bid	103
The Three-of-a-Major Response (and 4M):.....	109
Competitive Auctions	109
After Direct Interference:.....	109
After Interference over the Two Hearts Convention:	110
Some Actual Hands in Play	110
Requirements for the Two No Trump Opening Bid	119
Strength Requirements.....	119
Pattern Considerations	120
Responses to the Two No Trump Opening Bid	121
Responding to First or Second Seat Openers.....	121
Responding to Third Seat Openers	123
Fourth-Seat Openers	123
Handling Interference	124
How to Learn Canapé in Stages – An Idea for the Timid.....	125
Standard or 2/1 GF Players.....	126
Precision Players	127

FOREWORD

In the early nineties, while the first George Bush was president and I was in law school, I had the pleasure of meeting a man who had escaped the turmoil of a collapsing Yugoslavia to relocate in Washington, D.C. A former professor, he had worked his way up from delivering papers to opening his own business, eventually helping to bring his fiancé from the war zone, and then his first brother from out of the war, and was working on another brother. His willingness to do whatever it took to survive, and his humility, has inspired me in my life. I recently learned of his passing, and I mourn the loss of a friend and partner, Srčan (pronounced “Sir-Chen”) Osmanagich.

When I first met Srčan, we were paired up by a partnership desk. I introduced myself, and he as well. On the third hearing of his first name, I said merely “bless you” and we carried on. We had great success understanding each other and agreed to play again. The second time we played, he asked if I would be interested in canapés, which appealed to me because I was always hungry in law school. After he explained that this would not fill my stomach but rather my mind, I nonetheless agreed. I found this approach, even with his extremely exotic and unusual approach, to be fascinating. However, upon my graduation from law school and return to my home in Ohio, I knew that I would be unlikely to find anyone who played anything resembling his approach, with 1♦ as the strong, forcing opening, strange intermediate two-level openings, and the like. A fascinating idea, but not one that I could easily explain to anyone, even if I could get the several months necessary to do so. Just the name of his system, “Rosso e Nerro” or “Red and Black,” was strange enough to scare most people away.

However, I was fortunate. Less than an hour away from my home town of Marion, Ohio, I heard that a threesome was dabbling with the Neapolitan System, which was the system of Benito Garozzo, Pietro Forquet, and Eugenio Chiaradia of Italy in the 1960’s. This canapé system was entirely different, but equally exciting to me. So, I began to dabble, as well.

It soon became apparent to me, however, that the two versions could be blended in a way that solved a world of problems. The basic approach seemed good – canapé openings enabled a lot of pattern description and was basically good. However, all of the major canapé systems, Neapolitan, Blue Club, and Roman Club, seemed to suffer problems in dealing with what is called a “tendance canapé,” or a “canapé tendency.” This meant that a bid of a second suit after opening an original suit might or might not be longer than the first, depending upon the sequence. This left a lot of confusion, as you can guess. Some of the cures from Rosso e Nerro, blended with Neapolitan and with Roman Club

theories, got you closer to a pure canapé approach that worked. Plus, I had the ultimate trick up my sleeve. While in Washington, I had also played with a young player a “home spun” Precision style that had a funky 1♦ opening, one that we called a “Flamingo Diamond.” This funky call was the cornerstone to fixing the entire canapé approach effectively.

As a result, we ended up creating what I believe to be the easiest and most pure version of canapé bidding ever devised. It was so effective that we wildly outscored our unimpressive skills of the day. It was so easy that we were able to quickly teach even the most rookie of students.

About ten years ago, I put together a book describing this new style of canapé bidding for use by the friends who all used this new system. The book was written at that time with several goals in mind.

First, it was intended to set a foundation of agreements for what we called the Modified Italian Canapé System, or "M.I.C.S." As this general approach was employed by several individuals in a few different variations, it seemed good to have some semblance of uniformity. It was desirable to have a set "standard" M.I.C.S., such that any modifications could be discussed as such to avoid the need to cover the entire system each time that it is played.

