



Press Kit

Contact:

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The Chopping Block is a leader in the culinary industry for its mission to get people to cook. The popular recreational cooking school, private event venue and gourmet retail and wine store has been in business for over 23 years in Chicago due to its ability to adapt to its customers' needs. A highly-trained staff interacts with customers like they would with their own families: they swap stories, share recipes and learn together. The Chopping Block modifies what they teach, how they teach and what products they offer to fit the ever-changing needs of their students. From 101 cooking classes to professional culinary school-style instruction in Culinary Boot Camps, The Chopping Block addresses deficiencies in cooking skills for all levels. Learn more about "The Chopping Block Experience" here in this Press Kit.

Locations:

Merchandise Mart
222 Merchandise Mart Plaza
Suite 107, Chicago IL. 60654
312.644.6360 | 312 -644-6367 fax

[Click Here for Map](#) | [Take 360* Tour](#)

Lincoln Square
4747 N Lincoln, Chicago, IL 60625
773.472.6700 | 773.472.6779 fax

[Click Here for Map](#) | [Take 360* Tour](#)

Credit Cards:

American Express, Discover, MasterCard, Visa

Cross Streets:

Merchandise Mart
Kinzie and Wells

Lincoln Square
Lincoln Ave. between Lawrence and Leland

Parking:

Merchandise Mart
Limited street parking, pay garage

Lincoln Square
Metered street parking

Public Transportation:

Merchandise Mart
CTA Bus: No. 37 Sedgwick
Brown, Purple Line Trains: Merchandise Mart Stop

Lincoln Square
CTA Bus: No. 11 Lincoln, No. 49 Western, No. X49 Western Express, No. 81 Lawrence; Brown Line Train: Western Stop

Reservations:

Required, online at www.thechoppingblock.com or by calling either store 312-644-6360 (Merchandise Mart) 773-472-6700 (Lincoln Square)

Private Parties:

Available for any occasion, from social events to corporate functions

Catering:

Available within the Merchandise Mart

Private Party Facilities:

Merchandise Mart
Currant Kitchen 20
Basil Kitchen 65

Saffron Kitchen 50

Olive Kitchen 12
Entire venue 300

Lincoln Square
Eggplant Kitchen 14
Thyme Kitchen 30
Outdoor Patio/Kitchen 20
Entire venue 65

Square Footage:

Merchandise Mart 8,000
Lincoln Square 4,000

Wheelchair Access:

Merchandise Mart: Yes
Lincoln Square: First Floor

Opening Dates:

Merchandise Mart 2005
Lincoln Square 2003

Overview

The Chopping Block, Chicago's acclaimed recreational cooking school, private event venue, retail and wine store, teaches the lifestyle of cooking from two locations in Chicago: in the LuxeHome family of boutiques at The Merchandise Mart, Suite 107, and in the northwest neighborhood of Lincoln Square. The Chopping Block harkens back to an age when you knew the proprietor and might even sit down and chat with him or her for a bit over a cup of coffee. Some visitors head straight for gourmet foodstuffs, ingredients and cooking tools that can be used to recreate their favorite lessons at home. Others linger with Owner/Chef Shelley Young and chat about their latest adventure in the kitchen, or the results that their newest set of pots and pans have yielded.

"We do encourage interaction with our students. We want them to ask questions and talk about how their new pot worked at home. We want to know what works and what doesn't because it helps us to learn more about what they do when they leave the class or go home with that new pan. We can use that information to help them become better cooks, and we can help new cooks avoid pitfalls from the start," Young said.

The Chopping Block has enjoyed success by following a simple theory: Get people to cook. For everyone who walks in the door, the goal is to foster a certain lifestyle of cooking and enjoying food with friends. And with the cultural trends leaning toward increased family values and

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intimacy with loved ones, it is no wonder why this cooking school with a personal touch has taken off. The Chopping Block offers its clientele an atmosphere where the learning process is nurtured and encouraged not just within the four walls of the school, but in everyday life.

Guests are treated to "The Chopping Block Experience" that is a thoughtful standard in every element of a visit to the schools, from the greeting received when walking through the door to the equipment used in classes and events, all the way to the plates that are eaten on.

The Chopping Block has flourished throughout its 18 years of service because it offers its clientele a new culinary resource unlike anything else that Chicago has to offer. "When it comes to this city, it's one of the best in the world for food," Young said. "One can find anything that they need, great restaurants with award-winning chefs, amazing gourmet food stores and in the summertime, an abundance of farmer's markets with the freshest in produce, meats, cheeses and breads. But for those who are a little intimidated by the culinary arts, The Chopping Block is equipped to fill in the blanks in a way that most other establishments in this city cannot -- to create the bridge between the culinary knowledge and products available and the home cook looking to get dinner on the table."

History

The Chopping Block opened at the original location in 1997 as a small antique cookware shop and cooking school in a small cottage in Lincoln Park. Shortly after opening, founder and owner Shelley Young found that many of her customers needed assistance in selecting pots and pans and other kitchen equipment. The retail portion of the store began to grow as Young and her team of instructors started choosing the best equipment and ingredients for home cooks and carrying those items in the store. A mentoring style of relationship flourished between The Chopping Block and students who quickly saw the storehouse of knowledge and generosity available. The partnership worked and in 2003, The Chopping Block opened its second location in Lincoln Square. The Lincoln Park location was moved to the Merchandise Mart in summer 2005, greatly expanding the offerings of the school.

