

**MOUSE PROUD** Aquavit owner Håkan Swahn (below) landed more than 100 items for his relocated restaurant on eBay, while chef David Burke nabbed a toy-size stove (bottom).

# CheckOut

A smart buyer's guide to styles, shops, sales and services



# KITCHEN A

Score grade A culinary equipment and tableware NYC chefs do—on eBay. *By Nancy Davidson* Photographs by [unreadable]

**W**e go to great lengths to re-create restaurant experiences at home. But perhaps instead of sweating over complicated recipes and hunting down exotic garnishes, we're better off investing in professional-quality tools. Not surprisingly, NYC chefs and restaurateurs figured out the best source for top-shelf kitchen goods long before we did: eBay. The booming auction site is rife with industrial-strength juicers, milkshake machines and out-of-production tableware from shuttered eateries and private collections around the country—for a fraction of the wholesale cost. Just about every imaginable staple of a pro kitchen or dining room is on the block, though we recommend drawing the line at

a bell you can hit while yelling "Order up!" Recently, Håkan Swahn, the owner of relocated Swedish restaurant Aquavit, stood in the dining room of his new digs (set to reopen this week) eyeing a large box marked *FRAGILE*. Inside, nestled in foam peanuts, was the latest from the restaurateur nabbed off of the site: a Glasdam-Jensen bar cart on wheels. The cart, which fetched \$250—a price Swahn estimates is about a third of what he'd pay at an antique shop—slides open to reveal shelves roomy enough for highball glasses and bottles of wine. He already has three other antique Danish cabinets, one of which has a removable tray for serving drinks, which he'll use to store ice buckets and vodka, and a vanity with a mirror

(\$145), which will A credenza-like, steel base (\$300) ing beverages in be in Aquavit's pr Swahn was an ber, when he dec Danish tableware Aquavit's dark v Pantan and Arne ly, the Jens Quist and cutlery they continued in the keyword Quist's trove of the mast cheese boards an and \$100 for each estimated antiq 25 Quistgaard e



JANUARY 13-19



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**COLD RUSH** Gelato purveyor Jon Snyder considers this refrigerated truck the piece de résistance of his eBay-bought collection.

pepper mills for \$40 to \$100 apiece—one for each table in the reborn restaurant's dining room; plus vintage (but unused) Dansk red and yellow enamelware for \$15 to \$30 each. "This stuff is in really good condition—especially for being 40 or 50 years old," Swahn says. Aquavit's executive chef Nils Noren will use the Dansk pieces, which are not available in stores, for serving sauces and soups. To date, Swahn has amassed more than 100 items for Aquavit's new location (65 E 55th St between Madison and Park Aves, 212-307-7311), not to mention a slew of goods for his home, such as task flatware that was either too vulnerable for restaurant use or not available in sufficient quantities.

David Burke, the executive chef and co-owner of splashy Upper East Side restaurant David Burke & Goratella, isn't yet the heavy eBay user Swahn is, but he will be soon. After catering a recent on-site event where eBay executives showed sample inventory—including premium culinary equipment, designer frocks and furniture—to magazine editors, the famously radical Burke dreamed up a challenge for himself on the spot: "The next time I open a restaurant, I'm going to decorate it entirely with stuff from eBay" (note: there is no firm plan for the venture yet). His maiden purchase was a toy-size cast-iron stove; he had aluminum copies of the eight-inch-high range custom-made as a playful way to serve cookies and petit fours to diners.

Jon Snyder, owner of haute Lower East Side ice-cream shop Il Laboratorio del Gelato, searched for two years for a refrigerated truck to ferry his gourmet gelatos and sorbets to local restaurants like Barbuto and Pastis. He finally found what he was looking for...on eBay. Snyder paid just \$7,000 for a 1998 Chevy S-10 pickup with a freezer from PorSbot Delivery Systems; a new vehicle would have cost him about \$35,000. That success was the pinnacle of a five-year eBay obsession, during which Snyder collected several vintage milkshake machines (more useful acquisitions for home cooks than a refrigerated truck) for about \$100 each. Compact enough for the average kitchen counter, the old-school

mint-green-and-chrome appliances also make excellent smoothies. New shake-making appliances are on the market for about \$80, but Snyder says the motors are comparatively weak.

Among Snyder's other eBay finds: \$300 heavy-duty commercial juicers and blenders he uses to make fresh juice for Il Laboratorio's sorbets; similar machines fetch as much as \$900 at restaurant suppliers. Recently on the site, a Bravetti one-and-a-half-quart ice-cream maker that normally fetches \$49.99 was sold for a mere \$18.99 (plus \$14.99 shipping) on the block for significantly less than the \$560 it retails for (\$321.50 with 14 hours left on the three-day bid). When Jeremy Vladis decided to transform his Upper West Side French bistro Avenue

into an It needed an found one The mac \$4,000. "I was used says. A H like a Fry cooks pas standard that best miniature restaurat relatively Express t out fresh went to o Themac Vladis repositio He unloa chairs fo and i for a rest still call Vladis's most any thing yo back on t

# CLICKS OF THE

Before you bid, note the loot, note the

### Focus

Aquavit owner Håkan Swahn spent so many hours on eBay, his wife started to wonder aloud when she would see him again. He learned to speed up his hunts by using extremely specific keywords, searching for goods by designer, period, color and even model number. You can, for example, save time by typing in *Fiestaware, yellow pitcher*, rather than *Fiestaware, or Depression glass cookie jar* instead of *Depression glass*.

### Resist the impulse click

"New designs come up for auction every week," Swahn says. Hence, while it's exciting to find the Russel Wright ceramic creamer you were hunting for, Swahn says it's worth holding off to see if there are similar pieces up for auction that might be in better condition or have a lower starting bid.

### Know your limits

Unless you're running a juice bar out of your apartment, you're better off opting for a manual citrus press (roughly \$40.95) over a superpowerful "high-output" juicer (up to \$600) like the one Jon Snyder of Il Laboratorio del Gelato uses. Note the measurements and intended use of a machine, and troll the "home" category if an appliance you find in the "business and industrial" or "food service and retail" sections seems too hard-core.

### Go on autopilot

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kept losing says. Nina Bid'Samit that auto dollar on s up to the f The fee fo service, E percent of

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