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A GREAT FIT

Hoteliers face the tricky task of continually upgrading their kitchens with equipment that are functional and cost-efficient without unduly burdening their balance sheet

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

An important aspect that defines a hotel's reputation and the business it draws is the kind of food it serves. Naturally, since kitchens have become an important area, hoteliers are now focusing how on ways to ensure that the equipment in these spaces is effective and efficient.

Talking about the equipment that is most integral in the kitchen, Subrao Hati, corporate chef, VITS Hotels Worldwide said, "The gas range is the powerhouse of the kitchen, so it is important to choose one that meets both your cooking and aesthetic needs. These make it easier to judge heat and change from high to low faster than their electric counter parts."

At the same time, freezers and refrigerators are an inseparable part when it comes to setting up a kitchen. A commercial kitchen is all about menu planning and optimum usage of all resources and that is where refrigeration plays an impor-

tant role to increase the shelf life of all the ingredients and preparations. This in turn increases the profitability of the kitchen.

Subhadeep Datta, general manager of Goldfinch Hotel in Mumbai added that currently they are using equipment like high-end Alto-Sham and bakery ovens. "We are in the process to upgrade our bakery oven for the better quality of work as this will ensure highly efficient and uniform baking," he said.

According to Anthony Huang, the newly appointed executive chef of Sheraton Grand Hotel, Brigade Gateway, Bengaluru, dough mixers, dishwashers and most importantly, the fire fighting system that is installed in their hotel's exhaust hoods are few of the critical equipment that keeps their guests and associates safe. And that is crucial—safety as well as efficiency while at work.

NEW VISTAS

Gopal Jha, executive chef, Grand Mer-

cure Bangalore explained that a good commercial kitchen needs industrial grade equipment that will stand its tough schedule. The design and layout of the kitchen should allow food to flow seamlessly from the preparation area to dispensing line. Sometimes a new restaurant has a fabulous location, but if it has a small kitchen space, it can be a recipe for disaster.

"The ideal way to plan an upgrade or expansion of a kitchen is according to the cuisine served at the restaurant. This would allow proper equipment selection, spacing, and determination of capacity. A good kitchen design and proper menu-planning spare you from facing many future problems," Jha added.

Thermomix by Vorwerk is a critical, though simple, kitchen equipment that Roseate House is currently using and it plans to upgrade to the latest version that has a touch screen for convenience. "You have to keep upgrading kitchen

equipment with the latest technology to keep up with competition. Coming to aesthetics, we procure the equipment in sync with our hotel interiors, design and standards," said Anuj Wadhawan, executive sous chef, Roseate House.

"For the last few months our R&D team is working on a dosa maker, since dosa making is an art that South Indian chefs have mastered. We are trying to reach a level with this dosa maker (which is partly manual), where anybody can make a dosa following a basic level of instruc-



➔ Chef Nishesh Seth, executive chef, Le Meridien Goa Calangute.

tions. As we have a chain of restaurants, the basic objective of designing such equipment is to have consistency all over the brand and better utilisation of manpower," said Hati.

Huang added that most of the equipment that comes in today are energy-efficient and have additional features and programmes that allows chefs to control moisture, time, quantum of heat and even speed of mixing. "These can be programmed to suit the requirements of the recipe. They also look much better and fit in well to assigned spaces. Additionally, newer equipment invariably has built-in safety mechanisms that protect the user as well as the organisation's human and mechanical assets," he added.

UPGRADE MATTERS

A poorly planned kitchen results in high payroll, slow production, unhappy kitchen staff, and dissatisfied guests. "We are thinking of adding the Pacojet Ice Cream Unit to our existing equipment for easy and quick ice cream production, since we make own ice creams at the property. This is to adhere to our policy of offering food made from the freshest ingredients. Additionally, we are also looking at

acquiring the Excalibur Drying Unit for dehydrating the fruits and vegetables utilised in the kitchen," said Chef Ravish Mishra, executive sous chef, The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat.

A good kitchen design needs to be energy efficient to help reduce the cooking, heating, and cooling costs. The biggest and most common problems are found in the heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system of the kitchen.

Navin Kumar, executive chef of Radisson Blu, Paschim Vihar said, "Thanks to latest technology and awareness, manufacturers are coming up with sleek, but sturdy commercial state-of-the-art equipment that are well designed, environment friendly, energy-efficient. There are few international parameters to look for like, EU energy label that measures the degree of the energy usage. For refrigerators, the rating usually comes in the form of A+ or A++ depending on the capacity."

MAKING ROOM

While planning to upgrade or expand the kitchen, hoteliers need to keep several factors in mind, balancing aesthetics with functionality. A strong design will ensure that the kitchen runs smoothly and effi-



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ciently and for this the key lies in planning well in advance of the service opening time.

“We all know that we need great staff, solid equipment and a chef who knows what they are doing, but a vital part of operation is the design of commercial kitchen. Both food and non-food commodities need to be kept in a place that is free from contamination and in the right temperature, depending upon the product. Likewise, whether you are processing a fillet of fish or you are chopping tomatoes, it is vital to segregate different types of food during prep and as well as storing,” said Hati.

The front of the house staff should have rapid and safe access to the pass (pick up counter) without disrupting the kitchen flow. Another aspect to consider are after-service and continuous rolling of crockery, cutlery and glasses, which will help in rapid service in the restaurant.

Emanuela Tavolini, director of sales,



➔ Navin Kumar, executive chef of Radisson Blu, Paschim Vihar.



