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Feature: Ovens

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What types of ovens are available?

There is a lot of choice on the equipment market for ovens/prime cooking, whether it is gas, electric, dual fuel or increasingly induction, the choice is wide and varied and comes down to personal preference as well as space and budget restrictions. Whatever the preference though, it has to be a versatile and flexible workhorse able to make light work of the most demanding and varied dishes and be able to respond to the on-going changing demands that come with any professional commercial kitchen. Most operations want to offer a varied and attractive food offering and so without a doubt an oven that can 'multi task' in response to that will be a good investment.

The options:

Microwave ovens are definitely an essential part of today's commercial kitchen – essential for speed of service and still allow an operator to offer a wide choice of menu. Microwaves are also very energy efficient. If simple reheat and defrosting of foods is required then a microwave will suffice, but if an operator wants to reheat and cook food products then a combination microwave convection oven is well advised.

The latest and most flexible **combination microwave oven** from Maestrowave, is the new Combi Chef 7. It is able to operate in a combination of modes and can bake, roast, grill, steam, defrost, regenerate, microwave, boil or simply keep food warm all in one flexible, efficient unit. Packed full of new features and the latest version of Menu Creator (Menu Creator 2.0™) the oven will produce the best results ever in super quick time!



The **Smeg ALFA Range of bake-off ovens** provides an alternative, innovative and versatile solution. Savouries, breads and morning goods including the most delicate of products, like croissants, can be cooked to perfection, but what a lot of people don't realise is that the equipment's flexibility expands way beyond that – in fact, there is relatively little that these ovens can't cook! Another big plus is that they look good enough to be sited 'front of house' with the aroma of freshly baking food, helping to maximise sales.

Also Smeg has introduced models with the oven chamber lined in refractory stone to combine traditional cooking methods with modern technology to enable the foods to develop further in flavour whilst cooking – creating dishes with sublime tastes!

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What should caterers consider before buying new equipment?

To help make the right choice, caterers must be clear on the intended use: the volume of throughput; the types of dishes/menu available; variations in service time; staffing skills and find out about the latest features and operational functions before they invest.

Caterers should consider their equipment needs in line with current and future menu requirements, numbers and times/peaks in service – for example, it maybe that two smaller, versatile ovens that can adapt to changing service needs are better than investing in one large unit or that for example, one larger bake-off oven could cover a breakfast offering by itself and then bake-off products, such as baguettes, ready to be filled for the lunch service.

Space and installation aspects are also key considerations. It may seem fundamental, but caterers should consider the footprint of some ovens in comparison to their potential output. Both Smeg ALFA ovens and the Maestrowave Combi –Chef 7 can be stacked one on top of the other – so you can save on space yet double the output. Caterers can easily switch between one or two ovens depending on demand, which will give them great flexibility and potentially added profits when operating to full capacity, off-setting initial outlays. Alternatively a secondary smaller back-up oven such as the Smeg ALFA43UK could be installed to help cater for peaks – or a microwave added for speed. There is a huge range of options to suit and fulfil all needs and cost effectively.

Also many ovens will need hard wiring to a certain KW rating – unique to Smeg is that the range is switchable i.e. they can run off different KW ratings depending on the power on site – anything from 3KW upto 8.3KW making them ideal for any site, there is no limitations. The Maestrowave Combi-Chef 7 is simply a plug in and go unit!

Whatever the choice of equipment, caterers must carefully consider their purchase. Sturdy, commercial manufacture is a must, anything less won't perform or last! Choose a leading brand with an established reputation – they shouldn't be tempted to go down the cheap import route. Also consider the availability of spare parts and after sales service, plus what length of warranty is available.

What ovens are good for contract caterers?

An oven that can multi-task is ideal for contract catering operations.

An ideal example of this kind of oven is the latest and most flexible **combination microwave oven** from Maestrowave, the new Combi Chef 7. It is able to operate in a combination of modes and can bake, roast, grill, steam, defrost, regenerate, microwave, boil or simply keep food warm all in one flexible, efficient unit. Packed full of new features and the latest version of Menu Creator (Menu Creator 2.0™) the oven will produce the best results ever in super quick time!

