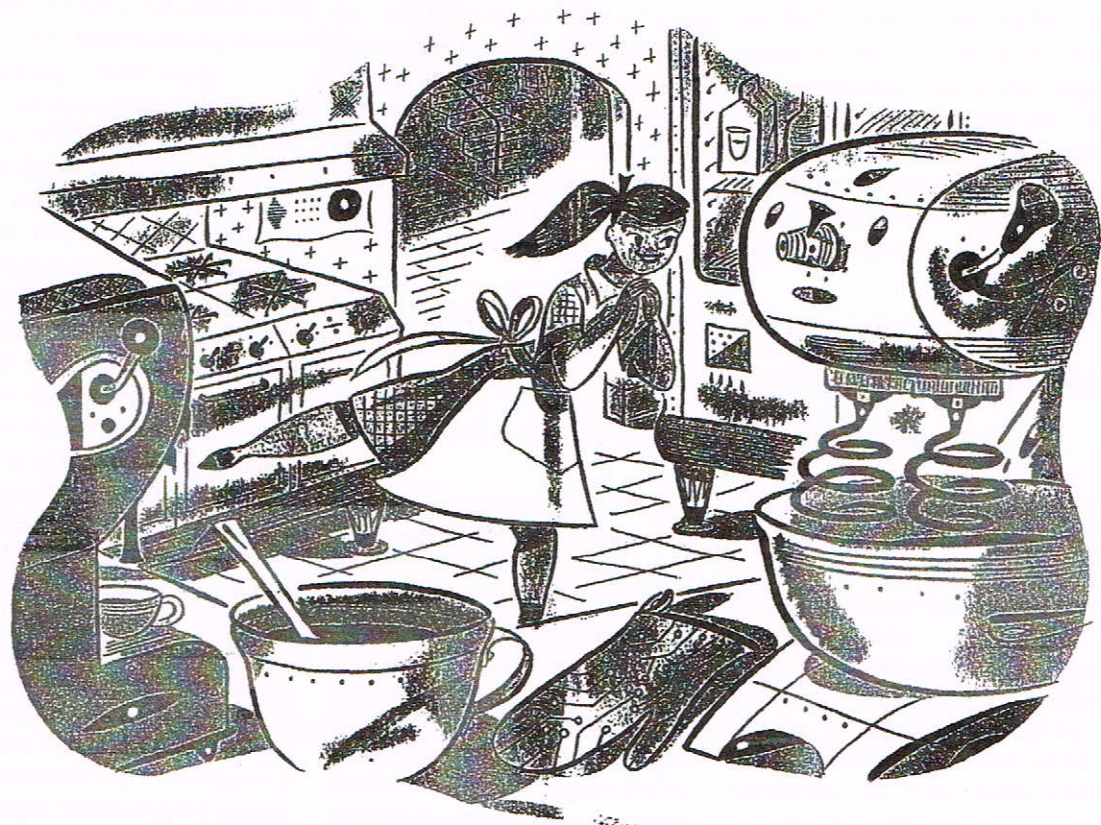


cooking equipment



The High-Tech Kitchen

Soon you may find yourself installing a restaurant-style setup.

But do you really want to cook like a pro? BY PENNY MOSER

About noon every Saturday my husband, Don walks into the kitchen, opens the refrigerator door, stares left, right up and down and then asks—whether anyone is there or not—“Where’s the mayonnaise?” This has been going on for twenty-five years.

There has to be some Mars-Venus, right-brain/left-brain reason men can’t find things in the fridge. A friend of mine—a real man’s man—once suggested that someone invent the Peg-Board refrigerator. You’d open the door and the baloney would just be hanging there, like a hamper.

Maybe the answer for my family, though, comes directly from restaurant kitchens: a Hobart (1) Series refrigerator, with “mobile food files,” shelves that roll out and slide onto a little dolly with casters. My husband could just open the fridge door, transfer its entire contents, and roll the cart over to me so I could point to the mayonnaise.

I’m learning about things like this because I’m toying with expanding my tiny townhouse kitchen. My wonder-kitchen ambitions find me flipping through magazines, doodling on the Net and calling manufacturers. “Hey,”

I think, “I could have a real kitchen. Almost a restaurant kitchen.” And I really mean that, because so much of what will be coming into our homes in the near future is taken from restaurant equipment. This is nothing new—consumers have been buying professional gear, like Viking ranges and Sub-Zero refrigerators, for some time. But these days the number of serious-looking appliances angling for spots in our kitchens is greater than ever before.

