

Mark Stech-Novak
owner

Mark Stech-Novak Restaurant
Consultation & Design
Oakland, CA

SPECIALTY

Independent restaurants.

BACKGROUND

Self-taught “computer geek” and AutoCAD virtuoso who combined chef experience with a love for all things digital to start his own design firm.

ROSTER OF PROJECTS

Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s Dune (Paradise Island, Bahamas), Le Cirque 2000 and Osteria del Circo (NYC), Le Cirque and Osteria del Circo (Las Vegas).

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Two new concepts for Vongerichten: a cafe in the West Perry Building and possibly a Spice Market Cafe (both in NYC); the kitchens of Rancho Encantando, a resort in the New Mexico mountains; equipment design for the *Iron Chef USA* shows filmed at the MGM Grand Arena in Las Vegas.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO KEEP CURRENT?

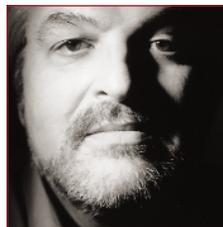
“I’m always taking courses in something. I just finished a class in lighting design. Also, every one of the Mac platforms that I got started with had its own user group. They still exist. We meet every month or so—architects, landscape architects, lighting and theater guys—to exchange ideas across disciplines and talk about what’s new.”

THE EXTRA MILE

“I see a lack of adequate lighting in about 90 percent of the kitchens I visit. I’m probably the only food facility designer who does his own lighting. I ask myself, “What’s the reflexivity of the light shining on the surface? Is the surface hot or cold?”

MARK STECH-NOVAK

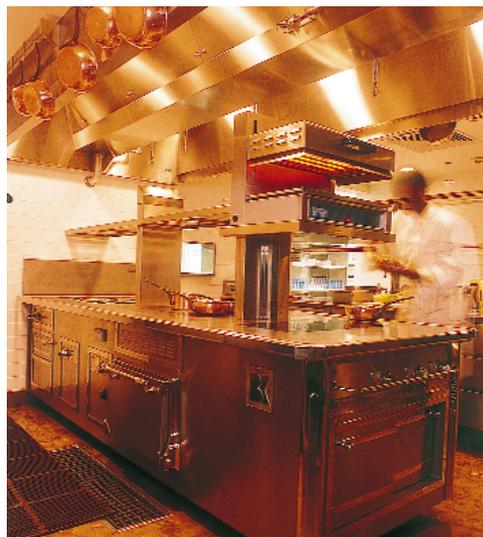
When Mark Stech-Novak, as a 30-something executive chef, took a step back from the day-to-day grind, he realized there’s a lot more to the restaurant business than food. “While my second restaurant was under construction,” Stech-Novak recalls, “I realized that I was relying on an equipment salesman to design my kitchen. By that point I knew enough



about what I wanted to get actively involved in the design.” In the late 1980s, a couple of factors steered Stech-Novak in exactly that direction. First, based on the quality of his food and the kitchen he built for himself at his restaurant Camargue, he was hired to consult on restaurants in the Bay Area. Then, in 1988, he joined forces with Interior Architect, an interior design firm specializing in large corporate offices that was looking to switch over to designing entirely with AutoCAD software. Stech-Novak steered them through the change, then began designing kitchens for the firm’s corporate clients.

Marco Maccioni, who was referred to Stech-Novak by Alain Ducasse, developed his appreciation for Stech-Novak’s talents when they worked together on Maccioni’s Osteria del Circo in Manhattan. “The thing about Mark,” observes Maccioni, “is that he’s not just a builder. He’s well traveled and passionate about food. He doesn’t just work from a catalog. He definitely has his own style, but he never imposes his point of view. Instead, he works with you to develop a kitchen based on what you want. If you have the wallet to pay for it, that is.”

Charlie Palmer, whose offshoots of his New York City-based Aureole and Astra have sprouted in Las Vegas and Los Angeles (respectively), echoes Maccioni’s enthusiasm.



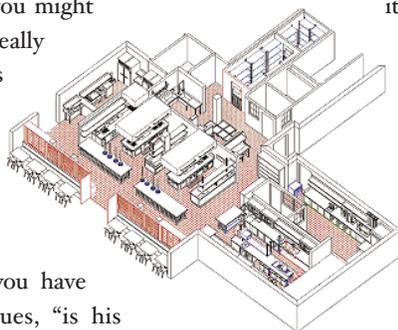
Stech-Novak’s kitchen for Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s Dune on Paradise Island. Photo by Matthew Pace.



Above: A blue Bonnet range suite and custom “big top” hood in Stech-Novak’s meticulously tailored kitchen at Le Cirque 2000 in New York City. Photo by Courtney Grant Winston. Below: Stech-Novak designs on a customized AutoCAD program that allows chefs to virtually walk through their future kitchens.

“If you can afford to work with Mark, he’s the man,” states Palmer flatly. “And money’s not even the issue. In the end, you might find cheaper guys, but he really works for his money, and he’s sensitive to the project. Aureole in Las Vegas was huge, but Astra in L.A. is on a much tighter budget, and he makes it work.

“The biggest advantage you have with Mark,” Palmer continues, “is his knowledge and background as a chef. You don’t have to explain ‘this is how much sautéing I do, this is how much grilling.’ He just gets it. And I



think his vision of what custom pieces can mean to a kitchen is, from a sense of practicality and beauty, right on the money.”

From Stech-Novak’s point of view, the benefits come full circle. “At the end of the day,” he says, “I’m providing these people with a service, but I’m also inspired by these amazing chefs. I learn more every day. I am the sum total of what I’ve learned from these people over the years. My value to the next client is what I bring with me from my past clients.” ▶

It goes beyond figuring the standard lighting formula. Lighting problems are easy to avoid by multiplying the light sources and increasing the amount of task lighting.

“We build our kitchens on 3-D models. From the get-go it’s a different approach. Most kitchen designers use a standard software package that drops a symbol into a CAD design. I can’t fault that in the least, but reading those designs is not within everybody’s reach. I want chefs to look at the whole cloth, not just the weave.”