




A wood-burning paella stove custom-built by Jimi Yui serves as the fiery focal point of Jose Andrés' Jaleo, crowned by a mammoth Gaylord ventilation system.





# *Naughty* **DESTINATION** *Rice* **KITCHENS**

**FAVORITE GEAR** THE MARKETING MAY BE RISQUÉ, BUT THE WELL EQUIPPED KITCHENS AT THE COSMOPOLITAN SUGGEST A SERIOUS FOOD DESTINATION. MERRILL SHINDLER REPORTS. PHOTOS BY JEFF GREEN. ➤



If it's true, as the pundits have suggested, that **The Cosmopolitan** is Las Vegas' last hurrah—the last great resort-casino to open on The Strip—then Sin City is going out with a culinary cry of magnificent proportions. For though The Cosmopolitan has been positioning itself as a naughty destination, with “just the right amount of wrong”—a hotel where a history of the Japanese pillow book sits on the stand next to your bed, for goodness sake!—it's also a place for foodies, a resort dominated by restaurants with edgy chefs like **José Andrés**, **Scott Conant**, **Costas Spiliadis**, and **David Myers**.

Their restaurants are all about the food, with little concern for whether their diners are attired in tie-and-jacket. And restaurants that are all about the food are also all about their kitchens. Which is why the kitchens of The Cosmopolitan are some of the sharpest in Las Vegas, with some of the snappiest equipment. We asked the chefs in each what piece of equipment they couldn't live without. The answers range from the sublimely expensive...to the ridiculously inexpensive. Indispensable, every one of them.

**Jaleo:** The Cosmopolitan is home to two restaurants from **Ferran Adrià** acolyte Jose Andrés—**China Poblano** (Chinese-Mexican) and **Jaleo** (tapas). How upscale is the kitchen at Jaleo? According to kitchen designer Jimi Yui, one of his assignments was to create a custom-built paella stove—a wood-burning paella stove!—inside a casino. “That was really cool,” says Yui. “I

got paella lessons from José. He told me he wanted to replicate the rustic paella stoves of Valencia. They're just a couple of metal rods on top of twigs on fire. I had to build something like that in a hotel, with the fire marshal and the health department breathing down my neck. We wanted to be able to cook paella over wood. It's like a 10 foot diameter object. It's a beautiful thing. His cooks are all going to have to learn to cook on this thing, just like they have in Spain for hundreds of years.”

It sits in the middle of the main dining room at Jaleo—five iron rings, a pile of wood stored in the middle, a giant Gaylord ventilation system overhead. Atop each iron ring sits a full-sized paella pan with wood burning underneath. There are normally four types of paella cooking—one with lobster, one with chicken and rabbit, one with seasonal vegetables, and one with the ribs of the famous black-footed *Ibérico de bellota* pig.

“You cannot find anything like this outside of Spain,” explains **Ruben Garcia**, culinary director of Andrés' many restaurants. “Even in Spain they rarely do it this way anymore. This is unique. The hood alone cost a million dollars; the setups for the paella pans underneath were maybe another million.

“For a true paella, you cook everything separately—the protein, the vegetables, the rice. We stir the rice with wooden paddles, very handsome. We found them on the Internet. The rice is Santo Tomas Arroz Bomba, a short-grained rice, the very best. We go through a lot of saffron, a fortune in saffron.



Quixotic Quest: Executive sous chef Jason Labahn, along with Andrés' other chefs, must learn to cook on the one-of-a-kind paella stove, following in the footsteps of centuries-old Spanish culinary tradition.



It perfumes the whole restaurant. We use orange wood mostly, which is traditional in Spain. But we could also use grape or olive. Most of our equipment is by Jade. But our paella stove is by Jimi Yui. It's one of a kind."

**China Poblano:** Andrés' China Poblano is part Chinese, part Mexican, and part Chinese-Mexican. The restaurant's subtitle is "Noodles & Tacos." There are take-out counters in front of each side of the restaurant, where strolling playahs can grab some dim sum and some tacos, eat them in the commons on the restaurant mezzanine, and then head for the tables, well fed, and ready to win. There's a curious art installation inside the restaurant, a series of steps populated by what looks like a Chinese version of Russian babushka dolls, where you're encouraged to sit and eat from a tray on your lap. Few do it—the long communal tables are just too much fun.

Chef Joe Raffa finds it all indispensable. On the Poblano side of the room, there's an open kitchen, in which cooks heat their food on what looks like a large circle of rough metal—a cooking method that dates back many millennia.

"I love my *comal* [flat griddle]," he says. "It can be made by anyone in Mexico with a hammer and a piece of metal. This one came from Mexico City. No *comal* has a brand name. They're made by artisans who fabricate the metal on which you cook your tortillas and toast your chiles. There's gas underneath—a wok burner with a *comal* on top. We also have one that my cooks in Washington, D.C., made. It's fancier; it looks like an inverted bottle cap. But I like my cheap one. Just thin metal over heat. It works great.

