

winning equipment

Chefs discover the right piece for the right job. / BY JODY SHEE

Menu success can come down to the tools of the trade. Some pieces of equipment mean the difference between accomplishing a technique or not, or between an average or excellent outcome.

Here, restaurateurs weigh in on the equipment they discovered that has helped their food stand out in some way. Each of these five kitchen wares received a National Restaurant Association (NRA) Kitchen Innovations award in 2012 or 2013.

Alto-Shaam 4.10 ESi CT Express Combitherm oven

When Erick Fisher, head chef for Blue's Egg, Milwaukee, purchased his new 4.10 ESi CT Express Combitherm oven by Alto-Shaam, Menomonee Falls, Wis., earlier this year, he had no idea how it would change his breakfast and lunch operation.

Oven operating modes are steam, convection, a combination of the two, retherm and toasting/finishing. Fisher has found the oven ideal for toasting, melting and browning in conjunction with waffles, pancakes and open-face sandwiches, as well as steaming poached eggs. "We just discovered we can use it as a proofing box for monkey breads," he says. "When we put it on steam mode, it takes one-fourth the time."

Though the restaurant still uses two standard convection ovens, the Combitherm has multiple uses that Fisher is still discovering. "Whenever I think of specials and things we can do, my question is, can we do it in the combi? That's part of our thought process," he says.

He finds efficiency with braising and roasting meats, then using the hose attachment to add water to the pan to make stock. The whole process requires less time, effort and cookware.

The restaurant serves dense stradas, which he precooks and reheats to order. "Before, in a regular oven, it would take 10 minutes to reheat. With the combi oven, it can be done in three to five minutes and stay moist," Fisher says.



The unit also has a browning bar, which eliminates the need for a torch to finish off something like a creme brulee, he adds.

Fisher also appreciates that the oven has a contained hood vent system, so the unit doesn't have to fit under the hood. It is also self-cleaning.

In 2013, Alto-Shaam added more functionality options, including a broiler feature, which mimics a small salamander, and a smoker option.

4.10 ESi CT Express Combitherm oven by Alto-Shaam

PHOTO CREDITS Courtesy of Alto-Shaam; opposite, Courtesy of Betcher Industries, Inc.

Bettcher Optimax Compact Automatic Batter-Breading Machine

Some restaurants, heavy on fried foods, are challenged with batter-breading, and may resort to frozen product, just for consistency. But that won't do in an era when fresh and local ingredients rule the day.

James Walker, chief development officer for Tampa, Fla.-based Beef 'O' Brady's, couldn't seriously consider expanding the chain internationally until he solved the breading issue. The family sports pubs/restaurants offer battered and fried onion rings, pub-style fish and chips and chicken tenders and chunks.

The first international restaurant opened in Saudi Arabia this summer, only after Walker's team found the Optimax Compact Automatic Batter-Breading Machine from Bettcher Industries, Inc., Birmingham, Ohio, which allows staff to feed any type of product through the conveyor, one after another, without having to stop and adjust anything. "It's the simple differential between making and hand-breading verses buying a manufactured product. It pays for the machine in a few months," Walker says.

The business philosophy for the international units is to create more menu items from scratch. "This system is the catalyst of this strategy, which is fresh, local, profitable and competitive," he says. "We have higher sales with lower cost of goods sold."

The breading conveyor belt keeps the batter in motion, effectively mixing it and breaking up dough balls. The belt carries the breading to the top of the conveyor where paddles push the breading over the product, so it is completely coated. Finally, a vibrator shakes off the excess breading, which keeps excess batter from dripping into the frying oil.



