

## CHEF SUITES: *More Than Just a Pretty Base*

By Russell L. Bean, CFSP

**Y**es, chef suites are beautiful. Some are near works-of-art and monuments to craftsmanship in stainless steel. Like a sexy Italian sports car, they promise speed, precise handling and exquisite styling - with a sticker price to match. With the on-going interest in all things cooking, and the resulting open-kitchen craze, we can (and I have) waxed poetically about how a chef island suite is the ultimate showcase, stage and work platform for the cooking arts. While form sometimes trumps function in expensive cars, the recent growth and popularity of chef suites is based on practical, justifiable improvements in kitchen performance, comfort and better communications.

Chefs understand the importance of saving time and reducing unnecessary movement in a busy kitchen. Wasted steps and wasted motion not only waste time, they can lead to accidents, food waste, marginal meals, personnel conflicts and more stress. Chefs also

understand the importance of good communication between cooks, chefs and even the wait staff. Open kitchens and sweet suite layouts foster improved communications and team building.

A well designed and equipped suite can even augment or improve food safety, with their easy to clean seamless tops, ready access to under-counter refrigerated or frozen storage and the growing popularity of integrated sinks. While nothing can eliminate the challenge of preparing 200 covers on a busy Saturday night, a well planned custom kitchen suite can make the job a bit easier and even fun.

Adding to the appeal of custom range suites is the recent expansion of providers, an explosion of new component options and fundamental improvements in the base equipment.

### The Basic Building Blocks

Heavy-duty modular ranges are the basic building blocks of custom range suites. While lighter-duty restaurant

ranges can be abutted and out-fitted with various range top and oven combinations, heavy-duty modular ranges are all 34- or 36-inches wide and designed to be bolted together to form continuous cooking platforms. Each top section can be specified with the chef's choice of open burners, solid hot tops, graduated hot tops or French tops, griddles or planchas.

Even a single range section can include a combination of those tops. For example, Hayward, California-based The Montague Company's Legend heavy-duty ranges are available with 24 different standard top configurations. Typically, all those top configurations can be mounted on a conventional oven or a convection oven base. If storage is needed, range tops can be mounted on cabinet bases (with or without doors) with shelving for pots, pans and non-perishable ingredients.

Additional storage can be added above the range by specifying one or two back riser-mounted shelves. Close-at-hand under-counter refrigerated storage can be added. For example, Montague (Legend Extreme Cuisine™) and Jade (Fire & Ice™) have low-profile refrigerated bases designed to support countertop versions of their heavy-duty range lines.

Heavy-duty range suites can also be ordered with range-match fryers and broilers, to provide additional cooking capabilities. These units have the same look, front rail and work height; and in the case of a charbroiler, can be mounted on another oven or cabinet base. Cheesemelters or salamander broilers can be wall or back riser mounted above one or more range sections, for additional cooking and warming capabilities in the same footprint.

When more prep area is needed, a 12- to 24-inch spreader section with a

stainless steel worktop can be added between range sections.

A linear heavy-duty range battery can deliver most of the multi-function versatility of an island suite. However, they often foster crowded work conditions with multiple chefs sharing range burners, limited room for prep and plating, cross-traffic in narrow aisles and difficult communications, despite the close quarters. Under those conditions, a basic range battery is certainly not as showy, with chefs forced to show their backs in any open kitchen setting.

### Suite Planning Makes It Custom

Heavy-duty ranges offer plenty of design options for a linear cooking battery, but like their water-bound namesake, island suites are unique and require careful planning to maximize results and satisfaction, while minimizing installation hassles. Chef island suites have unique ventilation and utility requirements. They need a special hood to cover the entire cooking island that will meet all ventilation and fire safety codes. The hood must provide reliable capture of all effluents and eliminate any odor issues in that open kitchen environment. In addition, that hood system should be attractive and designed to enhance that expensive cooking stage.

The trick with electric, gas, water and drain utilities is keeping them hidden and unobtrusive. In new construction and major remodels they are often brought up from below. If they need to drop down from the ceiling, they can be hidden in shelf supports or flue risers.

Fortunately, chef island suite manu-



Vulcan V-Series  
Heavy Duty Range  
Chef Suite



Bonnet-Maestro  
Chef Island Suite



facturers and kitchen design professionals have the knowledge, experience and tools to both configure the suite package and make it fit and function within space and building constraints. Today's more sophisticated computer assisted design (CAD) programs can do 3-D modeling of proposed layouts and some can provide a "virtual walk-around" of the proposed layout, which can help avoid expensive on-site problems.

### More Suite Sources

There was a time when if you wanted a full-blown chef island suite you had to look overseas to a select group of European manufacturers that would include Bonnet Grande Cuisine (France) and Molteni (Italy). After all, the origin of the word *suite* is French, and the origin of the concept of organizing and consolidating multiple cooking, warming, prep and storage capabilities in a single area, probably French and certainly European.

As the demand for full-blown chef island suites grew, a select group of higher-end range manufacturers led by Brea, California-based Jade Range and The Montague Company aggressively promoted their custom chef island suites capabilities. Using their Titan and Legend modular heavy-duty range lines as the basic building blocks, Jade was first to incorporate the European-style griddle or plancha in their suite designs, offering both Spanish and French variants. Montague followed suit and introduced five plancha variants to their Legend range top options.

In recent years the number of North American range manufacturers offering chef suites has grown. Several years ago Viking Range decided to expand from their high-end residential range stronghold into commercial food service equipment, establishing Viking Commercial. Today Viking offers a full line of self-standing ranges and chef suites complete with your choice of ovens, open burners, hot tops, French tops and even a plancha. They also offer refrigerated or freezer bases, sinks and a bain marie.

