

HEY GOOD LOOKIN'



We think of cuisine, as English speakers should, as a type or style of cooking such as Italian Cuisine or Japanese Cuisine. But it is the French who take this word, their word I should point out, and use it to it's fullest. Cuisine, to the French is not only the style of cooking in a place, it is the place. La cuisine is the place where the magic of French Cuisine happens, and often by the Chef de Cuisine!

Although the French language word for different types of cooking has caught on around the globe, the French word for kitchen has remained solely for French speaking peoples. In Montreal, for example, I once owned a *salle de montre de cuisines et salles des bains*, or a kitchen and bath showroom. In Bonita Springs, I own K2 Kitchens, a kitchen and bath showroom. Although our showroom garnered the award for Best Showroom in the North America in our size category, it would still be a lot *sexier* to call it a *salle de montre de cuisine*!



I've been thinking about how these two very full definitions are connected: how we refer to the place and the thing that happens there as exactly the same thing. Then I wondered, if I am talking about Haute Cuisine, or cooking to a high standard, could that also apply to the place; how it is designed for example?



WHATCHA GOT COOKIN'?

Also swirling around in my cranium was the question of whether the design or style of the kitchen affects the style of the food. Does la cuisine affect le style de cuisine? Certainly the reverse is true. Recently asked to design a restaurant on a barrier island, I asked for the proposed menu. I was told it was undecided. I gently advised that no restaurant, and certainly not any restaurant's kitchen worth it's salt (pardon the pun), should be

designed before the menu and style of cooking are determined. One must know the cuisine to design the cuisine (kitchen for English speakers)! But again, is the reverse true? The aesthetic design, the appliances, the surfaces, natural and artificial light: all these factors that go into a kitchen plan; can they influence our cooking? >>



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It's easy to make the argument that appliances will have an effect with home cooks now enjoying all things haute cuisine from steam ovens to sous vide cookers. Surfaces have an impact from bakery on cold natural marble, to butchery on butcher block wood counters. Maybe a harder stretch is lighting. However, when you consider how light affects mood, then the connection becomes more illuminated (puns are my thing apparently). Abundant natural lighting could sway cooks towards more natural and lighter foods while more dramatic artificial lighting might inspire more creative risk-taking. But can the actual finishes of the cabinetry, tiles, and other design elements alter the way one has traditionally cooked? To answer this, I will ask another question: when you visit Blu Provence, a long time Naples French restaurant, do you feel transported to a place in Provence? Does just being in that setting make you desire a nice duck confit or *salade niçoise*? When you stop by Osteria Tulia on 5th avenue in Naples, Chinese food certainly does not come to mind. So I think the argument that the surroundings influence the cuisine which influences the surroundings is valid. Is that also true in your home?

As a designer of all things, but with special attention to kitchens, for the last 30 years, I say the design of a home kitchen is influenced by the home cook who knows the type of cuisine they enjoy cooking most and what they need to pull it off. The cultural connection of the cook to the cuisine and the kitchen itself is undeniable. Setting aside the Southwest Florida retirement trend of the unused kitchen (which only needs a fridge and a microwave for reheating the leftovers from last night's restaurant outing), we tend to want to cook in an environment that feels like "us", reflective of our culture and cuisine. For those who choose a great room with a kitchen that is not so "kitchen-y", we propose sleek sculptural designs. For the "foodies" who love to explore different cuisines, the initial focus is on appliances. One always needs the right tool for the job of course. Post appliance selection, we turn our attention towards the surfaces and finally the storage units – or cabinets. Experimental home cooks tend to go one of two directions: 1) wood cabinets with durable counters for a more "homey" feel, or 2) laboratory-like with extra large surfaces, multiple sinks, integrated appliances and sleeker finishes. >>

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Haute cuisine, in summary, relates to the style of the cooking, and to the place where the cooking is performed. They go hand in hand. Once again, when it comes to things that look good and things that taste good, the French got it right. ■

- Jenny Provost

