

'The Thermomix is the kitchen appliance equivalent of Dr. Seuss's Sneed — except its must-have versatility is not a threat to the Truffula trees'



VICTUALS

In love with the world's smallest chef

The Thermomix will render all other appliances obsolete



JACOB RICHLER

Last weekend a charming couple from Quebec City dropped by to show me the future of my home kitchen, and it went like this: For starters, there will be a whole lot less of me in it, and even though no one else will be stepping forward to fill the void, the food leaving the place will be better and more varied. All this thanks to a nifty little German-made \$1,600 countertop home appliance called the Thermomix, styled by Porsche Design GmbH of Austria and conceived by Vorwerk.

The Thermomix is the kitchen appliance equivalent of Dr. Seuss's Sneed — except its must-have versatility is not a threat to the Truffula trees. Instead, what's faced with extinction is all those other kitchen appliances cluttering up your shelves. They've suddenly been rendered obsolete.

The Vorwerk Thermomix — or *Bindi*, as they call it in Italy — blends and chops. It grinds coffee and makes sorbet and ice cream, too. Feed it the right ingredients — which it measures out for you with an internal digital scale — and in fifteen minutes it will spit out a very sound risotto. And

simultaneously steam a fish, if you want it to.

It makes purées, rice and spaghetti sauce. Thermomix will turn out a pizza dough in two or three minutes, and then, after a short breath, slow down and fold a *crème anglaise* for dessert. Mayonnaise takes just a minute of its time (and yours), and béchamel, a mere six. Its blades will crush lobster shells and simmer them into bisque before you can get through the front page of the morning paper.

And then it cleans itself up.

"In Europe, they call it the smallest chef in the world," said Claude Perron, one half of its Quebec City-based distributor Importations Nobelhaus, as he fed it another simple dose of ingredients, and set about entering a new round of push-button commands.

No doubt its slowly building legions of home customers will soon be calling it the same thing. But as it has only been on the market here for seven years, and we are still a very long way from buying the 500,000-odd units per year purchased in the EU, it is thus far the restaurant chefs who know it best in Canada.

Over in Montreal, down the highway from the distribution hub, Normand Laprise's kitchen at Toqué! packs a half-dozen of the gizmos. Laurent Godbout has one at L'Épicier down in Old Montreal and so does chef Jean-Pierre Curtat at Nuances, the five-diamond restaurant at the Casino de Montréal on Île-Sainte-Hélène — to name just a few.

Now their local *confrères* are following suit. Michael Stadtländer has one at Eigensinn Farm. Brad Long uses one at the Platinum Club in the Air Canada Centre, Claudio Aprile bought one for Senses and Matthew Sutherland has another for Fat Cat. And Michael Bonacini bought six, four of which now reside in the



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Claude Perron demonstrates the ease of cooking with the Thermomix.

kitchen at the flagship Oliver-Bonacini restaurant Canoe — and remember, the Thermomix is not even intended to be a restaurant appliance.

"It's bloody durable," says Anthony Walsh, executive chef at Canoe and chef-at-large for the Oliver-Bonacini restaurant group, who took charge of the machines six months ago. "We haven't had a problem with any of them. It's unheard of, especially for a home appliance."

The genesis of the Thermomix goes back some 40 years, when the German appliance company Vorwerk did a little polling and research to find out what the consumer wanted in an ideal kitchen appliance, and the answer came back that there was a market for a food processor that didn't just chop, mince, mix and blend, but that also cooked.

Three generations later, the Thermomix is still centred on that principle. The machine essentially remains a food processor that happens to be

able to heat up. But it now does so with a level of precision, accomplishment and efficiency that was previously — and to me, until last Sunday — quite unthinkable.

At a restaurant like Canoe, they use it for making small batches of sauces that can later be vac-packed and frozen. The finely graduated heating controls for its mixing bowl are ideal for turning out sauces like mornay, hollandaise and béarnaise. And despite the fact that its basin holds only two litres of fluid, the machine operates so quickly that it is still useful in a restaurant setting, and the textures of the purées it delivers are such that it is welcome for that purpose, too.

At home, in my kitchen, the demonstration began with a simple mayonnaise. Follow the directions in one of the myriad Vorwerk cookbooks and drop in the requested mix of mustard, egg yolk and oil, push the required buttons and a pure and

quite delicious homemade mayonnaise pops out a minute later. To wash the bowl out afterwards, you empty it, splash in a little water, run it again briefly and give it a rinse. No one with one of these things in their kitchen will ever again have an excuse for serving their children chemical-laced mock-mayonnaise. Actually that hardly matters, because your seven-year-old children will not need you to do it for them — they can do it themselves.

Next up, we made pizza dough. And we began not with store-bought flour but by making our own, from spelt. The route from there to pure, preservative-free pizza dough was no more than two minutes long. And the pizza I made with the stuff later was very fine indeed.

A decent if simple vegetable soup involved nothing more than dumping a small bag of fresh vegetables into the vessel, pushing a button or two to initiate chopping, then adding some powdered stock and some water and pushing a few more buttons to see through 10 minutes worth of blending and cooking. Finding the flavour a trifle wanting, we added some cream and butter and pressed another button and a minute later were delivered a purée of a texture unfairly reminiscent of time spent chopping by hand and working a sieve. Final dirty dish tally: just two — the Thermomix bowl and its blade.

Our first foray into risotto making was less successful — a good reminder that recipes this technical require a lot of precision in the programming. But no matter, I was already convinced: I want a Thermomix and I want it now.

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WHERE TO BUY

The Vorwerk Thermomix is available in Canada exclusively from Importations Nobelhaus, 491 Boulevard Rochette, Beauport, Quebec, G1C-1B2; 418-661-3735 or 1-877-423-8111; importationsnobelhaus@qc.aira.com. Priced at approximately \$1,600 per unit plus tax, with various installment plans available. Purchase includes a home demonstration.