For instance, Seattle chef Kathy Casey, owner of a smart consulting firm with its own demo restaurant kitchen

where chefs can play with all the latest technology, thinks I could be a more efficient cook if I had a refrigerated work table. It would help me with my *mise-en-place*, she says. "Huh?" I reply.

"*Mise-en-place* means everything in its place. It's how restaurants throw together dishes so quickly on the line," Casey explains. These work tables (made by Traulsen or Randell, and sold for \$1,000 and up) have refrigerated drawers or doors with stainless steel pans that drop in and lift out. "So you just open the door and there are all the goodies—arugula in one pan, vinaigrette in the next. Why these are not already in more kitchens I don't know," Casey says, adding that the place to put one is "right next to the stove."

Which brings up my stove fantasies. I could buy a restaurant stove for my home. Not only would it cook like a demon, but it would probably outlive me. The downside of a full-size commercial stove is that it would not fit in my kitchen. I might even have to shore up my basement joists. The biggest of these ranges weighs in at 762 pounds.

Probably I'd be better off with one of the many new hybrid ovens that chefs are using lately to speed up production. These ovens cook at top speed, but—unlike microwaves—they give food a crisp, brown exterior. Thermador has a three-in-one oven that combines convection, microwave and radiant heat to knock up to 75% off cooking time. This fall, GE plans to introduce the "Advantium" oven, which uses halogen bulbs and microwaves to speed-cook foods four to five times faster than my oven. It could bake a potato in just six minutes.

Maytag's Jenn-Air has joined forces with TurboChef Technologies, the restaurant-equipment experts, to adapt patented high-speed cooking technology for home use. Their new oven will use microwaves in combination with convection heat, a controlled field of hot air that wraps around the food. These

"opposing energy gradients" will let me roast a three-pound chicken in 21 minutes, and the chicken will still get a nice golden skin. We all buy this and Kenny Rogers will be shaking in his shoes.

Both European and American manufacturers are offering stoves with built-in griddles—such as a showy Japanese teppanyaki grill with a space-age mirrored finish—that I could heat up to sear

Frankly, as exciting as the brute force of all this restaurant equipment may be, I find myself looking forward to a kitchen that can hold up its end of the conversation. I await what might turn out to be my favorite toy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab: the talking oven mitt. Yes, through the miracle of microchips, you'll soon be able to put on your

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meat like a pro. I learned about the griddles from genial Gregg Rowehl, master designer at New York's Commercial Kitchen Design. He also told me about another thing that's just beginning to come out of the restaurant kitchen and into the home: induction cooking. An induction cooktop—stay with me here, class—raises the temperature of any metal that a magnet will stick to (like cast iron) by exposing it to alternating electromagnetic fields. Induction cooking is fast because it directly heats the pot, which in turn heats the food. Another advantage of induction cooking is that it's cool—literally. The pan gets hot, but the kitchen doesn't. In part to take the heat off the chefs, Rowehl recently installed four induction cooktops at Daniel, the New York City restaurant.

With all this fast and furious cooking, I might want a restaurant-style dishwasher to help me clean up. While the whole industry has been high-ending their lines for some time, a true commercial dishwasher, one industry insider told me, "really kicks butt." Some pricey machines (we're talking three grand if you get Champion's top of the line; consumer models are still a few years away) can do a complete cycle in two minutes. This might be wonderful after-dinner entertainment, but I think for me it's overkill.

oven mitt, sit back and watch *Seinfeld* while you wait for a sensor in your stove to radio the mitt, which will then speak up and announce that your beef Wellington's ready.

We'll be seeing lots of chip-implemented appliances in the future. I was dazzled to learn that Frigidaire now has, somewhere in prototype-land, an online refrigerator. With a built-in bar code scanner (like at the grocery checkout), this fridge would let me scan that almost-empty jar of mayonnaise onto a shopping list that gets automatically modemed to the store. Then I could just wait for mayonnaise to be delivered to my door.

This, however, puts one scary cloud upon my horizon. My husband would never need me to find the mayonnaise again. Secure in the knowledge that we had a full supply, he would search with confidence.

That is, of course, until our big, smart, talking fridge weighs in: "Don, what you've just found is a mayonnaise jar. I've been scanning all night and now conclude that this jar contains either Cool Whip or creamed herring. Have a nice day."

How sweet. He'd still need me. ■

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