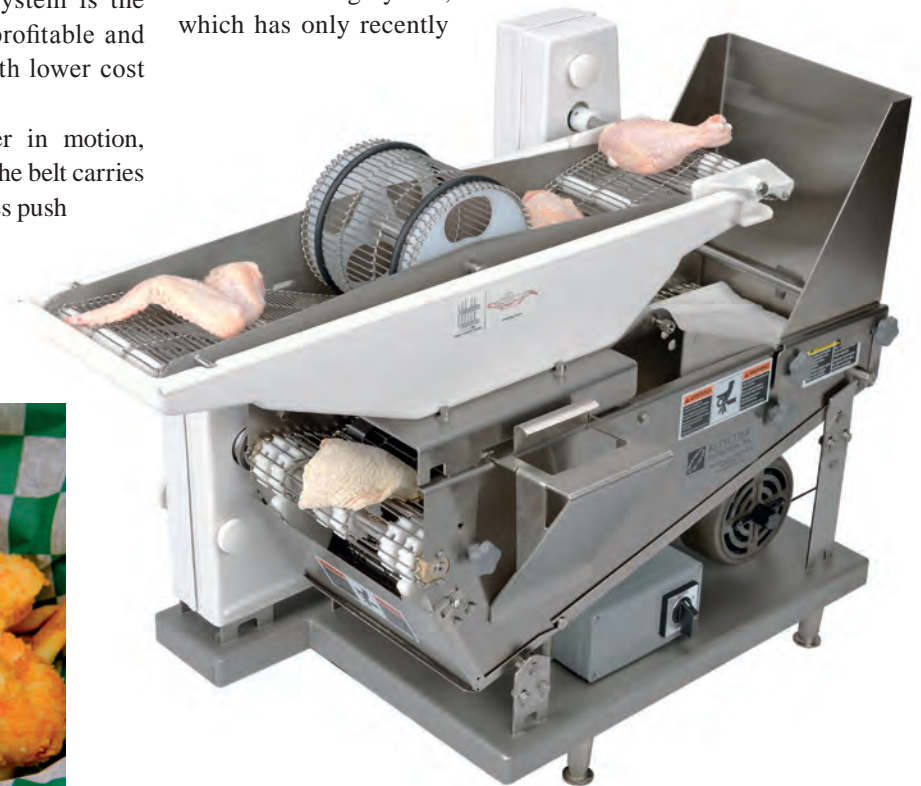
Before opening in Saudi Arabia, Walker told his development team he needed battering equipment that was easy to put together, tear down and operate, and would accommodate different products run through it in a short time span. "I've hand-breaded for years and never had a uniform thin coating like this unit gets," he says, adding that the equipment will be in every unit the chain opens internationally.

Coffea® Vacuum Brewing System

Quality coffee is what coffee importer/roaster Terra Café, Montreal, has built its business around. Yet president/owner Carlo Granito has always been frustrated with the conventional coffee machines on the market, feeling they downgrade the product.

Though Granito doesn't claim to be an engineer or designer, he feels he has a good idea of what coffee should be and how it should be done. So he partnered with Technologies Coffea, Inc., Quebec City, to develop a new coffee maker that would use the right amount of water to extract the best flavors for the right length of time to achieve the best cup of coffee.

The result was the Coffea Vacuum Brewing System, which has only recently



Left to right: Beef 'O' Brady's fried shrimp breaded with the Optimax Compact Automatic Batter-Breading Machine from Bettcher Industries, Inc.; Optimax Compact Automatic Batter-Breading Machine from Bettcher Industries, Inc.



become available in the Canadian market, with the U.S. market just opening.

Per cup, the machine grinds the coffee beans, which fall into a chamber into which hot water flows. It stands for about 20 seconds, then, the machine sucks the concentrated extraction—which is only the best part, Granito says—out of the chamber. With a coffee cup placed beneath two nozzles, the extraction flows into the cup along with pure, hot filtered water.

“It makes the perfect extraction. It’s the best way to extract the best coffee,” he says.

As part of its business, Terra Café has a retail shop where customers can buy coffee products, including a cup of coffee.

Above: Coffea Vacuum Brewing System by Technologies Coffea, Inc.; right: Mirage Induction Soup Rethermalizer from The Vollrath Co., LLC.

Without an explanation to customers, Granito installed the new machine. “People were astonished. They said it had good flavor with no bitterness. It was an amazing experience compared to what they were drinking here before, and the machines we were using before were pretty good. But that machine is blowing people’s minds wherever we place them,” he says.

