

# bakers can be choosers

Knowing products and your needs makes design easy as pie

WRITTEN BY BILL PARTSCH



Tailored to the height of the baker, a lowered section of counter creates a workstation that minimizes back strain when performing kneading and other tasks.

Passionate bakers can produce tantalizing bread, cakes and pastries even in subpar kitchens, but they don't have to. In a baker's kitchen, a smart array of the right appliances, work surfaces and storage can make the process as satisfying as the results.

## WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

The obvious place to start is with an oven—then another oven, if possible. Bakers used to one oven will feel great relief if they acquire a second, even if it's smaller than the first. (In fact, smaller ovens have distinct benefits—shorter preheating times, for starters.) A second oven is a huge time saver. For example, a loaf can rise in one oven, then go right into the preheated second oven.

Professional chefs prefer electric ovens for their consistent temperatures. Electrics also offer a wider selection of models with convection, although convection comes in gas, also. Convection's benefits—even heat throughout, no need to rotate, superb rising, ability to bake four sheets of cookies at once—make it an absolute must-have in a baker's oven.

Homeowners who favor gas cooktops (as professional chefs do) can buy dual-fuel ranges, which have gas on top and electric ovens. Designers say bakers are better off having the cooktop and oven together in a range. A range with an additional wall oven would be ideal, though.

For kitchens that don't have the wall space, convection microwaves can be second ovens. Yes, they're microwaves, but they're also real ovens with real convection, albeit with small capacities. As microwaves go, they're on the hefty side—not exactly space savers.

Other features for bakers to consider are proofing and steam. Steam and convection together can create loaves of bread with crisp crusts and moist interiors. A steam oven can also proof



## must have

**A sturdy mixer makes doughs and whipped cream a piece of cake.**

KitchenAid Professional 600, \$370. 800-422-1230; [www.kitchenaid.com](http://www.kitchenaid.com).



PHOTOGRAPHS: ABOVE, AMERICAN WOODMARK; OPPOSITE, ANDREW MCKINNEY

Bakers accumulate tools and gadgets on a scale that dictates kitchen storage be both specialized and flexible. Here, unwieldy rolling pins are decoratively displayed yet pragmatically within reach. The wheeled work cart, fitted with baking sheet-shelves, can act as a cooling spot for goods fresh from the oven.



To the left of the oven column, a counter made of heat-resistant stone makes a convenient spot to cool piping-hot baked goods.



Made of acrylic or other sanitary material, such as stainless steel, dry-ingredient bins inside drawers provide ready access and eliminate counter-cluttering canisters.

dough, but other, nonsteam ovens have a dedicated proofing function, which sets the cavity at a low heat to promote an ideal second rise for a loaf of bread in a draft-free setting.

**LOCATION, LOCATION**

In the kitchen plan, the oven should be in a spot convenient to the prep area, but not directly across from it. Nobody wants to prepare food standing in front of a 375°F oven. Another issue to consider is how the microwave fits into the relationship of the prep area to the oven. If it's hinged on the left, as most microwaves are, it should not be to the right-hand side of the prep area. (If it's just for burritos, then it could drift to the right, but if it's a player in baking, it needs to be in the game, to the left.)

**AT YOUR SURFACE**

As for the prep area itself, stone countertops have decided benefits for bakers. Most notably, granite and especially

marble do not retain heat, so the butter in pastry crusts will stay cold. Butcher block is, as always, an option for areas of heavy knife work. Clearly, a baker's kitchen will require either more than one countertop material or boards for cutting or pastry.

Those opting for a cooler material may also want to consider quartz, which behaves like stone but is nonporous and thus requires less maintenance. Another choice, solid surfacing, doesn't have quite the same cooling properties as stone but can be considerably less expensive.

Whatever the countertop material, fancy edges are out. Any dentils or ogees or fillets will haunt you in the form of caked-on dough, or even cake, which will require tedious cleanup. Stick to simple eased or radius edges, or maybe a bullnose at most—something that can be wiped off easily.

For the welfare of bakers' backs, the most important countertop issue is height. Standard countertop level is 36 inches, but this is ideal for only a certain segment of the

population. For a person around 5 feet tall, 30 inches is far more comfortable for preparing dough and prep work in general. At the other end of the spectrum, a 6-foot-5-inch person could easily work at a countertop that's 42 inches high.

Even at proper countertop height, the standard 24-inch depth is just barely sufficient for some tasks. Bumping cabinets out 6 inches to stretch the countertop literally provides elbow room for working with rolling pins (think pie crusts). This can apply to only a section of countertop, not necessarily the entire kitchen.

**MINDING THE STORAGE**

For storing all those baking implements, drawers should have dividers to segregate items by type: whisks, spatulas, etc. Otherwise, it's chaos. Another option is to have a cabinet fitted with a pullout Peg-Board, with outlines of the various tools in their proper hanging spots, à la the garage. Those who don't mind having tools out in the open can hook them onto hanging racks.

Drawers are also excellent for food storage. An open drawer displays everything so that the baker doesn't have to rifle through the cabinet looking for molasses. For bulk staples like flour, a large bin with 45-degree lid mounted on a recycling pullout keeps humidity out but still provides easy access.

Once the ovens are in place, suitable surfaces are at appropriate heights, and raw materials and tools are sensibly handy, creating a delicious-smelling house will be easier than ever. What's more, such an efficient operation lets the baker take on more adventurous pursuits, and for some, pulling off something new is the most thrilling aspect of baking. ♦

**CAN YOU HANDLE THE PROOF?**

Proofing is a term for the second rise of a bread dough, when it's been formed into a loaf shape. Pros use a special proofing oven to give their loaves a lift most home bakers can't approach. This oven should help. It has a dedicated proofing function with two settings, standard and rapid, for that professional touch.

Jenn-Air JJW9530D, \$2,220. 800-688-1100; [www.jenn-air.com](http://www.jenn-air.com).



**STEAM UP, PIZZA DOWN**

Gaggenau's ED 220/221 steam oven (top) has five graduated humidity settings: Zero (for just convection), 30%, 60%, 80% and 100%. Below, the EB 270/271 oven has a baking stone in it made just for this oven.

Gaggenau ED 220/221, \$4,500; EB 270/271, \$3,230; PS 026 plus heating element, \$418. 800-828-9165; [www.gaggenau.com](http://www.gaggenau.com).



**ALL TOGETHER NOW . . .**

A dual-fuel range, this unit combines a gas cooktop and an electric oven. The big addition, though, is in the upper lefthand corner of the front panel: a water slot that adds steam to the convection and radiant cooking modes in the oven.

KitchenAid KDRP707RSS, \$4,100. 800-422-1230; [www.kitchenaid.com](http://www.kitchenaid.com).

PHOTOGRAPHS: LEFT, CRYSTAL CABINET WORKS; RIGHT, ANDREW MCKINNEY



**must have**

Measuring spoon sets should have flush handles and 1/8 teaspoons.

Cuisipro standard set, \$12. 302-326-4802; [www.cuisipro.com](http://www.cuisipro.com).

**must have**

Good baking sheets allow two-handed grabs but let cookies slide off.

Vollrath cookie sheet, \$20. 800-309-2147; [www.vollrathco.com](http://www.vollrathco.com).