Second, it was intended as a text with which players interested in learning M.I.C.S. could master the system. Thus, the book included theoretical analyses to assist in thinking through the canapé approach.

Third, it was intended as an apologetic text to explain the reason for using M.I.C.S. over standard approaches, such that many arguments in favor of the M.I.C.S. approach were included.

M.I.C.S. is an easy, working system that works beautifully at the basic level and has a lot of room for scientific, artificial gadgets if desired. It fits without modification into the General Convention Chart, which is critical to any system intended for general use in the ACBL. It works, it is fun, and it frustrates the opponents. I recommend M.I.C.S. to any intermediate or better player who is willing to take the time to learn a new approach.

Why learn M.I.C.S. over standard? It seems to work better. Granted, any unusual treatment will produce bad results on occasion where certain hands shift the declarer or are more difficult than with standard bidding. Nevertheless, M.I.C.S. has proven itself in play, and especially so at IMP's, where finding unusual games or slams, and having more opportunities to punish the opponents mercilessly, is especially rewarded. The main key is in the enhanced description of distribution. Any system will get you to game with 26 HCP. The benefit of M.I.C.S. is in finding the correct strain and in finding the marginal games by enabling better pattern description. Plus, you find that there are many more lucrative double opportunities.

But, most of all, the best reason to play M.I.C.S. is that it is fun to play canapés. Very few know how, so we get to be members of an exclusive club. That's worth something!

Even if you do not end up playing M.I.C.S. forever, or with all of your partners, taking the time to learn canapé bidding is a worthwhile experience. I almost exclusively play 2/1 GF these days, tweaked of course, but a very natural approach. However, the experience of having played with a canapé system has increased my ability to handle opponents who play a canapé system, and it has enabled me to find unusual or counter-intuitive solutions to natural system problems, solutions suggested by canapé thinking. Generally, then, the experience developed me as a bridge theorist.

In this new 2010 version of the older 2002 book, I have modernized the approach. My hope is that this approach might appeal to many others. However, in so doing, I have decided to make one major change to the book, concerning the strong 1♣ opening. In the 2002 book, I described a complete set of agreements for responding to a 1♣ opening in the M.I.C.S. system. In this updated version, I do not suggest anything as a 1♣ response structure. Why? Well, frankly, the bridge world has developed responses to a strong 1♣ opening fairly well. I have no interest in trying to improve upon the structures developed over the years by many of the bridge greats. It seems silly to try. My suggestion, then, as to responses to a strong 1♣ opening is to read any preferred structure for Precision and to use that. Maybe Meckwell. Maybe Jannersten.

Additionally, the 1NT structure is not system critical and is therefore not discussed. Every system (almost) has a balanced 1NT opening. You can use whatever suits you in this system core as well.

So, this modernized 2010 book on canapé bidding will focus on what I now call the “M.I.C.S. core for unbalanced intermediates.” Anyone familiar with Precision or other strong club systems could very easily switch to canapé with this core and yet retain full use of their existing agreements as to a strong 1♣ structure. Anyone who has never played a strong 1♣ system can simply pick up a book on Precision and use that. Everyone will have a 1NT structure to import and save. I figure that these two decisions will have a huge impact on your ability to try out this approach, as you will not need to learn an entire system but can at least relax and apply what you already know in balanced or strong club auctions.

INTRODUCTION

The basic idea here is to improve upon the structure of a strong club system using canapé bidding. “Canapé bidding” means that Opener, with the intermediate hands not strong enough for a strong 1♣ opening, and when holding a two-suited hand, opens in the second-longest suit first, rather than in the longest suit. Thus, with five spades and four hearts, the canapé bidder opens 1♥ and the rebids spades. There are theoretical advantages to this approach, which are described later. Trust me for now.

