

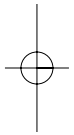
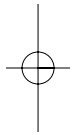


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# Vision Commercial Kitchens

Case Study  
**Malmaison Oxford**



## Vision Commercial Kitchens



**Keith Shearer**  
Executive Chef

Malmaison's daring new Hotel in Oxford is an ambitious conversion of a once derelict former prison. The prison itself was originally adapted from Oxford Castle which pre-dates the Norman conquest of 1066.

Keith Shearer, Executive Chef of both the Malmaison and Hotel Du Vin hotel chains, was responsible for the hotel's new kitchens which were to be housed in a unique and macabre location - the prison's former hanging pit.

**Trying to design and install a commercial kitchen in any converted building can be difficult at the best of times, but working in an ancient castle must have been a unique experience?**

The whole project was overseen by English Heritage, so when the main contractors were excavating the site, every time they came across some ancient relic, artefact or - as happened quite often - human bones, English Heritage sent a little boffin with a microscope and a toothbrush to painstakingly remove it. We had to be really sensitive to the fact that the site dates back over a thousand years.

**The fabric of the building itself can't have been easy to deal with either?**

The fact is that we were turning a prison into a hotel, and just trying to create a practical kitchen environment within a site that was never really meant to have that. The walls are four feet thick and the doorways just two feet six wide so Vision had some real logistical issues to deal with. The kitchen's stove is about twelve feet long by six feet deep and the only way to get it in was by craning it through the roof during the build, then covering it in plastic until the builders finished.

**All these issues must have caused some real delays?**

From the original concept to taking guests, it's taken about ten years. We actually designed the kitchen and created the spec about three years ago. All the delays and added cost of dealing with them meant that we had to be very disciplined when it came to the kitchen. I was basically given a budget and that's what I have to work to. From my perspective I was probably the happiest person on site. Once they'd excavated the site, it was then down to Vision, and myself, to deliver a kitchen to a very clear brief and just slot into the site you've been given. It was an easy job for me. My area's great!

## Case Study Malmaison Oxford



### How does the actual planning process work?

Every chef in my experience has their own particular design theme on a kitchen, for me it's about creating a kitchen that's really suited to a restaurant, even though we're a restaurant kitchen within a hotel. It's all about flow, from goods receiving to production of food to the actual service of it. It all has to have a natural flow. Vision and I will sit down and discuss the actual aspects of each kitchen - all the elements of the kitchen that are important to you. What I've found with Vision is that they're very open and it's great to work with professionals who take it all on board even though they're going to have their own preferences as well to go with what you want. Ultimately it's me and the rest of the chefs who are working the space and that's what it's based on. The idea is to make a kitchen as efficient and practical for the chefs as possible. Our kitchens are professional, heavy duty kitchens, but you try and make the environment as good a place to work as possible - they're hot, stressful and have no natural light. I try to make the working environment central to every kitchen as it helps retain staff and lifts the atmosphere. We invest in the top of the range extraction and air flow system to help with the temperature - you can't buy a better one. You can be in there for 12 hours at a time so you need it to be as pleasant as possible. The proof is in how the chefs react to it and the head chef is over the moon. A good kitchen is also a recruitment tool - you show chefs round, they see the investment and know that you're serious in what you do. It's nice for a chef to come into a really well laid out kitchen because the majority aren't.

### And Vision contribute positively to this process?

Absolutely. I want to be able to deal with someone who understands what I want and can deliver it so we work in close conjunction with Vision. There's a very open relationship and I respect the fact that this is their business

- they work with manufacturers and different equipment suppliers all the time so they advise me as the technology changes. And when you talk about design, you're really talking about compromises. I like to start with my utopia of what I really want, given everything, and then work back into what fits; what works; what's within the budget; what's going to be the most practical way forward. We're getting to a point with Vision where we take a footprint into every job but tweak it in for every different space. Of course you always look to try and improve on the last one, subject to budget which is always the start and the end of every project 'what have we got to spend?' Fortunately within Malmaison and Hotel Du Vin, our owners see the value in investing in good strong kitchens and have got the resources to do so. From a company perspective both hotels place a high importance on food and beverage areas in the hotel - they want to be renowned for great restaurants and great bars so you need to have the resources in the kitchen to do that.

### How successful has the Oxford kitchen been?

It's only been open a couple of months so it's still trying to establish it's business, but from the restaurant side the business has surpassed what we expected. We expected 70-80 dinners a night by now but we're well above that. And when you consider it's a 7 day business - Sunday lunches have been excellent; we're averaging 60 for a new business which is really good, particularly considering the building itself has been derelict for ages. Also there's some really good restaurants in the area but to compete and hold our own is great.

### Do you plan to continue working with Vision?

I've worked with other designers and once you've developed a good working relationship and a strong understanding, every time you change supplier you have to go back and redevelop the relationship which makes it hard to get progress on your last design. So yes, we're working with Vision on new designs for

Liverpool and Reading Malmaisons, Cambridge and York Hotel Du Vins and we're discussing four or five new projects.

### It's obvious from the ongoing projects that you're happy with Vision?

I find Vision very easy and accommodating so I'm happy working with them and I know that my Head Office are happy with the results - Oxford is up there as one of the best kitchens in the group. If I was to rate them out of ten I'd say nine. There've been no real issues, in the last 3 years we've been learning from one another what our preferences are. I find them a very easy company to work with, they respond well if there is an issue and they're very quick to resolve it which is vitally important. For example, when we were doing the snagging in Oxford - for starters it was one of the smallest snagging lists I've ever worked to - the way they went about resolving all the little niggly issues (that's what they are, little inconveniences), they were extremely thorough and efficient in doing it.



Vision Commercial Kitchens provides a full service to a growing number of clients throughout the UK from its base in Manchester. The company is one of the few in the industry to have gained ISO9001:2000 accreditation and has also attained the prestigious Investors in People award.

Vision has proven capability covering:

- Full AutoCAD design and planning service
- Equipment specification, sourcing and supply
- Project management and installation
- Full after sales service and warranty management

Vision's capabilities are demonstrable across a wide range of completed projects including restaurants, hotels, bars, schools, colleges, nursing homes, hospitals and the MOD. Clients include many of the leading names in the leisure sector such as Malmaison, Heathcotes and Out of Town Restaurants as well as numerous projects within the public sector. The company was formed by its four founding directors who have over 60 years combined business experience predominantly in the commercial kitchen industry.

Vision is a member of CEDA, The Catering Equipment Distributors Association, the industry's representative body. All members work to the highest standards as defined within CEDA's 'code of good practice'.



## Vision Commercial Kitchens Ltd

Turning ideas into reality

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