

**46 PULSE**NEW YORK POST
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THE BEST S-EATS IN THE HOUSE

Forget Broadway. The hottest shows this season can be caught chef-side in the city's kitchens**BY KIRSTEN MATTHEW**

NOT so long ago, bustling restaurant kitchens were kept hidden from paying diners. These days, however, no restaurateur worth his artisanal sea salt would design a dining room without at least a couple of chairs close to the cooking action. Why? Because food-obsessed New Yorkers want to watch the chef's culinary performance.

"Diners love to be entertained," says Marisa May, owner of SD26 on Madison Square Park. When May and her father, Tony May, were designing the restaurant in 2009, they included an open kitchen that can be seen from any table in the room. "People here are so food-savvy," she says. "They're interested in how things are made, and they want energy, ambience."

When George Mendes opened Aldea in the Flatiron District in May 2009, he was determined to have his chefs on show, too. "Aldea was always going to be an open-kitchen restaurant, where the customers could talk to the cooks and be entertained by the theatrical aspect," says Mendes. And the design works: Gastronomes are drawn in droves to these spots.

Read on for the very best seats in restaurant kitchens.

Bell Book & Candle

141 W. 10th St.; 212-414-2355

Kitchen: 650 square feet, including a 12-seat table

What you'll eat: A \$75-per-person meal that includes a variety of family-style appetizers and desserts, and a choice of entree from the regular menu.

What you'll see: Chef John Mooney's supervising his cooks and servers and plating dishes at the pass. "I like the interactivity," says Mooney of the table, which is made from reclaimed wood from a tenement building on the Lower East Side. "I serve the people myself, and it's a lot of fun. They get a kick out of it."

How to get a spot: Make a reservation one week in advance. The table is very popular with groups celebrating special occasions on the weekend.

