



THINKING OUTSIDE THE HOUSE



The Destin Culinary Center makes a variety of visitors feel right at home
Story by Caitlin Garibaldi | Photos by Steven J. Conway

These days, the ability to multi-task is not a skill, it's a method of survival.

And as the realms of work, home and play continue to overlap, it's increasingly important that our environments reflect and support the different roles we play within them. The Destin Culinary Center, sponsored principally by DCS by Fisher & Paykel, achieves this through a keen navigation of the boundaries between show-room, event center and studio. This deft balance makes the Center a unique study and a sure trendsetter for future facilities.

From the outside, the Destin, Florida, Culinary Center presents itself as a stylish, contemporary southern home, with a Spanish tile roof and palms planted in front.



But a visitor need only take a few steps into the high-ceilinged, columned entryway before the shape-shifting nature of the house begins to reveal itself. The entryway is flanked by a bustling office on one side and a formal dining room on the other. The main hall is lightly but comfortably furnished, impressing itself as a semi-formal reception area. Then the overstuffed chairs and roomy couch give way to the brawny and sophisticated kitchen, equipped with all the finest DCS by Fisher & Paykel goods, in a layout that at once appears the pinnacle of professional power and the epitome of elegant domesticity.

I'm taking in all this while Chef Tim Creehan and José Cruz, event director at the Center and Chef Tim's all-around right hand man, finish arrangements with a representative from the crew that



will be arriving later to film a cooking show. As soon as they finish, Chef Tim and José take me through the rest of the tour that I had self-started in the entryway.

The kitchen, crown jewel of the facility, is the clear place to start. Two walls and one side of the gigantic island that separates the kitchen from the main hall are covered in alternating panels of stainless steel and rich, dark maple with a glazed finish. The former includes a 48-inch Professional Range, Wall Ovens, warming drawers, two convection microwaves and three separate cooktops of varying sizes, representing the entire DCS by Fisher & Paykel line. The cabinets are the work of Wellborn Forest Cabinetry, which provided gorgeous custom-designed floor-to-ceiling work that perfectly complement the shining appliances. The cabinetry has an austere look, which Chef Tim and Tim Wellborn, president of Wellborn Forest, agreed upon so to maximize its versatility and impressive style.

The kitchen is the venue of Chef Tim's bi-monthly cooking classes. "With a smaller class of anywhere up to 12 people, we'll have everybody seated at the counter," says Chef Tim. "Counter" seems an almost insufficient word to describe the expanse of dark granite that houses two of the cooktops, and a sink with plenty

of room left to prepare ingredients. "With a larger group, up to 35, we'll seat everyone in the main hall, facing Chef," adds José, backing away from the counter to point out the two king-sized Toshiba flat-screen TVs mounted above. "We've got these hooked up on a live feed to the camera over the counter, so everyone can see what Chef is doing."

The public events held at the Center encompass some of the purposes that Chef Tim first had in mind for the Culinary Center. "We've got complete control over the setup here," Chef Tim says, "which really makes the classes much richer." In addition to classes, the Center also hosts a themed dinner about once a month, usually in connection with a seasonal occasion, like the father-son grilling event on Father's Day. These events tie the Center closely to the community, as participation in them becomes tradition for local families.

"The public events are always fun, and they keep our profile up," explains Chef Tim, "but we always want to keep plenty of room in the Center's schedule for private functions as well." The Center certainly started off on the right foot: Since its opening in January 2007, the Culinary Center has hosted weddings, rehearsal din-



ners, birthday parties and business conferences of various scales. The day of my visit, during the cooking show, the house was also being prepped for a dinner for 60 that would take place the following evening.

That the Center was built as a house shines through in preparations for private parties, and lends them a more cozy and elegant air than a banquet hall can offer. "We've got three spacious bathrooms where a bride can get ready, just as if the wedding were taking place at home," José says. "And the flow of the house itself creates an atmosphere that encourages people to mingle, like they would in the home of a friend."