The Chopping Block at the Merchandise Mart, an expansive 8,000-square-foot space, designed to accommodate Chicago's growing interest in private cooking events, was an expansion from the school's original location on Webster Ave. "The original location, of course, has great sentimental value to me as it is the place where I began this journey. But as our school has grown, so have the needs of our customers. A successful expansion to Lincoln Square first demonstrated that The Chopping Block can offer students the same attention and focus they have always received from our instructors while also expanding our services to meet their growing needs," she said. Good business decisions, intelligent growth and understanding her business is why Young received the 2006 Entrepreneur of the Year Award by the International Association of Culinary Professionals and named Educator of the Year in 2014 by Women Chefs & Restaurateurs.

The Chopping Block is now one of the busiest recreational cooking schools in the country, offering hundreds of classes and events each month.

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Cooking Classes

The Chopping Block's cooking classes are rooted in practicality and simplicity. "The thing about our cooking school is the interaction between students and teachers. The classes are small enough that you can ask questions and get a good look at what's going on. It is an added element that sets us apart and helps the student who devours cooking magazines, television cooking shows and cookbooks put it all together. It's the foundation that links that information to the home cook who needs to get dinner on the table," she said.

Training and experience have prepared the instructors at The Chopping Block to understand cooking well enough to teach others. Young leads a team of up to 20 instructors at any one time, each of whom has a background of working in professional kitchens. "If you've made a pan sauce 500 times a week, you innately understand what makes that pan sauce cook perfectly," Young said. "It is more than just having gone to classes yourself -- you need to understand the science, the time-savers, the repetition that can only be had from working in a professional kitchen," said Young.

The Chopping Block answers students' needs by continually developing new and informational curriculum. Young found that students wanted more in-depth cooking instruction but didn't want to turn to professional culinary schools. So, she developed a week-long intensive program called Culinary Boot Camp offered at the Merchandise Mart location. "It's like professional culinary school without the time or financial commitment," says Young. The basic culinary curriculum features knife skills, butchering, techniques for cooking meat and fish, soups, sauces, vegetables, menu planning, flavor dynamics and culminates in a final day of cooking without recipes. Culinary Boot Camp's popularity grew and graduates expressed their need for more knowledge and so, Culinary Boot Camp 2 was formed. The increased interest also spurred the development of specialized curriculum such as Vegetarian Boot Camp, Sushi Boot Camp and Baking Boot Camp. The Chopping Block now offers over 10 different Boot Camp style classes.

Cooking basics are a strong component of The Chopping Block Experience. Classes such as Knife Skills, Flavor Dynamics and Cooking Lab illustrate basic skills every home cook should have. The school's "101" series, covering topics such as Meat, Chicken and Seafood, gives students a solid foundation for cooking. "The students like the classes because they can walk away with a menu and recipes to follow, but the underlying purpose is to impart an understanding of the basics they will need to continue to learn and experiment at home," Young said.

The Chopping Block's signature hands-on classes are run in specially designed classrooms, equipped with complete cooking stations. Designed to replicate an ideal home kitchen, each hands-on workstation is outfitted with an oven, a cooktop, cabinetry, a counter-top and tools suitable for the home. "It is important that students learn to cook on the type of equipment they have at home. We want our students to understand the feel of what they are doing in a recipe so they can replicate it when they try it in their own kitchens," Young said.

The Chopping Block offers an outdoor grilling classroom/patio at the Lincoln Square location where year-round grilling classes are held for those students who believe grilling is more than just a pastime. Charcoal and gas grilling techniques are explored in classes with a variety of menus featuring meat, poultry, fish and vegetables. The Big Green Egg and Kalamazoo Outdoor Kitchen are also fired up to demonstrate unique grilling techniques such as smoking and grilling everything, including dessert.

Private Events

The Chopping Block provides a unique and affordable venue for private events. From corporate team building and client entertainment to birthday parties and bridal showers, any occasion can be transformed into a fun, custom cooking party that guests will remember. Private kitchen rental, cooking instruction, service, food and beverages are provided in each event.

The Chopping Block at the Mart offers three kitchens that can be used individually or collectively to accommodate groups as small as six people to as large as 300 people. For even larger groups, The Chopping Block can utilize event space available in The Merchandise Mart.

The Chopping Block Lincoln Square also has three kitchens, including an outdoor grilling patio that can accommodate small groups or gatherings as large as 100 people.

Catering is available within the Merchandise Mart.

Retail & Wine

Offering an array of kitchen necessities, from the instructors' favorite cookbooks to kitchen tools and the spices that make their recipes work, the retail stores at The Chopping Block are a culinary resource for students and shoppers alike. Each of the core products has been selected and tested by the staff based on quality and functionality. The instructors' hands-on knowledge of each product adds a great dimension to the retail store. "Buying the right equipment and ingredients can make a huge difference in success for any cook," Young explained. "So when someone is looking for a sauté pan, we can talk to them about what they are going to use it for, and how to use it best and care for it to ensure that it lasts a lifetime."

Also featured at The Chopping Block is a specially selected collection of authentic ethnic ingredients. "Once we started to teach our ethnic cooking classes, and watched our students get excited about trying new recipes at home, we realized that they either didn't know where to get the ingredients or didn't have time to drive up to Devon Avenue every time they needed something. It was a natural evolution for The Chopping Block," Young said. The ethnic classes at The Chopping Block are also designed to concentrate on a select few ingredients that are used in a variety of recipes to reduce the number of specialty ingredients the home cook needs to buy.

The Chopping Block offers a global selection of hand-selected fine wine and craft beer at both locations. "Our list is all about thinking out of the box, so you won't see these wines on just any store shelves," said Young. She plans to add spirits to the stores' offerings in the near future.

High resolution images are available upon request. Contact Andrea Miller at andrea@thechoppingblock.com.