



features

tools of the trade home

- Chef Gifts:**
 2007
 2006
 2005
 2004

Holiday Gift Ideas for Chefs 2007

By Heather Sperling
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Handheld:

Offset Spatula

We ask every chef that we interview for their most indispensable kitchen tool, and the [offset spatula](#) is mentioned by at least one of every five. Pastry Chef Chad Guay of *Table 1280* in Atlanta keeps his in his back pocket, saying "I always need it...it allows me to have a delicate touch." The small sizes (4-5 inch blades) are the most versatile, and are useful for both savory and pastry – for turning filets in the pan, plating a tart, a sliver of gelee, or portions of fish – and thin handles and a lower blade make for sturdy, comfortable maneuvering.



Sewing Scissors

Another immensely helpful tool that's good for doing things on a micro scale – Grant Achatz of *Alinea* uses them for clipping tiny herbs, trimming shards of sugar, cutting butcher string, etc. Last year we featured [Joyce Chen](#) (they stay sharp for so long!), but really, any sturdy pair of plastic-grip sewing scissors will do.



Plating Tweezers

Behind any plate of delicately-placed food, there's (probably) a pair of [plating tweezers](#). Size 24 tweezers have elongated prongs and thin tips, and are gentler, cleaner, and more dexterous than fingers. Will Goldfarb, Paul Liebrandt, and Chris Lee of *Gilt* find them perfect for precise plating of flowers, or any delicate, tiny dish component.



Knives

Henckels' answer to the call for [Japanese steel – German knives](#) designed by a Japanese Iron Chef. The knives, designed with Iron Chef Rokusaburo Michiba, come in six sizes, with ergonomic handles and hand-honed edges. Rick Bayless just bought two sets – one for traveling and one for home.

Plates:

Alinea Landscape Plates

Crucial Detail's newest out-of-the-box [plating option](#), by chef Grant Achatz and designer Martin Kastner, is inspired by rolling hills, peaks, and divots (possibly of the moon), and is one of its most stunning. You'll want to run your hands over their Czech porcelain curves...then wipe off your fingerprints, plate something beautiful, and send out food that, thanks to its vessel, you can sincerely call art.



Hering Porcelain

Le Sanctuaire featured Hering's beautiful perforated porcelain bowls, with elegant designs and sweeping lips that set off the contents in the small bowl within, at their booth at the International Chefs Congress. The Berlin-based company doesn't have an English version of their [website](#) yet, but dishes are occasionally available through Le Sanctuaire and [Rose and Radish](#)... and can be found holding Graham Eliot Bowles' edible compositions at *Avenues*.



Products:

Minus 8 Vinegar

Sweet, tart, citrus-y and a bit caramel-y – the grapes for this vinegar are picked and pressed ice wine-style at -8 degrees; [Minus 8](#) was mentioned enthusiastically by almost every chef we met in Las Vegas this year.

XRoads Sea Salt

Beautifully textured [natural sea salts](#) from the Philippines. It's a good garnishing alternative to Maldon, with larger, firmer crystals, plus the salts come in a small, pretty, woven palm box. Kristine Subido of *Wave* in Chicago tells us to look forward to a number of artisan products coming out of the Philippines in the near future; she uses Xroads as a garnish on a number of dishes.

Blis Maple Syrup

Tony Bombacci of *Nana* in Dallas is one of the few lucky chefs familiar with [Blis products](#). Their sherry vinegar and smoked steelhead roe (don't even try to get some this year – the crop was snatched up early) help dishes hit their high notes. The maple syrup is aged in bourbon casks in Michigan; it's beautiful – deep, nutty, with a small boozy kick – truly the Courvoisier XO of the maple world.

Sustainable Caviar

Celebrate and indulge responsibly. Caspian caviar is in dire straits – thankfully other countries (and species) are stepping up to the plate. We provided our Rising Stars with two kinds of sustainably raised caviar this year – [Sunburst Trout Co's](#) vibrant orange trout caviar and [Riofrio's Ecologico](#) from Spain.

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