

DISPLAY KITCHENS: A FEAST FOR THE EYES (PART II)

In the previous installment, we discussed the popularity of display kitchens and the many issues that should be considered to determine whether a display kitchen is desirable for a given operation. For argument's sake, let's say that you did your homework and have determined that a display kitchen is the way to go. You did do your homework ... right? Now we are going to look at some of the features of a well designed display kitchen.

Layers of Activity

The visual impact of a display kitchen is significantly enhanced when there a variety of activity that occurs at different levels of depth perception. In other words ... it looks really cool when there is a whole bunch of stuff going on simultaneously in different parts of the display kitchen. One way to achieve this is to incorporate pieces of equipment with constant activity. Rotisseries, open hearth ovens, charbroilers, and even six-burner ranges are good examples of equipment that have constant activity.

This concept can be taken a step further when the stations are strategically located. For instance, picture a display kitchen with a pick-up counter at the front, an expeditor's station on the chef's side behind that counter, with an island cooking suite behind that (lots of activity there), and an open hearth oven with a constant flickering flame behind that. This layout has the potential for a variety of activity to occur simultaneously, one behind the other. This is the concept of "layers of activity."

How's the View?

The objective of a display kitchen is to prepare food in front of the guest. It would make sense, then, that the display kitchen be located so that it can be easily viewed from the dining room. In certain scenarios it is appropriate for the display kitchen to be visible from as much of the dining room as possible, while in other situations the display kitchen may only be visible from a portion of the dining room. There is no right or wrong answer, rather such a decision depends on the

overall concept. The location of the display kitchen, however, is an important issue that can affect the facility's design and should be addressed early in the design process.

Flow

Yes, I am going to talk about flow ... again. In previous columns, I have addressed the importance of flow within a foodservice facility in depth. Flow is even more important for display kitchens, primarily because the interface between the service staff and kitchen staff occurs in full view of the dining area. Under normal circumstances, this interface can be chaotic at times.

In display kitchens, chaotic conditions simply aren't an option. The service staff and kitchen staff need to meet, but never cross paths. The culinary staff should be able to access all support areas and produce their food without interruption from the servers. The servers, likewise, should be able to access all required areas without having to navigate the culinary staff. Because display kitchens are often divided, with some areas in full view and others concealed, achieving proper flow patterns can be more challenging than in traditional configurations. Proper consideration should be given to the final layout.

A Happy Medium

Display kitchens, due to their intricate planning, configuration, and expense, do not typically provide a great deal of flexibility. Concealed, back-of-house kitchens are better suited for equipment configuration changes or substitutions. So, they can limit flexibility despite their higher costs. Fortunately, there is a happy medium when a display kitchen is desired but the cost and limitations are prohibitive. The answer ... display stations.

Instead of having an entire kitchen in full view of the guest, it is possible to incorporate a remote display station within view from the dining area. The idea behind such a station is to offer the ambiance and interactivity unique to display kitchens, while limiting the expense and increasing the flexibility of the facility. In such a configuration, the main kitchen (i.e. hot and cold production, food pick-up

areas, and service support stations) would remain in the back-of-house. Only a limited amount of production would be in view of the guest.

Dessert stations, for example, are well-suited for such a configuration. Picture a station with one or two culinary team members assembling desserts. Perhaps there is an open hearth oven for baked desserts to offer the constant activity desired. Guests will be able to see the chocolate sauce generously added to each plate and watch the chefs pull fresh baked desserts from the oven. Imagine the smell that would emulate from this station and drift throughout the dining room. Mission accomplished!

Coordination

As we have seen, display kitchens can significantly enhance the dining experience when properly planned and coordinated. Stop and read that word five or six more times ... *coordinated*. Display kitchens require a tremendous amount of coordination, as they feature unparalleled integration of form and function. If a display kitchen is to achieve its desired function, coordination is critical. Every detail must be analyzed and conceptualized. When properly planned, display kitchens can be a feast for the eyes!