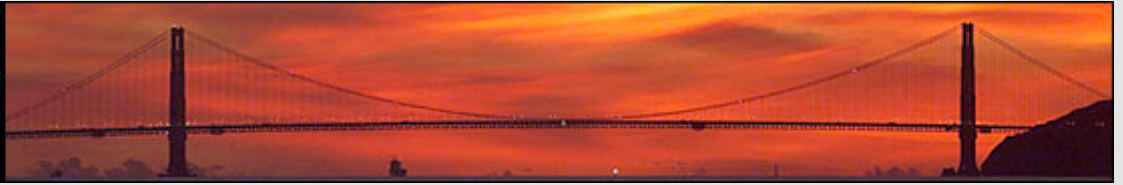


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San Francisco Chronicle

Must-have gear for any kitchen Stocking up on good, durable cookware for under \$150

Jerome Gagnon

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Before attempting to stock your kitchen with the basic accoutrements, "The first thing you need is a desire to cook," observed Rita Paoli, owner of the kitchen supply store City Discount, and former owner (with her late husband) of the popular Italian restaurant, Paoli's. "Without desire and the love of food, you aren't going to be able to cook."

Fortunately, you don't need to spend a fortune to set up a functioning, well-stocked kitchen. Industrial grade kitchenware (stamped NSF) can be found at discount and at restaurant supply stores. IKEA and Target also carry low-cost cookware and dinnerware.

"I've never been one to say that I need a tremendous amount of equipment in my kitchen because it's just not necessary," Paoli said. "I've been in many kitchens where they have magnificent pots and pans and equipment that's never been used. But a kitchen should be a working kitchen with all kinds of foods and tools to prepare good, wholesome food."

Here's a list of Paoli's "must-haves":

-- Knife: "You need a good knife that holds the edge, otherwise you continually have to stop to sharpen it. Prices range from \$18 to \$30 for a decent knife but "if you're doing a lot of cutting professionally, you'll need something more expensive."



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Professional quality knives range from \$60 to \$90.

-- Pots and pans: "You should have a 1- to 3-quart sauce pot, a 10- to 12- quart stock pot and a 10-inch frying pan, either uncovered or Teflon-coated. I don't like nonstick pans because you can't make a good sauce with them.

"If you're making something like Chicken Saute Sec or Veal Scallopini, you want it to stick to the pan because that's the beginning of your sauce."

The total for the two professional quality pots by Eagleware (in larger sizes) plus an uncoated 10-inch frying pan is just under \$70.

-- Roasting pan: "I personally think a roasting pan should be of heavy steel, but if you don't want to spend a lot of money, a metal pan with a Teflon covering or aluminum are other possibilities. Aluminum is the greatest conductor of heat you can get." (\$8.75, coated steel)

-- Cheese grater: The classic "Microplane," a stainless steel grater with a generous handle, can be used for grating cheese or zesting fruit (\$10.50).

-- Mixing bowl: The 3-quart, rounded, stainless steel bowl is versatile and a good deal at \$2.50.

-- Whisk: By whatever you name you call it -- whisk or whip -- this is the indispensable hand tool for foaming up eggs, puddings, sauces and gravies. (\$4,

stainless steel)

-- Colander and strainer: It's possible to get by with one or the other, but at these prices, why skimp? (\$7.85 and \$5.25, respectively)

-- Tongs: "You can get a nice set of stainless steel tongs for turning meats for \$1.65, but because this style doesn't lock it will take up more drawer space. If you want something that locks and won't burn your fingers, the \$7.50 model is a good choice."

Tongs are a top-10 toss-up between stainless steel slotted and solid spoons,

both \$1.65 each.

-- Basket steamer: Drop it in a pot with a lid to steam vegetables without drowning them. (\$5.59)

-- Measuring devices: For measuring solids, a graduated set of stainless steel cups is \$6.35; for liquids, the glass Anchor-Hocking one-cup is \$3.95; and a set of measuring spoons is \$1.65.

Of course, these are just the beginning.

"People who do a lot of cooking need a mixer, maybe a food processor and possibly a pasta maker, and there are dozens

of little helpers like scrapers, pot holders and oven mitts -- there's no end," Paoli said.

Where to put it all can be a problem, but there are a number of options that are adaptable in a rental or most any space-challenged kitchen. Carts, open shelving, portable cabinets and bins are just a few of the choices readily available. If you're living in an apartment and storage is minimal, you might want to consider a wall-hanging pot rack. Half-round models and steel rods with hooks are both practical and affordable.

The Chelsea Baker's Rack, a portable kitchen island available at Cost Plus World Market (on sale at \$159), adds the bonus of extra counter space along with a rod for hanging pots and pans above and slatted shelving below.

The six-shelf pine tower from Hold Everything is \$89 while the five-shelf chrome tower is priced at \$199 and will hold up to 500 pounds per shelf (catalog only). The hand-forged Baker's Rack from Williams-Sonoma would be equally at home in a kitchen or dining room.

Fashioned after antique racks found in French boulangeries, it's embellished with decorative scrollwork, has four shelves and measures 36 3/4 inches by 17 1/2 inches by 71 1/2 high. (\$499, plus shipping; catalog and Internet only)

Stocking a kitchen doesn't have to be done all at once. As your skills and knowledge of the art of cooking increase, you'll have a better understanding of your personal needs and preferences.

You may find you prefer an aluminum to a steel roaster, for instance, or simple stainless steel tongs to the lockable variety. (Professional chefs hang the former from rods or racks above ranges where they're handy.)

Whatever your preferences, if you buy quality cookware and utensils and treat them well, you should be rewarded with many years of use.

If you want to boost your desire to cook, or just get some cooking tips and seasonally oriented recipes, check out local Amy Sherman's Web site. Ranked among the top five best food blogs by Forbes magazine, the site will whet your appetite or, at the very least, affirm your God-given right to make reservations rather than cook dinner. Restaurant reviews are also included (www.cookingwithamy.blogspot.com).

Resources

City Discount, 1542 Polk St., San Francisco, (415) 771-4649

Cost Plus World Market, (800) 267-8758 for locations

Restaurant Supply Place

Hold Everything, (800) 421-2264 for orders and locations.

Williams-Sonoma, (800) 541-2233 for orders and locations.

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Page E - 4

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