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For example, a beef topside joint of up to 6lb (2.7kg) can be cooked in combination mode in just 11 minutes. By using the combination mode of grill and convection, you can also be sure of a quality result. Accelerated cooking, with quality!

Menu Creator 'create your own menu' feature now allows for up to 99 menus to be pre-programmed using any method of oven, microwave, grill or combination or microwave plus grill using the turbo fan function on or off. Errors are eliminated with perfect cooking stages and timings all very easily pre-programmed onto the unit's Menu Creator 2.0™ software. Great results can be achieved within both skilled and non-skilled operations.

Are there any environmental considerations?

As the leading independent catering equipment distributor in the UK we work on behalf of a number of the leading brands in the industry and the majority if not all of these companies now manufacture products that have sustainable and environmentally friendly technology in their designs. Equipment is evolving all the time and there are plenty of very good pieces of kit on the market which can help an operation build their green credentials and become more energy efficient.

Caterers should look for newer energy efficient models that help to save on water, gas and electricity consumption whilst ensuring maximum performance. We also find equipment from the leading brands are very well built with extended warranty and regular maintenance intervals built in – both of which definitely help sustainability as does very importantly looking at the whole life costs of a piece of equipment rather than initial outlay – a longer term perspective is far more beneficial for a business and the environment.

Equipment is becoming more intelligent, with programmable models aiding efficiency and ensuring consistent results, leading to less wastage. In addition, features such as rapid pre-heat functions save on power and aid unit recovery after loading/unloading; self-diagnostic facilities are built-in to some equipment which can detect any operational problems, again helping to keep them running at optimum performance and efficiency and auto power cut out is a great feature which saves energy when the equipment is not in use.

Our team can also advise on the savings available through manufacturers registered with the ECA (Enhanced Capital Allowance) Scheme which provides tax relief for businesses that invest in energy efficient equipment and with The Carbon Trust where there is an Energy Technology List which details products that offer better energy efficiency and reduced running costs.

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What features are most useful?

For bake-off ovens specifically: Look for stylish designs for installation in prominent positions and go for high quality stainless steel finish both inside and out; rapid pre-heat function to enable fast recovery after unloading; easy control functions; auto power cut-out to save energy when not in use; programme pre-sets and manual options for ease of operation; cool touch doors; fans for efficient heat circulation; grill function for versatility and the ability to vent that wonderful bakery smell into the premises if required!

With regards to features when choosing a microwave/combi microwave, variable power is very important, as this will allow more dense food products to be reheated/cooked more evenly, working in the same way as a hob, it gives you exact control for a quality cooked/reheat result. A further feature to look for is stage cooking. This allows the operator to program in a series of different defrost/cook/reheat tasks to allow a complete process to be carried out at the press of a button. For example, it is possible to defrost then cook and keep warm ready for serve up all in one go. Most leading brand models now have this function as standard.



What one tip would you offer on getting the best from your oven or range?

Get the correct training for staff on how to use and look after the equipment in the first instance this will definitely help a caterer get the best from an oven or range. In addition, simple regular low cost maintenance and cleaning will keep it in peak health and condition.

Additional reader information:

RH Hall can also offer bespoke and tailored solutions for any foodservice brand, concept, menu or operational need through their in-house Foodservice Solutions team.

Caterers can tap into this service and the successful creative foodservice solutions that have been developed already with a number of major foodservice chains and operators, including ready-made packages that offer a simple start up way to launch a concept into a foodservice operation – one such example is the package created with Chicago Town with their Pizzas and the Smeg ALFA43UK oven – all the leg work has been done – all the optimum menu timings, products selections have been developed and the package is ready to buy and have installed, up and running, almost immediately.

With RH Hall's access to the most extensive range of foodservice equipment available on the market today, together with our vast knowledge and experience within the sector, we are ideally placed to offer this specialised service. Our development team can work closely with a club's own chef/caterer to look at equipment and create new menus, adapt recipes and perfect equipment timings to enhance cook/bake/regeneration results or bring in our tried and tested concepts to also maximise their operation.



Website for further information:

For more information, please visit www.rhhall.com

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