Vollrath Mirage® Induction Soup Rethermalizer

Harry Ljatifovski, chef/owner of Harry’s Diner, Sheboygan, Wis., serves about 100 cups of soup a day. So he is familiar with the disintegration of quality that happens as soup sits in a traditional soup warmer on a steam table.

“With the lids on them, steam seeps in and causes sweat, which drips on the soup,” he says. Additionally, cream-based and cheese soups become crusty on the sides if they aren’t used frequently.

Then he purchased the Mirage Induction Soup Rethermalizer from The Vollrath Co., LLC, Sheboygan. The induction thermalizers don’t use water to heat, so there’s no steam. He marvels that he can set the unit to the temperature at which he wants to hold the soup, so it never burns, and the sides don’t become crusty, he says.

The soup rethermalizer comes in two sizes, 7 and 11 quarts. Ljatifovski has the 11-quart unit, though he believes the 7-quart unit would be perfect for chefs who want to use it to hold sauces. “Some sauces break at certain temperatures. With this, a chef could adjust it and keep the sauce, as in fresh hollandaise sauce, at a temperature that will never break,” he says.





Vollrath designed the soup rethermalizer with three temperature monitors to provide accurate temperatures and to indicate when it's time to stir. It has presets for soup, chili and macaroni and cheese. It heats to a temperature of 165°F, then switches to a holding temperature set by the user.

Ljatifovski planned to purchase another soup rethermalizer for his new restaurant, Harry's Prohibition Bistro, which was to open in August.

Zip Zester

Seattle chef, author and restaurateur Tom Douglas found a zester that is so fast and efficient that he can eliminate at least two bartenders for a 2,500-person cocktail party/dinner. "That pays for the unit that one night," he says, referring to the Zip Zester by Zip Zester, LLC, Bellevue, Wash. Bartenders used to adding an orange peel or zest of lemon to a cocktail glass can now dress it up more, making designs with longer peels, he says.

The Zip Zester adheres to a table or countertop with a suction base and comes with a micro-blade for zesting and a big twist blade to make twist garnishes. It zests nearly all the fruit's surface in 10 seconds, avoiding the bitter white pith. The company launched the product at the NRA show in May 2012.

It only takes Douglas' pastry team a fraction of the time it used to take to make marmalade or a pungent lemon curd that uses zest. "My team also uses it on potatoes to make quick curly fries. There's nothing wrong with it. It's even easy to clean," he says. Besides potato fries, he sees an application for fried beets and fried sweet potato fries.

Currently, he is experimenting with making and drying lemon peels to make his own lemon powder, which he previously purchased. "It will show up in my spice rubs to add a bounce of lemon," he says.

Because of the Zip Zester, he's been able to improve the taste of his lemon salmon sausage with the addition of more lemon zest. His ability to more easily zest limes has improved his pork and crab sausage. "My mind starts going through a list of how I can use zest," Douglas says. ■

JODY SHEE, AN OLATHE, KAN.-BASED FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR, PREVIOUSLY WAS EDITOR OF A FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE. SHE HAS MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF FOOD-WRITING EXPERIENCE AND WRITES THE BLOG WWW.SHEEFOOD.COM.

LEARN MORE

- **4.10 ESi CT Express Combitherm** oven by **Alto-Shaam**, Menomonee Falls, Wis. www.alto-shaam.com
- **Optimax Compact Automatic Batter-Breading Machine** from **Bettcher Industries, Inc.**, Birmingham, Ohio www.bettcher.com
- **Coffea Vacuum Brewing System** by **Technologies Coffea, Inc.**, Quebec City coffea-usa.com
- **Mirage Induction Soup Rethermalizer** from **The Vollrath Co., LLC**, Sheboygan, Wis. www.vollrath.com
- **Zip Zester** by **Zip Zester, LLC**, Bellevue, Wash. www.zipzester.com

Above: Zip Zester by Zip Zester, LLC