JS² COMMUNICATIONS

Client: Ford's Filling Station

Publication: *Food Arts*

Date: May 2006

Circulation: 56,623

FOOD ARTS

72

108

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Burning issues

My Favorite GEAR

Equipment Big or small, plain or fancy, there are some things chefs can't cook without. Merrill Shindler goes into their kitchens to find out what they are, what makes them great, and who makes them.

On top of his culinary game: Ben Ford (Ford's Filling Station, Culver City, CA) pumps out gastropub fare to a formidable lineup of A-listers, courtesy of three six-burner Jade ranges. Photo by Jessica Boone.

Ben Ford Ford's Filling Station Culver City, California

Ben Ford's new gastropub in suddenly trendy Culver City turned overnight into the restaurant of the moment, a destination for A-listers from the nearby Sony Studios and for neighbors amazed to find themselves suddenly at the center of massive property value appreciation. While arranging platters of salumi (from **Armandino Batali**'s **Salumi** in Seattle) and hand-chopping his steak tartare, Ford looks about his kitchen, shrugs, and says, "My favorite equipment? I love it all. But what I can't live without would begin with my **Doughpro oven**. We do about 40

Berkel single chamber vacuum packer

percent of our cooking in the Doughpro. It uses a combination of gas and oak wood, so it's perfect for pizzas, breads, meats—it's very versatile. And since it's floor-to-ceiling and visible from the whole restaurant, it looks terrific."

A wall of **Jade ranges** stands to the right of the Doughpro. "I love them, too," says Ford. "I've actually got three of them in a row, with six burners on each. The funny thing is, it wasn't what I ordered. But I love what they sent me; it's even better than what I had in mind. When you design a kitchen you start with the burners. And really, between the burners and the wood-burning oven, I've got everything."

Ford is also head over heels for his **Silent Servant dumbwaiter**, which connects the upstairs prep kitchen with the main kitchen, downstairs. "Everybody is fascinated by the dumbwaiter. It's like something out of another era. It's nothing but a box that goes up and down. But it's very odd to find one in L.A." And there's one more item, found in a side room in his prep kitchen. "This is the greatest machine ever," Ford says, pointing proudly at his **Berkel vacuum packaging machine**. "We can make anything in advance, then vacuum-pack it, and it stays fresh. We use it for catering. We put all our sauces in vacuum bags. We even use the machine to bind mozzarella. It's become as essential to me as a fork and spoon."

Recipes & Techniques

EDITED BY JIM PORIS
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CRISPY FLATTENED CHICKEN WITH ROASTED CORN SUCCOTASH & LEMON/GARLIC CONFIT

CHEF/OWNER BEN FORD, FORD'S FILLING STATION,
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

For 4 servings

Lemon/garlic confit:

1/2 cup olive oil
10 cloves garlic
1 bay leaf
2 tsps. lemon zest

Heat oil in a skillet set over medium-high heat; add garlic and bay leaf; cook until garlic softens; remove from heat; stir in zest; remove and discard bay leaf; cool to room temperature; reserve.

Succotash:

1/2 Tbsp. olive oil
3 Tbsps. fennel bulb, cut into 1/4" dice
1 cup black-eyed peas, cooked
2 cups fresh corn kernels
1/2 cup chicken stock
salt
white pepper, freshly ground
3 Tbsps. unsalted butter
1 cup spinach, roughly chopped

1. Heat oil in a skillet set over medium heat; add fennel; sear; add confit, black-eyed peas, and corn; add stock; reduce by 50 percent; season. **2.** Remove from heat; stir in butter; fold in spinach; reserve.

Assembly:

1 bay leaf, crumbled
2 whole cloves
2 Tbsps. coriander seeds
2 Tbsps. cumin seeds
2 Tbsps. fennel seeds
4 skin-on chicken halves, deboned
1/4 cup olive oil
fingerling potatoes, boiled and tossed with bacon

1. Heat oven to 400°F. **2.** Toast all spices in medium skillet until aromas are released; cool; transfer to spice mill; grind; transfer to a bowl. **3.** Season chicken halves with spice mixture on both sides; heat oil in large skillet set over medium heat; add chicken skin side down; sear until golden; flip; sear until golden; transfer skillet to oven; roast until chicken is cooked through (about 15 to 20 minutes); remove from oven. **4.** To serve, spoon succotash onto each plate; center a chicken half on top; place potatoes and bacon alongside.

What to drink: red Spanish Priorat