Their commercial line has a clean classy look, but also boasts some unique equipment including a cantilever-mounted, open-sided, infrared heated salamander and cheesemelter that helps maintain line-of-sight and an open design look.

Vulcan, in Louisville, Kentucky, has just completed a major overhaul of their Heavy Duty Range Line now offered as the V-Series. Like many H-D range lines they have 36-inch wide units, but also offer 12-, 18-, 24- and 48-inch modules; with a choice of cabinet bases, standard ovens, convection ovens, chef finishing ovens, refrigerated bases and modular models. They build their top sections independently from the range base, which allows for tailor-made mix-and-match combinations, perfect for building custom suites.

The V-Series is tailor-made for open kitchens and chef island suites, with a sexy new look that features an angular design, high polish knobs and handles, plus a matte finish front manifold cover. For even more battery versatility, the V-Series is available with range-match charbroilers and fryers, plus an oven-mounted upright infrared broiler and that requisite plancha.

### New Suite Options Add Value & Versatility

The list of available chef suite options is long and getting longer, as chefs trade notes, share ideas and push the boundaries of conventional equipment thinking. Those European-style griddles called planchas are now



## Suite Dreams DO Come True!

Perfectly timed for our article on Chef Island Suites, The Montague Company announced the winner of their "Suite Dreams Design Challenge"

at the 2011 North American Foodservice Equipment Manufacturers Association (NAFEM) Show, which was held in Orlando, Florida on February 10-12, 2011.

Not only did they announce the winner from a select group of six semi-finalists, they unveiled the actual winning suite, fully assembled and the centerpiece of their show booth display.

The award-winning design team included executive chef Shannon Galusha of Bastille Café & Bar and designer Chris McKenty of the Smith & Greene Company in Kent, Washington. After serving as booth eye-candy, this impressive suite package (valued at over \$200,000) was headed to Bastille Café & Grill, which is located in one of the burgeoning mixed use corridors near downtown Seattle, Washington. Built in a sensitively restored warehouse space, their new Montague Chef Suite will be the focal point of this new 3,500 square-foot restaurant and lounge.

The prize winning suite design was chosen by a blue-ribbon panel of operators, culinary educators and designers, so it is no surprise that the Bastille Café chef suite is innovative and cutting edge. While it includes the basic building blocks: five Montague Legend heavy-duty ranges, a gas fryer, salamander broiler and seven under-counter refrigerated bases supporting same; there is nothing basic about this expanded "X-wing" layout.

The equipment package includes two custom immersion tanks equipped with PolyScience Sous Vide Thermal Circulators. The equipment package also includes a JB Prince/Pacojet Sorbet Machine and PolyScience Anti-Griddle, which uses glycol to instantly freeze sauces, toppings, candy and other creative concoctions.

It also includes plenty of cabinet-mounted sinks and faucets, including dipperwells for sanitizing utensils. This creatively equipped dream-suite should make it easy for Chef Galusha to dazzle Seattle diners with a wide variety of modern cuisine, and enhance their fashionable, upscale environment. (For a complete list of Suite Dreams contest finalists and the judging panel, visit [www.montague.com/suitedreams](http://www.montague.com/suitedreams).)

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# CHEF SUITES:

## More Than Just a Pretty Base

available from many stateside manufacturers. Drop-in induction tops are sharing space with gas range burners and sinks are migrating from prep areas to the suite.

Gas is still king for most to-order cooking but the electro-magnetic magic of induction cooking has earned its place in the chef suite, as well as out in the banquet hall and on the buffet-line. Induction units are a

great way to sauté single portions of pasta, prepare and hold heat-sensitive sauces, melt butter and more. Induction tops are being integrated into the largest chef island suites. Single or twin-hob drop-in induction units can be strategically flush-mounted in chef suite work tops.

For more induction production Electrolux Professional offers a Full Surface Induction Range as part of their S90 range battery. The S90 has four adjustable temperature zones, each powered by a 5-kW induction coil. With a big, one-piece 33-inch by 29-inch deep solid surface top, up to 16 small pots or sauté pans can be grouped and heated simultaneously.

Sinks and faucets of various sizes are being incorporated into chef suite prep and plating areas to provide water for cooking and doing quick cleanups. In open kitchen settings, a clean work area is even more critical.

### Suite Manufacturers Embrace OEM Options

There was a time when a manufacturer would be reluctant to integrate equip-

ment from another manufacturer into their custom suite. Today manufacturers are more customer-centric. If you want to include another brand of finishing oven, charcoal broiler or induction top in your chef suite, they are happy to oblige. After all, these custom equipment packages can cost as much as a Lamborghini; and chefs that can afford the ride know exactly what they

want and expect to get it.

The chef suite that took-the-prize in Montague's "Suite Dreams Design Challenge" (See sidebar: Suite Dreams DO Come True!) is a perfect example, incorporating high-tech sous vide and anti-griddle technology from Niles, Illinois-based PolyScience and a Pacojet Sorbet Machine from JB Prince.



## Manufacturers directory

### •Bonnet

(914) 793-9000 (East);  
(916) 361-9500 (West)  
www.bonnetusa.com

### •Electrolux Professional

(866) 449-4200  
www.electroluxusa.com

### •Jade Range

(714) 961-2400  
www.jaderange.com

### •JB Prince

(800) 473-0577  
www.jbprince.com

### •PolyScience

(800) 229-7569  
www.cuisinetechology.com

### •Molteni/Electrolux

(866) 449-4200  
www.electroluxusa.com

### •The Montague Company

(800) 345-1830  
www.montaguecompany.com

### •Viking Commercial

(877) 307-8877  
www.vikingcommercial.com

### •Vulcan

(866) 988-5226  
www.vulcanhart.com

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