The classic problem with canapé bidding, however, has been a lack of internal systemic consistency. This arises because of the strong 1♣ opening, which creates an obvious problem – how does one handle hands with clubs as the second-longest suit?

The solution was rather simple for the Roman Club System – open 2♥ or 2♠ to show the opened major as the longest suit and clubs as the secondary suit. We adopted that in M.I.C.S. However, the Roman Club System left two other hand types unsolved, one of which is minor two-suiter. The second is one-suiters with long clubs.

The Neapolitan System solved the latter in the same way that Precision solves that hand pattern, with a 2♣ opening. However, the 2♣ opening in these systems is bulky, and the Roman Club System solution for 4441 hands, another “problem hand” in canapé, is too appealing – a three-suited 2♣ opening. So, our M.I.C.S. solution was to add in a meaning of “just long clubs” to the 1♦ opening. This is enabled by splitting the former problem hand – minor two-suiters – between 2NT for the weak, pure holdings, a concept that is well-known to many, but also with a new tool, probably rather unknown. We also open 2♦ as a minor two-suiter, with at most a three-card side major, and with sound values.

The end result is a canapé-pure approach. All major hand patterns are consistently handled, meaning that one-suited hands are opened in the one major or with an artificial 1♦ and a rebid of the actual minor held; two-suited hands are opened in the second-longest suit, or two-of-a-major if the second-longest suit is clubs, or 2♦ or 2NT if the two suits are minors; three-suited hands are opened 2♣; balanced hands are opened 1NT; and strong hands are opened 1♣.

When the approach is pure, the approach is easy. As perhaps the first and only easy canapé system out there, I also believe it to be accessible for most people. Finally, because the system is so natural in most respects, the entire approach is, in the ACBL, completely General Convention Chart approved. It is amazing how you can fix canapé to make it work better and by so doing actually make it fit into the GCC completely.

THE ONE CLUB OPENING

As I stated, the response structure to a 1♣ opening is not the focus of this book. Suffice it to say that the one-level and two-level openings in the Modified Italian Canapé System ("M.I.C.S.") are limited, with a 1♣ opening handling all hands containing 16+ HCP.

One caveat is that, with certain highly distributional hands containing fewer high card points, 1♣ might be opened if there are four or fewer losers held. On the other hand, there will be hands that contain 16 HCP where a different opening seems best, just like as in standard you sometimes open 2♣ with light values because of the playing strength but also opt to not open 2♣ because of rebid difficulties. The same concerns sometimes determine when to open 1♣ in a strong club system.

Additionally, you may decide to either reduce or increase the minimum necessary for a 1♣ opening generally. The modern trend seems to have 16 HCP as the line between intermediate openings and the strong club. In many canapé systems, the line is 17 HCP, which is just as workable. In that event, your maximums for intermediates would rise by a point, and your minimums as well unless you don't mind larger ranges. Conversely, it is plausible to have somewhat of a light initial action approach, with a lesser 1♣ minimum of 15 HCP, allowing some openings on rather bleak hands.

In any event, 1♣ is completely artificial, having any possible hand pattern. For your response structure, I would suggest using whatever approach suits you, from any number of strong club systems like Precision. For my part, I would recommend a few concepts to consider when selecting a strong club approach.

First, I think that transfer/submarine is the way to go. In other words, if you have a way to show a positive with spades, I think 1♥ for that call pays dividends over 1♠, by saving space. These are generally called "transfer positives."

Second, I think that a semi-positive call also has merit, if this can be included. For an example (inconsistent with what I just mentioned, admittedly), there is a lot to be said for having, say, 1♦ be a bust hand (0-4 HCP or so) and 1♥ a semi-positive of 5-7 HCP or so. This helps if fourth hand intervenes, especially.

Third, I like a lot of means of two-suit indications by Responder. For example, I have had 2NT as a relay to 3♣ for Responder to show various two-suited hands. Strong club sequences often seem to focus on what Opener has, because Opener usually has the stronger hand, but then Responder may well have a very distributional hand, where his pattern might be more important.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, I think that development of the structure when the opponents interfere is more important than the structure when they do not, because the opponents interfere a lot.

