

FLAVOR

& THE MENU



About the Origins of Flavor
FROM CONCEPTS • STRATEGIES • TECHNIQUES

wd-50's Wylie Dufresne depends on the Vita-Prep to whip up purees and sauces, like the soybean gazpacho, paired here with crabmeat, ramps and pomegranate.



Flavor ASSIST

Notable chefs discuss the equipment that helps them achieve a flavorful edge

BY DEB NORTH

Form follows function when it comes to the equipment chefs use to deliver unexpected and sometimes unorthodox flavors — from fire-roasted fruits and vegetables to caramelized orange powder. *Flavor & The Menu* asked a cross-section of chefs to reveal their favorite pieces of equipment in their professional kitchens and describe how these tools have helped them develop their culinary finesse.

ANDREW HUNTER, vice president of culinary development for **Wolfgang Puck Worldwide**, based in Beverly Hills, relies on a rotisserie oven to turn out those unmistakably “Puckish” flavors.

The rotisserie is so relevant to our Wolfgang Puck Express concept, because it allows us to cook our all-natural, humanely raised meats in a variety of cost-effective formats to meet the right price point. We can roast beef, turkey breasts, whole chickens, pork loin and more. Our signature is all-natural chicken that we marinate in olive oil, garlic and rosemary and roast in the rotisserie until crispy. We pride ourselves on not using processed deli meats, so we reserve some of the rotisserie chicken, pull it from the bone and dress it with pesto, red onions and fresh basil for our delicious pesto-chicken focaccia — our best-selling sandwich.

We also roast an all-natural bone-in pork loin that we serve as a chop at dinner, then chill and slice it thinly the next day for a rotisserie-pork sandwich.

QUICK-TAKE

THIS STORY TAKES A LOOK AT:

- ▶ The equipment chefs rely on to bring out food's best flavors
- ▶ Equipment tricks of the trade, from high-tech gadgets to rustic ways with wood
- ▶ Techniques, tips and menu ideas from industry innovators



WOLFGANG PUCK

The flavor combination of using the rotisserie and the pizza oven [brings out] the flavor and texture components from both and creates a very successful flavor profile for us. An example is our beef knife-and-fork salad presented on a 9-inch garlic-herb pizza crust seasoned with grana padano Parmesan. The salad is composed of sliced, house-roasted, garlic-rosemary rotisserie beef arranged over crisp romaine, tossed with Roma tomatoes, red onions and crumbled Gorgonzola and dressed with horseradish Caesar dressing.

What I've learned is that the rotisserie is a great way to utilize high-quality but lower-cost cuts of meat that come out wonderfully tender and juicy.

CHARLIE TROTTER, chef/owner of **Charlie Trotter's** in Chicago and one of the most meticulous and innovative chefs in the industry, reaches for a PolyScience Immersion Circulator when he needs ultra-precise temperature control.

This incredible piece of equipment gives us the ability to control temperatures within 0.01 of a degree. This allows us the capability not only to control the temperature but also the length of the cooking process. Through the many applications while using the circulator, we have been able to focus on flavor preservation and textures, finding the perfect temperature before a product denatures.

For Charlie Trotter, precise temperature is the key to balancing texture, flavor and color.



We are able to cook with precision; one dish on our menu that benefits from this technology is the Tasmanian ocean trout with orange rind, fennel pollen and trout-roe vinaigrette.

Temperature is key in developing the perfect balance of texture, flavor and color. We continue to observe the cooking process of a variety of products, from chocolate to vegetables and even shellfish. This helps us maintain the integrity of the pristine products that come through the back door of the kitchen at Charlie Trotter's.

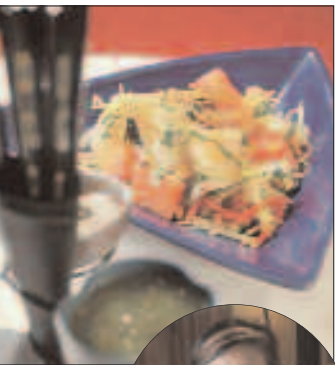
SHAN WICKHAM, pastry chef at **Ken's Artisan Pizza**, a wood-fired-pizza joint in Portland, Ore., has learned to embrace his rustic side with the help of a wood-fired oven.