"I also can't live without our *molcajetes* [mortar and pestles]. We use them in the kitchen all the time. We serve our guacamole in them. If I had a plastic *molcajete* in any of José's restaurants, he would kill me. Diana Kennedy would fly up from Mexico on the first plane and smack me. We only use basalt *molcajetes*. They're heavy. We've got them in lots of sizes, from very small to very big. We have one coming in that's the size of a wok. It's not here yet, because you can't air freight something like that. It's so heavy, it would bring the plane down."

On the China side of things, across the dining room from the Poblano side, there's a massive dim sum steamer, custom-made by Town Food Service Equipment, the Brooklyn-based supplier of Asian cooking equipment to restaurants across America. It's so large that even with the burners turned up full, it still takes 30 minutes or more to start steaming.

Not visible to the public is the equipment in the kitchen—two Rational combi ovens, a Frymaster, Jade ranges, a Texican chip warmer. And there, in a corner of the kitchen, not far from the Texican, stands a culinary object of desire that brings Raffa to the point of rhapsody. "It's our Vitamix XL large capacity blender with variable speed blending system. When it first came out last year, Oyamel [Andrés' Mexican restaurant in Washington, D.C.] was the first restaurant to get one. Mexican restaurants are notoriously hard on blenders; there are so many blended sauces that are thick and heavy. We'd go through a regular Vitamix in three



Top: China Poblano's massive dim sum steamer turns out Happy Buddha spring rolls and When Pigs Fly pork buns. Above left: A Mexican mask graces the innovative art installation, alongside Chinese doll-like statuettes.

months. When we make *mole poblano*, it's 40 quarts at a time. You've got to puree it all. That's very hard on blenders. This thing is a beast. It costs about \$1,500, not cheap. We have two here. Our chef in D.C. loves his so much, I've seen him hugging it."

**Estiatorio Milos:** Costas Spiliadis is the king of Greek seafood. Not just in Montreal (where he opened his first restaurant), or in New York City or Miami, but also in Athens, where his branch of Estiatorio Milos in the Athens Hilton is considered one of the great seafood restaurants in a land of many (many!) seafood restaurants. With the opening of Milos in The Cosmopolitan, he's brought the fish of the Aegean to the Mojave, with little or no compromise. He says, with his laconic Greek inflection, "The fish leaves at night. It arrives in the morning. It is only fresher if you pull it right from the water."

And his chefs—Periklis Koskinas and Joshua Smith—display the fish on ice in a marketplace in front of the kitchen and then cook it in full view in a kitchen designed by Mark Stech-Novak of Restaurant Consultation & Design in Oakland, California, using a system of charcoal that isn't charcoal.

"They're ceramic briquettes on a grill that defuse the heat perfectly," says Smith. "The ceramic imparts a flavor to the fish





Above: Fish caught less than 24 hours prior chill out on display at Spiliadis' Estiatorio Milos. Left: One of four ceramic briquette grills optimizes heat distribution for highly efficient (and tasty) cooking of this whole red sea bream. Bottom: Terra-cotta pots and plaster figurines add a flair of authenticity to Milos' interior.

like charcoal. Using the ceramic briquettes is more efficient than cooking over a gas grill. And you never get the flavor of the gas on the fish."

The grills are made by MagiKitch'n of Concord, New Hampshire—four in a line, the first kept at lower heat for vegetables, the other three hotter for whole fish. "We use these at our restaurant in Athens. And our kitchen designer, Stech-Novak, made this beautiful space for cleaning the fish. Our life would be really hard without this space.

"These industrial-sized cutting boards can be lifted up, so the work space is closer to your face. That way, cooks can really see the fish. They can see what's going on. The cutting boards are made of a composite plastic. They sit over the drain with a strainer. It's a custom piece of equipment for cleaning fish. The tile behind is real tile, iridescent, running all the way across the kitchen. We could use some shelves. But we need to respect the way the kitchen was designed. It's a work of art."

**Scarpetta/D.O.C.G.:** Like Andrés, Scott Conant has two restaurants in The Cosmopolitan. And like Andrés, one is more serious, the other more casual. But unlike Andrés' restaurants, they share the same cuisine—Scarpetta is a place for a casually formal Italian experience, while D.O.C.G. is a place to go with the kids (of all ages, of course). They share a common prep kitchen, which feeds two separate kitchens, though there's a fair amount of overlap between the equipment.

Like most of the restaurants in The Cosmopolitan, there are Jade ranges and Jade ovens—which thrill Conant, who says, "I couldn't afford Jade in New York."

The plancha is Jade as well. "We sear our fish and scallops



on the plancha; it's limited to fish usage. There's a flattop right next to the plancha. There are lots of moving parts in these kitchens—look at that straight line of three times six burners. That's a lot of fire. And we use it all.”

There's a Rational combi oven. “It's great. When we get into whole suckling pigs, it'll be perfect.” There's a Cleveland tilt skillet: “I tend to use one chicken reduction, with many sauces based on that, to which I add seasonings and purees. And no, it's not an eternal stock pot—God forbid.”

