



# **Kitchen Design Consultants: Interviews**

Planning Better Kitchens

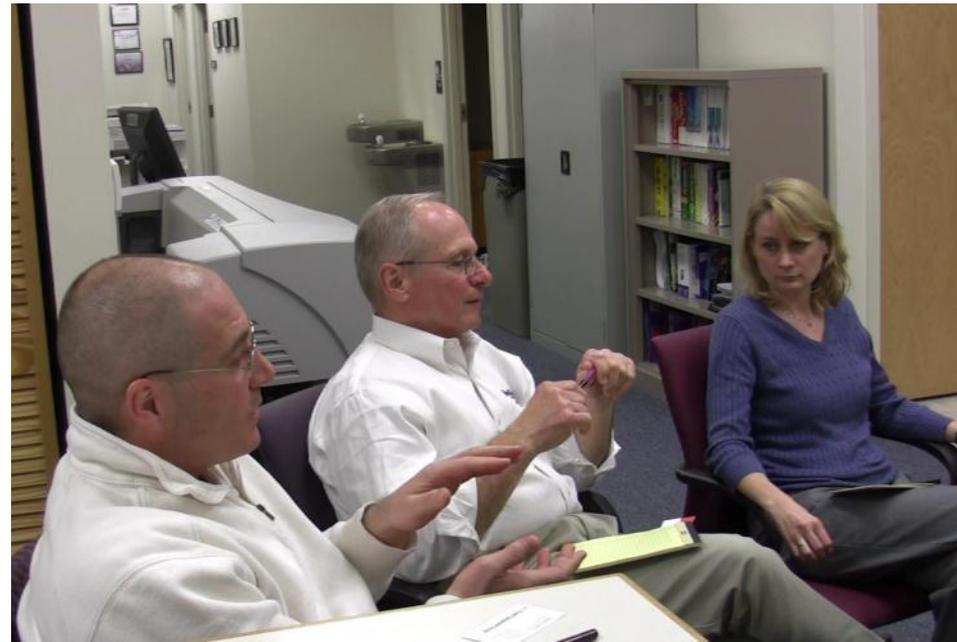
# Kitchen Designers

## 5 Interviews

Kitchen Designers have a big influence on selection, recommending and specifying equipment. We interviewed five consultants in five different states

1. Restaurant Design Services\*, Eufala, AL., Louise Howard (LH)
2. Food Services Consultants Studio\*, Richmond, VA., Larry Huber, Doug Huber, Amy Hegarty (LDA)
3. Vondran & Associates, Fort Wayne, IN., (Phone) DJ Wagner (DJ)
4. MacFarland, Kistler & Associates, Pittsburgh, PA., (Phone) Ken Kissler (KK)
5. JS Smith Design, Cincinnati, Oh., (Phone) Joby Smith (JS)

*\* In person interviews*



# Kitchen Designers

## Questions for KDCs considered:

- Segments in which they worked
- Kitchen design trends
- Project process
- Drivers of kitchen design
- Equipment and specs
- LEED and green issues
- Waste management
- AutoCAD and Revit status
- Information sources
- Brands/manufacturers
- Suggestions for improvement w/Hobart/Traul



# Kitchen Designers

*“We design and specify, we do not sell”*

- Our interviews with SNDs often suggested a contentious relationship with KDCs.
- The KDCs say they start the design process with discussions with the SNDs and the schools
- KDCs with a good working relationship with SNDs are more likely to deliver what they need in a kitchen design (Pam Riley-DJ Wagner, Olentangy)
- Because so many districts were frustrated with kitchens being designed by people who don't work in kitchen, there is an opportunity for design leadership in school kitchens



# Kitchen Designers

## Segments in which they worked

- LH (AL), DJ (IN, OH), and JS (OH, KY) concentrated in their respective one to two state geographic regions and work primarily in K-12
- Kissler (nationally) and Huber (internationally) worked more broadly in K-12 and segments beyond K-12
- Huber (former Hobart rep) expanded beyond K-12 “when they stopped building houses”
- Huber also surveys K-12 operations and provides equipment needs assessments (compliance, budget forecasting, etc.)
- Kissler is well experienced in K-12, works efficiently and has “lots of knowledge of the sector”

# Kitchen Design Trends

## **Kitchen design trends**

- Consolidation of schools, EL+MS or MS+HS, around a single kitchen (OH, AL,VA)
- Increase in purchasing locally to save transport costs (though structures are not fully in place to ensure food consistency/safety as in national programs)
- Recovering economy will likely give way to “pent up demand for schools”
- SNDs are more well educated
- Significant pressures on food service operations to “break even”

*Absolutely because the goal of the district is basically to have that food service department run in the black, if it is now running in the red, they just don't want to keep dumping money into that program.*

