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## High Tech on the Menu: Restaurant Owners Use New Technology to Boost Business

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What's happening in Traci Des Jardins' restaurant - beyond the usual culinary feats that keep diners flocking to Jardiniere - has surprised even the chef.

A revolution is cooking, and it has nothing to do with how fresh her striped bass is, or how refined her Champagne.

At least not in ways obvious to diners.

This revolution is technology-driven, but it's more subtle than the gee-whiz stuff of the '80s. Unlike the hand-held gadgets that sprang into restaurant servers' hands a decade ago, beaming digital orders to kitchens and cash registers, the latest wizardry can track a restaurant's inventory, buy its lettuce and mustard and bratwurst, comparison-shop for wine and evaluate the nutritional values of popular dishes - all while cutting costs and eliminating paperwork.

And - getting it all done out of the customer's view.

"I was very resistant to having a computer decide what carrots I was going to buy," said Des Jardins, who at 33 has seen, though not exactly embraced, the rising profile of computers in professional kitchens. Like many chefs, she has been too busy cooking to take computer classes.

This year, she faced down denial and opened her San Francisco restaurant to two new DSL lines. They now power a half-dozen PCs and a laptop.

About two months ago, Jardiniere also opened its doors to OpenTable.com, a start-up that allows diners to make online reservations at about four dozen restaurants in the Bay Area. OpenTable.com also allows restaurants to computerize their entire reservation system and keep detailed profiles of customers - which diners eat what for dinner, how often they eat there, who their companions are.

Over the course of a few months, Jardiniere has gone from being computer-shy to frontier-friendly.

Technology was the most anticipated seminar topic at the 1999 conference of Women Chefs and Restaurateurs, which is taking place through Monday in The City.

Organizers didn't even plan to include technology on the program, said Melissa Mershon, WCR's executive director.

WCR already had focused two entire conferences on software, hardware and restaurant-related Internet developments earlier this year in Seattle and New York, but plans for this weekend evolved by demand, Mershon said.

Technology is compelling, Des Jardins said, if ultimately it gives her chefs more time in the kitchen and her servers more time with customers. What doesn't interest Des Jardins is technology that whizzes and beeps in front of guests.

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