

Equipment

All steamed up

Say the word “steamer” front-of-house, and you’re referring to a soft-shell clam. Say “steamer” back-of-house, and you’re talking about one of the most-used pieces of cooking equipment.

There are two basic types of steamers. In **convection** (or pressureless) steamers, a fan circulates the hot steam throughout the unit to cook. **Pressure** steamers allow the steam to build up in the chamber to cook the food more quickly. Both types of steamers are available in gas- or electric-powered models.

Many steamers currently available are “connectionless”—boiling water is poured into a reservoir in the bottom for the steaming process. Alternatively, some machines produce steam by heating water pulled in from an outside line.

When buying steamers, look for the Energy Star label. David Zabrowski, Director of Engineering for the Food Service Technology Center in San Ramon, California, says the difference “can be huge. A standard steamer can cost three times more in utility charges than the Energy Star.”

HOBART CE20FD COMBI OVEN

Larger stand-alone steamers often

All steamers need regular maintenance to keep deposit buildup to a minimum and prevent unwanted flavors coming through in the steam. “Even if water quality is good, you’re putting water into a harsh environment which helps precipitate substances. Regular deliming and cleaning is absolutely critical,” adds Zabrowski.

FULL STEAM AHEAD

The countertop steamer is a space-saving workhorse, ideal for moderate volume operations. The average unit holds three to five full-size hotel pans, although there are smaller models to accommodate one-third size pans. Most models have optional stands.

The Cleveland Steam Chef line offers an optional rack to facilitate stacking. The line also features an energy-saving system that calculates steam production by type and amount of food. An electric countertop model, the Vulcan C24EA, has a timed drain system with a “power flush” to make cleaning easier.



**HENNY PENNY
SMART COMBI**

have multiple cooking compartments and come installed on a rack or atop a cabinet base. The compartments allow for food to be cooked at different temperatures. The larger capacity of these units makes them ideal for higher-volume operations. For example, the Blodgett DS-SC convection

steamer features two ovens and holds up to 10 full-size hotel pans.

COMBI COOKING

For more flexibility, you might consider a combi oven, which combines convection heat with steam to cook food. “Combi ovens have come a long way,” says Zabrowski, “and many of them are better at steam cooking than they may have been initially.” Henny Penny’s SpaceSaver SmartCombi model has a compact footprint yet holds five two-thirds size pans. At the other end, the CE20FD Boilerless Combi Oven from Hobart holds up to 40 tall hotel pans.

—TOM O'BRIEN



**CLEVELAND
STEAMCHEF 3**

SELECTED THREE-PAN COUNTERTOP STEAMERS AT A GLANCE

Manufacturer/model	Dimensions (H x W x D)	Power source	Features
AccuTemp S3 Steam 'N' Hold	21 by 23.25 x 28 in.	Electric	3-gal. water reservoir; 90-min. timer
Blodgett Synergy SB Series	23.9 by 21.8 by 30.1 in. (dimensions for electric model)	Electric or gas	Field-reversible doors; easy-open handle and latch
Cleveland SteamChef 3	25.6 by 21.6 by 34.4 in. (dimensions for gas model)	Electric or gas	Drain line temperature reduction system; automatic water fill and drain
Hobart HC24EA	23 by 24 by 33 in.	Electric	Professional control package with “smart” drain system
Vulcan C24EA3	22 by 24 by 33 in.	Electric	235°F. high-energy steam; constant steam feature