# Kitchen Design Trends

*“You want to make them comfortable, you want to make them eat, you want to make them spend their money”*

## Kitchen design trends

- Growth in Culinary Programs in schools and trade centers (good for equipment sales and brand building)
- Multi-use cafeteria space (eating, testing, meetings)
- Increase in use of **food court design** to attract students and improve participation and profitability

*“Participation went from **55 percent to about 85 percent**, and sales, because they were going through in seven minutes in a 30 minute lunch period”*

*“I am going to say anytime we have gone into a district and changed from a to a standard cattle lines that is what we are used to, going through with the kids to a food court. We haven’t seen anything less than a **30% revenue increase**. That is even when they have additional labor costs sometimes to man some of these stations.”*

# Kitchen Design Trends

## **Kitchen design trends**

- Some large city districts use less equipment (Columbus, OH) and more thaw, heat, serve
- Fryers seem to be disappearing
- Increase in need for “display refrigeration”, more self serve, more Grab N Go
- Menus have greater variety to attract students
- SNDs worry about labor costs and finding skilled staff
- Less use of hard trays for paper trays, though “in the long run it’s a swap off”



# The Process

*“It’s usually the architect who hires us”*

## **Project process**

- Other key contacts are school superintendents, construction supervisors and engineers
- KDCs play a key role as architects have difficulty keeping up with K-12 specific rules/regulations
- They oversee construction to ensure plans are being developed accurately

*“Working specifically with the end users, and what we do, I guess why people like to work with us we tend to listen to them, give them all the pros and cons of what they are asking for. Give them ideas to consider that we have been successful in implementing in other facilities. Ultimately the final decisions are theirs, they are the operator not ourselves.”*

# Playing by the rules

## Why it's tough in Ohio

The Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) administers the state's comprehensive Kindergarten through 12th Grade public school construction program. The agency helps school districts fund, plan, design, and build or renovate schools. (OSFC website)

- Initial intent of OSFC was to help bring Ohio's schools (especially in some rural areas) up to code
- Currently KDCs are frustrated with OSFC's "outdated" methods for space plans for kitchens (3.5 square ft./student)
- Rules make it difficult to build the food court concept ("you pretty much need that design for participation if you are going to operate in the black") in smaller schools

*"Any time you get bureaucracy involved, the mindset gets very rigid. The program is built around 750 kids. And they define their spaces based on that amount. And as they go up and down, it's all done on percentages. So, when you start dropping below 750 kids, the spaces get real limited. You know, dishwashers don't change size, three compartment sinks don't change size, refrigerators don't."*



# Pick me!

## Why it's tough in Ohio

### The infamous “Pick Three” rule

- All school construction (new build and renovation) using OSFC funding must follow regulations including the “Pick Three” method
- KDCs feel this rule stifles innovation
- Workarounds are possible, but cumbersome and time consuming

*“Ohio is one of the worst states in our country (to work in). Ohio is a minimum pick three, so if we believe one manufacturer is by far better and meets the requirements of the particular end user, it does not matter. We still have to list two other ones that we know are not. “*

# What drives kitchen design?

*“It’s all about the menu”*

## **Drivers of kitchen design**

- While a number of states seem to have regulations regarding labor and space based on number of students, none were described as negatively as those in Ohio
- Several KDCs likened designing a kitchen to designing a manufacturing facility
- Key elements in design” “It all starts with the menu”
- Frequent changes in regulations also affect design
  - USDA regulations requiring 20 case minimums on delivery dictated an increase in storage space in school kitchens
  - NSF’s new standard eliminated the self serve concept in elementary schools creates challenges in the line

*“The menu is the product you’re building and the equipment is the factory”*

# The food is in your court

## Why food courts?

### The food court plan

- Food courts have been described as a very successful way to increase participation
- They reduce “line time”, which students dislike, support wider variety in menu options, reflect a retail vs. institutional environment and serve a greater number of students in shorter amount of time
- Even when increased labor is added in (more cashiers, security equipment/monitoring), food courts have been successful in schools
- One KDC uses a food court plan in 90% of high schools, 75% of middle schools and sees the concept growing at elementary schools (10%)

*“I see that number also changing as we progress through as the kids are getting much more advanced than we were at that age. They do they see it (food courts) at the malls and everything else.”*

*“We were serving 300 kids in seven minutes - food court concept.”*

# The “Spec”

## who writes these things?

### Equipment and specs

- Specs are usually written by the KDCs with input from the SNDs
- Most KDCs work with the SNDs on specs, though approaches may differ
- In VA, LDA usually has the SND take the lead on brand preferences
- Among other KDCs, they might take the lead in recommending brand depending on the knowledge of the SND
- SNDs and KMs usually prefer to stay with a “brand I know”
- Most KDCs disliked “value engineering” and though they felt they could be helpful, were sometimes not involved
- Some suggested in value engineering “the combis are the first things to go”