The D.O.C.G. side features a Woodstone pizza oven that uses gas to burn almond and olive wood. Conant loves his Staub cast-iron cookware, which fit perfectly in his Jade deck oven. But what he really, really loves is his pasta station.

“We have double pasta cookers. We do a lot of business with them. They're by Rosito Bisani, with 12 baskets that come right out. There's a water gauge in the back to keep it from coming to too much of a boil. The gauge moderates the level to keep it at constant heat. This is the thing that gets the most use in every kitchen.

“And we feed it with pasta from a workhorse pasta machine, also a Rosito Bisani. It has four internal cutters, for flat sheets, angel hair, tagliatelle, pappardelle. I have an Imperia pasta maker for tabletop work, too. I don't use dried pastas. With the volume we do, I don't have time to cook it from start to finish. Oh, and I love my Carpigiani. Nothing tastes like a traditional Carpigiani gelato. I've tried other brands. Nothing is like a Carpigiani. I should take their gelato making course in Italy. It would be worth it to get the discount on the machines.”

**Holsteins:** For years now, when a new property opened in Las Vegas, it offered beef at least two ways. There's the obligatory steakhouse (see **STK**, below) and the obligatory upscale hamburger joint. And **Holsteins** fits the bill for burgers just fine, with its gold standard burger made with dry-aged beef, smoked bacon, aged goat cheese cheddar, tomato confit, arugula, and garlic/chive aioli on a very nice bun—a dish that couldn't be made, according to sous chef **Joseph Flannery**, without Holsteins' double Rational CombiMaster. Indeed, the whole menu is dependent on the combi. He says, “You can go from wet cooking to dry heat to a mixture of both in nothing flat. We can do sticky buns, sausages, and braised cheeks in the combi; you can't beat it. It's an awesome piece of equipment once you learn to use it properly.”

Though he also has much affection for their YieldKing OmniVection Technology Smoker: “It's not just a smoker—you can do prime rib, you can do dry smoke, hot smoke. And it's massive. I could fit you into it, and smoke you. Not that I would. But I could.”

**Blue Ribbon Sushi Bar & Grill:** This upscale offspring of a New York City classic has a monster kitchen filled with gee-whiz equipment. Like Sodir by Equipex toasters for salmon skin. The double RiceMaster automatic gas rice cookers, situated adjacent to a massive Zojirushi rice cooker. The



Top: Scarpetta and D.O.C.G. share a plancha by Jade, exclusively for fish. Center: A sinuous banquette and bubble-like light fixtures adorn Scarpetta's dining room. Above: Fragrant almond and olive wood burn bright in D.O.C.G.'s gas-powered Woodstone oven.





Top: Holstein's dining room sets the mood to enjoy burgers fresh from the CombiMaster, while sous chef Joseph Flannery mans the man-sized YieldKing smoker (right). Above, from left: Rational CombiMaster 102, Carpigiani Pastomaster and Labotronic RTL, Vulcan V Series Heavy Duty Range, Vitamix XL, Frymaster FPPRE214.

two Blodgett convection ovens. The double Market Forge convection steamers. The Ariana Cadco Unox ovens for grilling.

But the piece of equipment the chefs love the most is handheld, and made of green plastic. It's a Benriner turning slicer from Japan. It's used to shred daikon and other vegetables. The kitchen explains, "It can shred or slice. You can retract the blades. We'd be lost without it." And it doesn't even use batteries.

**Comme Ça:** David Myers comes to Las Vegas for his first time with **Comme Ça**, a classic French bistro with a fabulous view of The Strip—and yes, you can see the Eiffel Tower at the Paris from the patio. It's the only restaurant at The Cosmopolitan with an outside patio. And it seems to be the only restaurant with an American Panel HurriChill blast chiller. Along with its Jade ovens and ranges, its Rational Combination Oven Self Cooking Center, and its Pacojet, there's a big ole blast chiller in the kitchen, which executive chef **Sheridan Su** just loves.

"We chill everything. Traditionally in restaurants, when you have something good, you chill it on ice, which is very time-

consuming. But with this, you just slide in a whole rack—racks that fit perfectly in the Rational—after it's been cooked, and the HurriChill freezes the food in a matter of minutes. It also records times and temps on a little NCI recorder. So when the health department comes in, we can show them. We vacuum pack in a Berkel, we freeze in a blast chiller, we cook in the Rational. It's so much easier than it used to be."

**STK:** As noted, in Las Vegas, every resort-casino-hotel must have a steakhouse. I believe it's the law. And at The Cosmopolitan, it's a branch of the STK chain, which, unlike most of the restaurants in the hotel, has a kitchen built around Vulcan rather than Jade. There's a Vulcan combi ("for pastry only"), a double-level Vulcan salamander and grill. Vulcan deep fryers. And Vulcan ranges. The steaks are, of course, cooked on a Vulcan grill. "It burns at 1,800 degrees," explains one of the cooks. "We've got a line of them. But when we're busy, we need more. We always need at least one more. It's a big kitchen. But we need to give our steaks room to stretch out. So, we need one more." ■