If you could see the kitchen I work in, you wouldn't have to ask what my favorite piece of equipment is. The kitchen is completely dominated by a very large, floor-to-ceiling wood-fired oven. We have no stove, grill or conventional oven, so everything I bake must, by necessity, come out of it. The best thing about it is the very tight menu focus it forces me to take.

The category of dessert, as a whole, is unconventional coming from a wood oven. Most places have at least a range top and/or convection oven for pastry use, and we have neither. Most categories of desserts are ruled out: meringues, pastry cream and fussy little garnishes are impossible. Instead, we make beautiful, rustic, roasted-fruit desserts that use the high heat of the wood oven to concentrate and intensify the natural flavors in the fruit.

For example, in summer, we make a fabulous seasonal dessert — Frutti di Bosco — by roasting fresh red currants, raspberries and blueberries together and serving the sauce over vanilla-bean gelato. Rhubarb tarts, with the filling cooked in the oven, cherry clafoutis and roasted apricots are also some recent menu items.

I start my day baking, using just the residual heat from the previous night's service, then start the fire when I'm ready for high heat for roasting fruit. The baking times are different every day, depending on how busy we were the



Ponzu's Michelle Mah relies on a Vita-Prep to make blended flavors come alive.

night before, so I'm never sure how long things take. I have to be pretty vigilant about watching and listening and smelling to be sure that I don't scorch or under-bake my products.

HOMARO CANTU, executive chef at **Moto Restaurant** in Chicago, talks about equipment that sounds a bit like science fiction, but from lasers to freeze-driers and vaporizers, it's all real, and it's going on in his kitchen. [When Cantu discusses a laser, he means a Class IV laser, the highest grade under OSHA's classification system, which projects high-powered beams and typically is used by surgeons or welders.]

Because of its versatility and range of heat transfer, a laser enables me to extract flavor profiles from food that no other piece of equipment can. One unconventional example is making "inside-out" bread, where the crust is baked (or lasered) inside the loaf, and the doughy part forms the outer surface.

I also use the laser to 'caramelaserize' freeze-dried orange powder at 2,800 degrees F. A vapor is released in an upside-down wine glass, placed in front of the diner and flipped over to release the aroma. Red wine is poured into the glass, where the orange notes complete an unusual food-and-wine pairing.

WYLIE DUFRESNE, another experimentalist extraordinaire and chef/owner of New York City's **wd-50**, values the Vita-Prep for its functionality and extreme durability.

We have four Vita-Prep mixers, and often they're all in use at one time. They are extremely functional for the kind of purees and sauces we feature in dishes. I wouldn't say the Vita-Prep has influenced our style or technique, but it does enable us to get the textures and consistencies that we want. It is renowned for its power and durability and has lived up to that reputation.

Because we use a lot of 'powders' in our cooking, we are also dependent on micro-scales for accurate measuring. And it's easy to

take for granted, but my Bonnet customized kitchen suite is, of course, my favorite piece of equipment — because it was designed with exact specifications that I was able to communicate to the manufacturer.

MICHELLE MAH, the chef at **Ponzu** in San Francisco, points out that most chefs would be nowhere without a good chef's knife, but when it comes to machinery, she also reaches for the Vita-Prep.

I love the Vita-Prep blender. I used to use little bar blenders but burned my way through about eight of them before I finally bought the real deal. It was worth paying more for it. I make all sorts of purees, soups, blended oils, curry paste; the Vita-Prep allows me to transform so many different things into flavors that come alive.

With a busy dining room and a small staff, I have to count on as many efficiencies as possible. My Vita-Prep saves me loads of time because it blends better than an immersion blender.