*“If there is any, I am going to say additional equipment first off in the program that they may not need but it was considered a wish list item that would come off first. And that varies based on how the district operates. The other potential is to eliminate combi ovens and go with ovens and steamers as a savings.”*

# About Equipment

## the basics

### Equipment basics

- Convection ovens, steamers, refrigeration are kitchen “basics”
- Use of mixers and slicers varies by district
- The advent of heat and serve is counter balanced by the push to do more “fresh”, but “it all comes down to money and safety and labor”
- “Large big vessels cooking one thing” are on the wane because of batch cooking
- One KDC likes to spec smaller/shorter equipment because the kitchen staff is usually female

*“Obviously in the majority in the K-12 kitchens, it is my mother and your aunt. One of the kid’s grandmother and that is the work force”.*

*“Southbend convection ovens are “my prime spec” as they are eight inches shorter than Blodgett’s”*



# About Equipment

## Combis

### **Combis are loved by some**

- Frozen food cooks better, stays moister
- Food cooks more quickly
- Combis provide some flexibility in kitchen management
- As a good replacement for fryers, they “keep school boards and legislators happy”
- Generally prefer boilerless and gas

### Combis are avoided by others

- There is a push in VA districts to get rid of combis because of the expense to repair (\$1200)
- Request is for a redesign of control panel to lower costs so “repair is \$300 and we can do it”

# About Equipment

## Keeping food cold

### Keeping food cold

- Pass throughs on the line increase serving efficiency
- Pass throughs can also improve safety (avoid having 2 people in the serving line and opening/closing of doors)
- Traulsen does a nice job in “small things that become big things” like protecting door gaskets
- Two key needs in refrigeration are for open front display coolers and under counter (dual purpose, work station on top, cool storage underneath)
- Many spec Traulsen, with Victory being a close competitor (close in quality, lower in cost)
- One suggested growth in K-12 of blast chillers as need for record keeping increased
- Cleaning condensers is a problem (it doesn't get done) and one suggested following the model of residential refrigeration; condensers don't need to be cleaned



# About Equipment

## Mixing and Slicing

### Mixing and slicing

- Most agreed that large mixers were no longer needed in school kitchens
- One KDC specked a 30 qt. Hobart mixer with two bowls and two bowl dollies
- In some districts, slicers and mixers were no longer used as most food was more of a heat and serve variety

*“There's only one mixer. It's Hobart. It's simple. You go to any school in the country that's 45 years or older and you find three original pieces of equipment. They're all Hobart - dishwasher, mixer and slicer. And, you know, just the mixer is the one that seems to last forever. And the closest competitors are half the price and don't hold up near as well as what the Hobart units do.”*

# About Equipment

## Ware washing

### Washing ware

- Several KDCs liked to spec dish machines but the decision was usually up to the district leadership
- Some KDCs designed space for a dish machine but held off on initial installation because of cost
- One suggested a resurgence in popularity of dish machines because of outside pressures by school boards to be more “green”
- Several commented that the job was “low on the totem pole” compared to all kitchen tasks
- Schools offering multiple menu items supported a continuing need for dish machines

*“I think trend will reverse because of outside pressures to be “green”*

*I am going to guess that for all the OSFC schools that we do, when we do 40 of them a year 35 of them have dishwashers in them.”*

# About Equipment

## Pulpers and Waste

### Pulpers and waste

- Managing waste remains an opportunity area in K-12 kitchens as no single department has control
- Resolving waste issues often follows “throw over the fence” decision-making
- Solutions and cost savings in one area generate problems in other areas
- LEED regulations preventing use of disposals has added to problems of waste management without offering solutions
- Most did not see pulpers as a viable solution at the HS level because of student behavior

*“The challenge is in cost of repairing a big piece of equipment that destroys things for a living”*

*“The landfill people were not in the LEED meeting to eliminate disposals”*

*“Pulpers, unless we use a truly remote system, we have had **unbelievable amount of problems with it due to smells. The odor in a self contained environment, it is terrible.** I think it is a great idea, you go to the end user (missed) sitting any where I think this is going to work well and a potential for order is to put a remote (missed) (The problem is coast) it is **\$50,000 usually in a public money environment, they are not very receptive to that.** “*

