

AT HOME ON THE RANGE

These cookers are for culinary artists

BY DEE GIBNEY



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And it’s very forgiving.”*



PRINCE CHARLES, MADONNA, STING, SHARON STONE and TV chef Jamie Oliver all own one. It’s the Rolls Royce of stoves (or cookers, as they are known over the pond), the classic icon of British culinary tools: the AGA cooker. It may look like your grandmother’s oven, but it’s unlikely Grandma’s oven could be programmed by remote control or a touch screen.

Invented in 1922 by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Gustaf Dalen, a Swedish physicist, this timeless appliance is the pride of the elegant Grange showroom at King and Jarvis, gateway to the King Street East Design District.

The AGA’s retro look is not a style gimmick. Manufactured since 1932 in only one location in the world, the historic Coalbrookdale Foundry in Shropshire, England, it has stayed true to its classic bones to this day—except for the rainbow of colors to choose from. It’s now available in a newly released on/off programmable model.

“It was really the heart of the home when we lived in England,” said Grange sales specialist Daniel Frohlich. “I remember how we would all huddle around the AGA oven on cold rainy days and how different the food my Mum made tasted when she cooked with that oven.”

Cooks love an AGA. “You’re cooking from the heart because you’re not setting temperatures, you’re not waiting for temperatures to go up or down,” said cookbook author and chef Donna Dooher, who owns Mildred’s Temple Kitchen in Liberty Village. “It turns you from a good chef to a great chef.”

(Below right) Separate ovens can be preset and maintained at different temperatures for roasting, baking, simmering or simply keeping food hot without drying it out. No knobs or dials control the radiant heat. Surface hobs or plates – one for simmering and one for boiling – are each set at different temperatures. (Top right) The boiling hob can also perform as a grill. Anything from pancakes to bacon can be cooked directly on top.





The AGA comes in an array of colours from Pistachio to Duck Egg Blue, but you won't find the stainless steel that dominates appliances today – AGAs are cast iron. The iron is more than just a décor issue; the weight of the heavily insulated appliance means that floors might need to be reinforced.



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You can book an appointment with Daniel Frohlich for a multi-course AGA cooking demonstration at the Grange showroom, 150–154 King Street East. 416-943-0242

Prices for AGAs run from about \$15,000 to \$25,000

“You have your different compartments set at different temperatures so you are cooking much more intuitively. There is a bit of a learning curve, but the results are phenomenal. It’s the pure radiant heat that really makes the difference in the dish.

“It’s hard to burn anything,” adds Dooher. “It’s a much gentler way to cook. And it’s very forgiving. If you leave something in the oven for too long it won’t be ruined, because the juices stay locked in.”

Both the traditional and electronic models use heat transferred from a small thermostatically controlled burner in the core to the ovens and top metal plates preset at different temperatures. The cooker can be fuelled by natural gas, propane or electricity. Its insulated cast iron body absorbs, retains and transfers the heat.

When Susan Ellsworth, research director for an advertising agency, and her husband renovated their Victorian-era weekend home two years ago, they designed the farmhouse kitchen around their new Wedgewood Blue AGA.

“You really have to be a cook to buy it,” said Ellsworth. “It’s not something you buy for show. It does change the way that you cook.”

“We love to entertain, and one of the nice things about the AGA is that you can put different dishes in it then walk away and do other things. It frees you up. You don’t have to be hovering over it. It enables you to cook in a much more relaxed way because nothing bad can happen.”

Said chef Dooher, “Your vegetables can be steaming on top while your bread is baking, your veal shank simmering, and your braised ribs roasting – all at the same time in the different ovens. You don’t have to queue things up. You can move your pots around from the boiling plate to the simmering plate and use the roasting oven, the baking oven and the warming oven simultaneously. It gives you tremendous flexibility and you can cook a large meal much faster. I love it but it’s not for the faint of heart.”

“Ovens are like lovers,” said Dooher. “You have to figure them out before you are fully compatible.” ☞



Now you can text your oven! The Total Control (right) has an electronic touch screen and built-in programmable computer so that the oven can be controlled remotely from a smartphone, computer or an iPad app, as well as by touch. Each oven and hob can be programmed independently.