DARRYL MICKLER, executive chef at Orlando, Fla.-based Darden Restaurants' **Red Lobster** concept, believes that fresh fish deserves a technique that will preserve its freshness and impart simple flavors. For him, the grill is the thing.

The grill is always a fresh and exciting piece of equipment for delivering great flavor. Fresh seafood is particularly good when grilled, since it's so easy to maintain the healthful benefits of seafood without adding saturated fat; the subtle flavors of many fish and shellfish aren't masked, and the dish is highly appealing to our guests — visually and, of course, when they taste it.

For my first experiments with a new concept, I like to get a feel for the dish — how it performs and where flavor is developed in the process. Once we understand this, we work through all the elements of the dish to simplify it and make it workable within the needs of our many restaurants.

Consistency from restaurant to restaurant is key to our development. Other equipment

used in the restaurant, such as the impingement oven, is engineered to provide a constant cooking experience in both time and temperature, allowing us to design our dishes for consistent quality and timing.

DEBORAH WILLYARD, pastry chef for Home Appétit and executive chef/owner of **Blue Dragonfly Catering** in Atlanta, made it her quest to create rich, dairy-free sauces and found magic in a submersion blender.

We do on-site corporate catering for about 225 employees. Interestingly, because of the international and religious makeup of the employees, we are required to cook vegan and vegetarian entrées. So, my dilemma was to find a way to prepare flavorful and dairy-free meals.

I am classically trained in French culinary technique, and I never realized that cooking without dairy would be such a challenge. I can't rely on any type of flavorful stock other than vegetarian, so my submersion blender came to the rescue. I found that certain vegetables pureed can take on 'meaty' and 'cheesy' flavors.

My philosophy is that anything tastes good with a yummy sauce on it. I have been able to be creative in ways I had never thought possible before. Additionally, [using the submersion blender] has been a way to cut fat out of other cuisines. The surprising thing about purees is that they allow you to concentrate flavor without concentrating fat and calories. Another nutritional plus is that you can sneak in veggies that people wouldn't ordinarily eat.

JOHN FOLSE, owner and executive chef of **Chef John Folse & Company** in Gonzales, La., proves that the Vita-Prep isn't the only way to cause a stir. He also reaches for the electric food mill.

Although quite a simple implement, the electric food mill makes for an interesting day of creativity in the kitchen. My Tre Spade food mill has been an integral part of my product development for years. It is a specialty item that

allows the cook to combine multiple pureed ingredients into unique flavor components.

Just recently, we combined sweet and hot peppers with freeze-dried herbs to create a component that could then be outsourced to a supplier for processing. Often, multiple pieces of equipment can serve the same purpose; however, I have yet to find a food processor or grinder that creates the same textures of finished products as a mill. It is for this reason that I tend to use it to gain unique flavor characteristics.

CASSANDRA MAS, corporate development chef for **Quantified Marketing Group** in Orlando, Fla., favors the carousel brick oven for churning out hundreds of pizzas in an hour and wood-roasting vegetables.



The carousel brick oven is my new toy. It revolves completely and provides an even cooking surface with an infrared cooking component for unparalleled consistency of flavor and food. It's a very efficient workhorse of a machine that can produce about 250 pizzas an hour.

The oven gives me complete autonomy and control over product that you don't ordinarily find with traditional wood-fired or charcoal ovens. I can concentrate on the way I cook versus what I cook.

We can meet the needs of regional differences for textures and additives to pizza. The real-brick deck imparts char and fully developed flavors to pies and doughs. But more than pizza, we can cook way 'outside the box.' I can sauté gorgeous golden-brown chicken, for one. I can add wood chips and roast ribs, rib-eye steaks and even vegetables. It's also user-friendly; you can establish your own rules for recipes and control the rotation speed of the deck. ☺

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- ▶ **DOUBLE UP:** Combine favorite techniques in a single dish, as in grilled rotisserie chicken on wood-fired focaccia
- ▶ **CROSSOVER COOKERY:** Think brick-oven-roasted fruit, emulsified vegetables and more