➔ Gopal Jha, executive chef, Grand Mercure Bangalore.

Europe, Graff explained that her company develops kitchen products to satisfy any request coming from the hospitality sector. “The Sospiro collection for the kitchen, for example, is offered as a single hole and as a bridge option to suit a contemporary style as well as a more transitional style. Furthermore, it is available in a smaller version to suit the bar area.”

NOW TRENDING

The smart kitchen may not be a new concept in the food industry because a lot of food companies are now using equipment, which are all functioning with the latest technologies. Hoteliers are now looking at smart appliances from ware washers and ventilation systems to oven and refrigerators that do self-diagnostics and track performance.

“In 2018, some of the latest trends which will gain popularity will be sous vide and quick chilling ice cream units as well as evaporators. Equipment related to molecular gastronomy is also gaining momentum,” opined Mishra.

Ovens with self-cleaning system are also expected to be common. “Business owners are realising that multi-utility machines are revolutionising the kitchen experience and changing the way commercial kitchens should function. However, as the machines come at a onetime heavy cost, thus the hotel management needs

to analyse and justify its long-term utility and return on investment,” said Datta.

WiFi and internet-enabled kitchen equipment are trending. Some companies also have kitchen equipment apps where you can file complaints, look for recipes and other functions. Smart kitchens, colour-coded cabinet, streamlined designs, effective storage solutions, modern appliances and single-level multipurpose kitchen islands are other key trends.

“Now that the open kitchen concept and front-of-house prep have become commonplace, you will see a lot of visually appealing equipment showing up. This includes ovens and fryers in bright colours as well as sleek touchscreens replacing knobs and buttons. In terms of size, you do not have to go for traditional sizing any longer. It seems like the sky is the limit with variety,” said Jha.

In fact, he predicts that this year larger kitchen islands will come to the forefront. These will have storage solution cabinets and be fitted with various under-counter appliances while also providing seating—serving as a casual dining and/or drinking bar. To accommodate the increased size, we are seeing a tendency for the kitchen island to extend into living room spaces in homes with open plan designs. This ensures the kitchen island can be multi-functional without cluttering up space in the kitchen.



➔ A good kitchen design needs to be energy efficient to help reduce the cooking, heating, and cooling costs.



➔ The criteria for selecting suppliers are important as there are different types of suppliers in the market for different products.



➔ Ravish Mishra, executive sous chef, The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat.



➔ Subrao Hati, corporate chef, VIST Hotels Worldwide.

STRIKING A BALANCE

While keeping an eye on the functionality, hoteliers also need to ensure that the cost element is kept under control, especially during procurement, long time usage and maintenance. All this has a bearing on the capital expense.

“For most of the equipment we buy, aesthetics is not our priority. Our chefs need to be comfortable, while the machine’s effectiveness and durability as well as its cost are also borne in mind,” opined Datta. The common denominator for maintaining the most expensive appliances is simply the act of cleaning them efficiently. Chef Nishesh Seth, executive chef, Le Meridien Goa Calangute averred, “While procuring new equipment, I read up on trends, discuss products with my peers for industry feedback and also visit industry expos to get a better understanding about them. I also take an active interest in understanding its

durability, after-sales service, access and availability of spare parts, training and demos for my handlers by the manufacturing company is factored in before the final purchase is made.”

VENDOR SELECTION

Naturally, the criteria for selecting suppliers for kitchen equipment products and solutions are important as there are different types of suppliers available in the market for different products. “Choosing the suppliers who can meet your consumers’ demand for higher-quality products may bring some increase in initial costs, but it will pay off over time through consistent, high-grade quality. However, the process of finding the ideal supplier is often not easy and requires discipline and hard work,” advised Jha.

While suppliers are associated with big brands, there are others who manufacture and assemble equipment locally. Ho-

teliers prefer to work with suppliers who are open to suggestions and are able to design the equipment as per their requirements. “Usually, we prefer to continue with existing suppliers. However, while choosing a new supplier, we keep in mind a couple of things, like reliability and responsiveness, timely delivery, market and industry certification, and product quality for the price offered,” said Datta.

While outlining the criteria his company keeps in mind, Wadhawan added, “We look at their association with renowned brands, their technical know-how and their ability to deliver all the international latest kitchen equipment within the required time frame.”

SPACE SAVERS

After procuring the equipment, the optimum usage depends on the location where it is placed. To ensure the equipment is placed in the right location, it is best to refer to the master kitchen design. Although every kitchen comes with their own challenges, the this blueprint ensures all the equipment are placed ergonomically.

“The equipment should also be placed considering the chef and other kitchen staffs’ easy movement across the workstations. It should be strategically placed keeping in mind the heating and cooling appliances as well as the area’s ventilation,” Datta stated.

Ventilation, in fact, is a key factor in equipment selection and kitchen design. Equipment such as hearth ovens, rotisserie ovens woks might bring excitement to a display kitchen, but they often require heavy ventilation. Many kitchens now feature induction cooktops and ventless fryers and grills to balance the exhaust demands. “The basic principle of ergonomic design calls for employees to expend the least amount of energy to complete the most tasks in the shortest amount of time. An under-counter freezer, for example, must be placed right beside the deep fryer. This allows the fry cook to retrieve foods and place them in the fryer with little effort. The chef doesn’t even have to take a step,” said Jha.

With such science built into the design, development and procurement and placement, the culinary staff is free to rustle up a storm. And when they are not breaking into a sweat, it’s a good time to ask them, “What’s cooking?” 