



# Hand on heart

Associate FCSI member **John Reed** assesses the real meaning of handcrafted in today's foodservice and how consultants can help culinary teams deliver the goods

**T**he concept of handcrafted food is being used as an advertising slogan and has me somewhat confused, especially as the trend in foodservice is for less labor and more efficient equipment. The term implies chefs and artisans, hand-forming, processing and preparing food without the aid of complex tools. It begs the question of what does handcrafted mean in the modern foodservice operation?

Throughout the history of professional cooking we can see an evolution of tools and food processing equipment. These innovations have improved production and created consistency, while improving the quality of the chef's day-to-day life behind the stove. Chefs have always looked for ways to make things more efficient, from the changing of the chef knife from carbon to stainless steel to the use of silicon for our tart molds. We have moved from single process, fossil-fuel-fired stoves to multi-tasking combi ovens. Is the use of modern materials or efficient equipment a step away from food cooked from scratch?

## Keeping control

Sous-vide cooking and the use of rapid-cook technology has grown to improve the consistency of the food being presented and an expedited guest experience. These advancements are great from the business aspect, but has there been a negative effect on the customer's perception of the food they are being

served if it is heated and served from a bag? There is a movement in Europe to move away from sous-vide prepared food in commercial foodservice operations and back to food cooked à la minute from raw ingredients. There is a renewed shift to the philosophy of starting with minimally processed ingredients being brought to the receiving door.

It is not necessarily just the removal of technology – starting from great ingredients is the fundamental idea of handcrafted food. Handcrafted is not about chefs going back to the days of the chef knife and the hours of laborious preparation, it is more about the concept of making and processing the ingredients, which are all under the cook's control. Mayonnaise can be bought or it can be made from methodically sourced fresh ingredients. Handcrafted denotes the commitment to handle those ingredients with respect. It is the use of the latest technology to preserve their integrity and intelligent preparation to benefit not only the guest but also for the financial success of the operation.

In a handcrafted kitchen, the culinary team is committed to making the foundation of its cuisine from stocks to table condiments rather than a high-quality commercial product. The passion of the handcrafted kitchen is to purchase the ingredients separately to make their own. However, in today's economic environment it makes sense to prepare it with efficient equipment. Handcrafted is

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more about culinary philosophy. It is the preserving and control of the ingredients to its final preparation.

## Multi tasking

What effect does this have on how we consult on and design a kitchen space? The reality is that kitchens aren't getting any bigger but the need to produce more items within the space is becoming more apparent. It requires a pragmatic shift to design and equipment decisions that allow multi-function equipment and preparation areas. A work zone can become a temp-controlled butchers station in the morning, sanitized and converted to a garde manger or pastry station for evening service.

Consumers demand quality products, so our role as foodservice consultants is to create a modern environment that allows the culinary team to fuel their passion for handcrafted food that makes economic and environmental sense. ■

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