

[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

## A Kitchen For Show And Flow

By Derek Gale, Senior Editor -- *Hotels*, 9/24/2009 10:49:00 AM

Chef Ken Frank enjoys interacting with his guests, and wanted to be able to greet them as they entered his restaurant and to say goodbye as they left. That desire, combined with the chef's clean working style and the existing space at The Westin Verasa, Napa, led to the creation of an exhibition kitchen for La Toque that puts the expediting table front and center.

"It's the focal point," says kitchen designer Frank Muller of Muller Design Inc., Minden, Nevada. "It catches the eye first, as it is polished to a high No. 7 finish. Then you immediately look back into a stainless steel polished cooking suite."

Equipment-wise, Muller specified a three-sided Jade island suite, which he says works well with a small amount of space because you get a lot of cooking power in a relatively small package. The island setup also allows chefs to face each other while cooking, which facilitates communication, Muller notes.

And the piece not only functions well but looks good, too, adds Lev Weisbach, principal at CCS Architecture, San Francisco, who worked with Muller and Frank on the restaurant and kitchen design. "The idea of developing a nice integrated European-style kitchen suite was a pretty important part of the design," he says. "It looks clean, neat and efficient."



Most important, the kitchen setup plays to Frank's desire to converse with guests—who actually enter the restaurant through a part of the kitchen that faces the expediting table, where the chef is often working—while also taking into account food and traffic flow.

On that note, just beyond the expediting table, no more than about 10 feet from the cooking suite, is a chef's table for eight.

"The chef's table is important and the challenge is to make the kitchen function [around that]," Muller says. "That is extremely important—you don't want to sacrifice [function] because of where something may be such as a chef's table. The design was driven to make sure it was properly placed," he says.

The placement of the chef's table and the cooking suite within the open kitchen allow guests to truly be involved in the show while still ensuring the space remains functional, Muller notes.

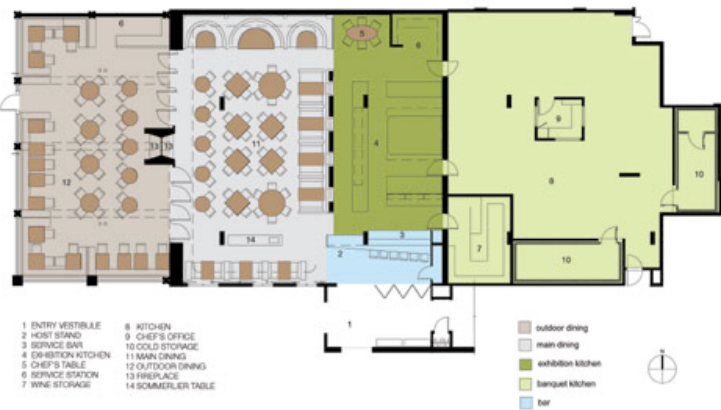


### Behind The Scenes

When Frank relocated his restaurant from a small inn outside Napa to The Westin Verasa, he accepted the role of overseeing the hotel's F&B program, including banquets and roomservice in addition to his restaurant. And because the relatively small existing kitchen space at the hotel needed to accommodate a roomservice line, space for banquets and a prep area, it made sense to make the restaurant kitchen part of the front of the house, Muller says.

Meanwhile, the back-of-the-house kitchen is behind a shared wall, which allows restaurant prep to take place in the back while all finishing happens up front.

"Listening to your client is really key to develop a kitchen that chef wants and is functional," Muller notes. "In this case, given a square box to work with, it was natural to have all the prep areas focused toward the center of the prep kitchen. We've got a roomservice line that backs up to the wall, and a separate banquet area—a prep and cook line with an L shape to it. If you go through the back door, you have the garde manger station where salads and desserts are made. The flow starts from the back of the house with how food is made and then is going to get to the customer."



La Toque at Westin Verasa, Napa, CA

CCS ARCHITECTURE

Muller says flow, function and station placement comes somewhat naturally to him after many years of working in kitchens in various capacities plus 16 years designing kitchens, not to mention working with other respected foodservice designers like Mark Stech-Novak.

"Working directly in kitchens for that long, you have a sense of what works and what doesn't," he says.

But it still helps to have the right client and partners. "Chef Ken Frank was a pleasure to work with, and CCS was great to work with," Muller notes.

### Making It Look Good

It was CCS' job (and Weisbach's specifically) to design and finish the exhibition kitchen and front-of-house space in a way that made it worth showing off.

"We spent a lot of time on the wall separating the exhibition kitchen from the dining room," Weisbach says. "[Chef Frank] wanted to look through the wall and see people—he had a lot of long-time customers [from his other location] who liked to watch what's going on in kitchen, but didn't want the noise and heat. So we used long windows broken up with white oak casework to create a view into the kitchen."

Also, because of the importance of the restaurant's wine program given its location, "We developed into the end of the casework that separates the kitchen and dining room a wine display, so guests can see the wine pairings for the evening," Weisbach notes. "And we wanted to use the back side of the casework for the display of glassware used to serve the dining room."

On kitchen side, "We worked hard at trying to upgrade the finishes, using tile along the back wall. There are some pot and utensil racks [there] that we composed so we could hang some of the pots and pans in a 'country kitchen gone mod' way," he says. And above the chef's table, CCS framed Frank's first toque in a brass-and-glass display case.



[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

© 2009, Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All Rights Reserved.