THE OPENING BID OF ONE NO TRUMP

The opening bid of 1NT indicates a balanced hand with a good 11 to an average 15 HCP. What does this mean, you ask? Well, the opening 1NT bid shows a range of 12-15 HCP. However, with 11 or 15 HCP, you could upgrade the hand to a 12 or 16 HCP hand, meaning that some 11-count hands could be opened 1NT, and some 15-count hand might be opened 1♣ (planning to show 16 HCP and balanced). If you have a method for upgrading, use that. If you do not, then settle with a 12-15 HCP range.

Again, there is no required systemic response structure, in that any favorite responses may be used without having any impact on the overall system integrity.

However, you will find out later that weaker hands with a four-card major and balanced can be opened in the major, if you elect this systemic tweak later on. Therefore, you can easily opt to have the 1NT opening actually show 13-15 HCP, which is a standard "Precision" range, reserving balanced hands with 11-12 HCP for the one-of-a-major exception openings. This would leave you unable to open hands with no four-card major, balanced, and 11-12 HCP.

A third option is to blend these approaches. Thus, a 1NT opening would have a strange range of 11+ to 15- HCP, but 12 HCP or the rare 11 HCP only if upgraded because of the minor holding(s). Thus, you might open 1NT with 5332 and a 5-card minor, or with 6322 and a 6-card minor. Something like that. Also, maybe 2-2-4-5/2-2-5-4 gets upgraded into a practical 1NT opening.

The response structure, again, is your preference and is unrelated to the M.I.C.S. core. Personally, I like a relatively simple approach. Of course, Stayman, Jacoby Transfers, and Texas Transfers form a normal core. I also like 2♠ as Minor Suit Stayman, possibly handling weak minor two-suiters (will convert 2NT to 3♣) or weak one-suiters with diamonds (will convert 2NT or 3♣ to 3♦). I like 2NT as a relay to 3♣ for various slam tries (or weak with clubs).

The 3♣ response makes sense as Puppet Stayman, or possibly a modified Puppet. In this sequence (1NT - P - 3♣), I kind of like to switch the meanings of 3♥ and 3NT. Thus, 3♦ by Opener shows at least one four-card major, 3♥ denies a four-card major, 3♠ shows five spades, and 3NT shows five hearts. This allows Responder to bid 3♠ after 3♥ from Opener as a minor-oriented slam try.

I also like 3♦ as 5-5 majors and invitational or better.

Finally, I suggest having 3♥ and 3♠ show both minors, with 3-1 in the majors. This one call seems to pay off more than expected, where a failing 3NT is often averted and replaced by a making minor-suit slam.

Now, however, we begin the new stuff.

AN EASY, EFFECTIVE STRONG CLUB SYSTEM

In this book, Ken Rexford introduces the strong club relay system with canapé bidding that he played successfully for years. His approach is novel, but it is also one that is easy to learn and play. Most importantly, the entire system fits within the ACBL General Convention Chart. As with his first book, *Cuebidding At Bridge*, Ken Rexford spends much time explaining the theory and thinking behind canapé sequences, so that the reader will understand the approach rather than simply memorizing a list of conventions.

The author also includes a basic scheme for converting your system from Precision to Canapé, or even from Standard all the way to Canapé, all in easy steps. For those who are intrigued but intimidated by Canapé, this extra material should help to ease the transition.



KEN REXFORD (Ohio) is a bridge player with 30 years of tournament experience. His first book, *Cuebidding at Bridge: a modern approach*, and his blog, www.cuebiddingatbridge.blogspot.com, introduced the bridge world to a modern approach to Italian cuebidding. Using more than conventions and definitions, he introduced the reader to the theory and thinking you need to actually use cuebidding to your advantage.