# “Green” without envy

## *Leadership and Energy in Environmental Design*

### **LEED and “Green”**

- The push for LEED certification comes from architects and school boards (with the assumption that LEED projects have a better chance of being funded)
- All KDCs suggested LEED is growing in importance and was a challenge in kitchens to win “one stinking point” and experienced frustration that LEED decisions seem to be made in a vacuum
- LEED is especially challenging in dish and ice machines (eliminating boosters, excess water usage etc.)
- KDCs rely on manufacturers to supply them with LEED data
- One KDC suggested LEED would spur increased monitoring of utility use in school kitchens

*“They want us to do away with all booster heaters, which we fight them, and usually, we win that one - no booster heaters. Everything they want is cold water sanitization, which for school doesn't work”*

# Design Tools

## AutoCAD and Revit

- KDCs used AutoCAD and were aware of Revit
- One had purchased Revit software but had not yet had it installed
- It was recognized that Revit made pricing and ordering supplies easier “push button ordering in linear feet”
- The 3D rendering is easier to understand for people “who don’t read drawings”
- Revit challenges are in space requirements for files though product detail is “10 times more simple” than AutoCAD
- All recognized change from AutoCAD to Revit is “a nightmare”
- Timeliness of Revit implementation ranged between “down the road” to “coming very very shortly”
- Request was for manufacturer support

*“Move quickly, we’re gonna need it real soon”*

# Current information?

## Keeping up to date

- KDCs mentioned NAFEM as the “go to” trade show for information
- There is a heavy reliance on reps to keep KDCs up to date on new equipment and KDCs want to learn about new equipment before the end user
- KDCs also depend on reps to know and be able to “tear down equipment” and manage equipment repairs.

*“NAFEM is our biggest, where we go to learn the most”*

*“Rely on manufacturer for good information, technical information”*

*“If something is not working right, we rely on the rep to know how to fix it”*

*“We rely on our factory representatives tell us that. If we hear it from an end user that is the fault of the representatives, that doesn’t sit really well with us.”*

# Which brand is which?

## The Hobart brand is strong with KDCs

### Brands and manufacturers

- All highly regarded the Hobart and Traulsen brands
- Equipment lasted a long time and customers respected the name
- Reps were trained more effectively compared to other manufacturers
- Hobart Service was a bonus “that needed to be touted more”

*“I do prefer Hobart on some of the equipment items, primarily it would be on the food preparation equipment. That would be your slicers, mixers, and things of that nature. The other major segment would be the dishwashers.”*

*“Traulsen's probably the better--you know, if you're gonna go a scale of one to ten, Traulsen's the 10 and Victory's the eight or nine.”*

*“Aside from a couple of times just where it has taken a little longer we have been for the most part they are one of the best.”*

# How can Hobart improve?

## Areas for improvement:

- There was some suspicion of a lowering of quality standards in Hobart equipment

*“in other words it (Hobart) was a top brand very, very high quality above everyone else. I do think due to the climate now everyone wants to become more of a fan of everyone. So I am going to say in some aspects they dropped the quality of the equipment to match others because of this (K-12) market. “*

- One suggested being more open-minded in production of specialty machines in the K-12 market, looking at profitability differently, following innovation in the retail restaurant chains

*“You get a bunch of financial guys like me who start looking at it and said, we sell one of these every other year, let’s get rid of it. We don’t need it. We’ve got some tooling we can get rid of. It’s sitting in the corner collecting dust, but we pull it out when we need it. Let’s not worry about the fact that we can price it any way we want because when that client needs it, they’re going to buy, no matter how much it is to a degree. . They took the curve and they say we’re going to take two standard deviations from the mean, and that’s going to be our product line. “*



# How can Hobart improve?

## Areas for improvement:

- They wanted ITW/Hobart/Traulsen to recognize and build on an opportunity

*“I’m talking from a product standpoint basically, but parts too. If you think about it, there are times and there are opportunities where that one piece of equipment, you’re the only guy that makes it and we knew about it, and we wanted to get it and you didn’t make it anymore. It’s been discontinued, and now we can’t solve that client’s problem.”*

*“Silver King makes a little drop-in counter. It’s not really an ice cream cabinet, it’s a display cabinet that kind of will hold ice cream for two hours without it melting. I’ve asked another manufacturer to make that. They’re not interested. We probably spec, well we were when schools were really hopping, 30 a year just in this office.”*

# Kitchen Designers

It's more than just the product

## **Suggestions for improvement:**

- Improve cut sheets for warewash; making them more user friendly, easier to read, improving call out of changes
- Expand distribution such that dealers who do not sell Hobart can purchase from dealers who do (in cases where Hobart dealer doesn't win the bid, schools can still obtain Hobart equipment)
- Follow the KISS principal in K-12 markets and equipment
- Consider developing a specialty machine division to address K-12 needs
- Borrow on the retail chain restaurant innovation and transfer to specialty products for K-12