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Luciano Del Signore, owner and executive chef of Bacco Ristorante/Saletta, sautes scallops in his mobile catering kitchen.

## Mobile kitchen adds a sizzle to catering

Restaurant boosts business bringing cooking to parties

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

SOUTHFIELD -- Custom graphics, commercial refrigerators, chrome wheels and Mercedes-Benz logos are among the features of Luciano Del Signore's new \$100,000 kitchen-on-wheels, a mobile complement to his upscale Bacco Ristorante/Saletta in Southfield.

"You can only squeeze so much juice out of one orange. A catering truck opens new vistas," Del Signore said. "Wine can be transported in prime condition."

Del Signore, who stocks more than 400 labels from vintners in Italy and around the world in his restaurant, spent almost four months updating the vehicle for upscale house and office parties.

Outfitting the truck was a labor of love for Gary Scanlan, a sales manger at Corporate Fleet Services in Highland Park. Working in tandem with Snethkamp Automotive Group, Del Signore and Scanlan identified the ideal vehicle and drove together to a dealership south of Cleveland to secure a 20-foot, 8-cylinder Sprinter van with a custom black paint job and a base price of \$46,000.

"The ride is incredible," Del Signore said.

Scanlan sent to Mercedes-Benz Stuttgart, Germany, headquarters for official logos, grille, chrome wheels and dashboard. Sprinter, a tall, narrow vehicle with lots of headroom for people standing inside, sells in the

United States as a Dodge brand and in Europe as

Mercedes. Del Signore used Innovative Media in Warren, a custom graphics firm, to translate the Barney Judge-produced mural behind the bar of his restaurant to an image on both sides of the truck.



Many food purveyors use trucks improved both inside and out.

"I've booked 25 parties since November because people see the truck and want our catering service," Del Signore said.

Fancy catering trucks that serve as mobile kitchens are turning up all over town as food purveyors look to gain a leading edge for corporate and private entertaining off premises. Such a vehicle is a rolling billboard for future parties.

Nick Forte, vice president of Forte Belanger in Troy, said his catering firm acquired a General Motor's Express Cutaway truck in 2007 and had a custom-made 18-foot box installed on it with a rear roll-up door and heavy-duty lift gate.

"That truck is ideal for large specialized events and transporting large equipment with shrink-wrapped, packaged carts for efficient unloading and loading at the events," Forte said. "We also have two new General Motors Cargo vans we recently purchased with

customized 'Metro' rack shelving installed in the back as well as 'Rhino Lining' sprayed inside the van for durability and ease of washing."

The company also has four refrigerated trucks with walk-in coolers and power supplies.

In Bingham Farms, the Matt Prentice Restaurant Group, including Shiraz and Coach Insignia, has a full catering fleet. Food travels in a 22-foot refrigerated Mitsubishi Fuso and two refrigerated full-size Ford vans. Prentice also owns three non-refrigerated full-size Ford vans and two non-refrigerated Chevy vans.

BD's Mongolian Grill with eight restaurants in Metro Detroit invested \$15,000 in an 18-foot Interstate One car hauling trailer and custom "fire pit" graphics from the Meteor Group in Troy. A Ford Excursion -- sans graphics -- hauls the trailer bearing a 2-



ton grill station, portable refrigerator and catering supplies. It has a winch to raise and lower the mammoth cook top for backyard party locations.

Luciano Del Signore spent almost four months updating his mobile kitchen with things like burners, hot boxes and refrigeration.

Customizing a truck for full-service catering is daunting, Scanlan said, because of how much versatility must be built in for the cooks and the varied kind of foods that must go onboard. His company and its suppliers stripped Del Signore's Sprinter interior of everything but front seats and split the back portion in half for dual functions. Power is supplied by generator or a plug affixed to an extension cord for use at everything from Woodward Dream Cruise parties to birthday celebrations.

Add to the mix an insulated commercial refrigeration unit that can chill food all day and a work space with counter storage, hot boxes, induction burners, benches and counters to assemble trays and more.

"Bacco gains flexibility," Del Signore said.

His expansion plans began with purchase of the 18,000-square-foot plaza on Northwestern, west of Franklin Road. He invested more than \$1 million to renovate the space by boosting the kitchen from 500 square feet to 1,500 square feet, building a

private banquet facility for up to 70 people, adding a cargo bay door to the rear, and planned a custom wine shop.

By spring he expects to open a 3,000-bottle wine cellar and wine tasting room whose temperature will be held at 55 degrees. Customers will be offered coats to keep warm while browsing the massive wine selection.

"Everything Luciano does is first cabin," Scanlan said. "He makes his clients feel like royalty. The dining room is booked six nights a week, even on a snowy night."

### **Bacco Ristorante**

- What: Bacco Ristorante/Saletta, Southfield, joins other local caterers with a vehicle equipped to cook food offsite.
- Prices: Vary based on the number of services, type of food and wine ordered.
- Contacts: (248) 356-6000 or [www.baccoristorante.com](http://www.baccoristorante.com)

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