As well as facilitating the actual success of the event, the Center's ambience often simplifies the planning. "We want the people hosting the event to really feel like it's their party," Chef Tim says. "They can do everything just the way they would if they were throwing the party at home, but without the hassle of moving furniture, hiring a caterer and cleaning up." The Culinary Center's magnificent kitchen adds a special bonus. "There's not a restaurant or banquet hall around where you can have chefs cooking live in plain sight during your party," says José. "That's what makes it really special."



Door to Drawer

Wellborn Forest Cabinetry brings gorgeously custom-crafted woodwork to the Destin Culinary Center's kitchen. Since the cabinetry interacts so closely with the DCS by Fisher & Paykel appliances, special consideration went into planning the aesthetic aspects of the kitchen. "The door style is a popular raised panel frame called Nottingham, which works well with the Center's Mediterranean feel," remarks Pamela Wellborn, director of styling and color for Wellborn Forest Cabinetry. "The Coffee color we chose was brand new at the time. Chef Tim had wanted a dark finish, so the kitchen would work for formal affairs as well as filming and photography." "Wellborn Forest Cabinetry is a perfect match for DCS because they both pride themselves on innovation, quality and great looks," Chef Tim says. Side by side, the DCS by Fisher & Paykel appliances and Wellborn Forest cabinetry have stood up beautifully under vigorous use, maintaining their signature performance and impeccable appearance.



Evergrain composite material's strength and versatility help it pull triple duty as dancefloor, stage and route to a peaceful paradise.

The multi-functional strengths of the Center are in rare form when it is used for a corporate event. Sales professionals who are accustomed to conferences and meetings conducted in sterile, single-purpose environments are relieved by the variety provided by the Culinary Center. The conference room itself can seat up to 12, and has full PowerPoint and presentation capabilities. When the meeting is over, the group can transition smoothly into the areas of the house designated for entertainment and dining. "The folks we have here for corporate events aren't itching to get out the second they're through with business," says José. "It's an easy space to unwind in, so they take in the view, ask the chefs questions and just relax." The best location for all three of these activities is the deck, which may be the most versatile space in the house. Custom TAMKO EverGrain® decking surrounds a pool and a stony waterfall. The EverGrain deck itself provides several different areas to socialize which include a full DCS by Fisher & Paykel outdoor kitchen in an Outdoor Polymer Systems enclosure and a separate circular platform. At wedding receptions and parties, this platform is used as a DJ booth, bandstand or part of a

multi-level dance floor. For TV and photo shoots, it provides a prime location for the subject to be presented against the lush backdrop of Florida greenery. In all situations, the deck's style and durability contribute to its many uses. Chef Tim is quick to note the strong relationship the Center has with its sponsors. "We picked partners that made sense to us," he says. "These are products that I believe in, that I use. That's why they're here." The effect is very cohesive, from the built-in work of Wellborn Forest Cabinetry and EverGrain to the kitchen utensils from Scanpan and Kitchenique. Through these sponsors, the Culinary Center occupies a unique position as a state-of-the-art showroom where clients and customers can see products in context. It's not necessary to wonder what the Liberty Grill would look like on a home deck, or how a Scanpan frying pan holds up under strenuous treatment, because they're all there to see in the steely flesh. As the film crew members take their leave of the place, checking for any equipment they might have left behind, they ask Tim what they should do with the

food they prepared during the shoot. Recognizing the opportunity for a brief break in our day's itinerary, we retire to the deck with bites of pork loin, grilled vegetables and a fruit torte. My cell phone is giving me a well-timed rest, and Chef Tim's only rings twice as we relax on the shady deck. It occurs to me that among the Culinary Center's many purposes, this is the one that truly sets the place apart. It's a space where it's natural to be at ease, to relax and enjoy the rare moments when the only communication happening is friendly conversation, and the only task at hand is the enjoyment of good food and good company. **T**