

Kitchen Electrification: A Chef's Guide to Architects

By: Chef Chris Galarza

Most people don't understand just how difficult it is to be an architect. Orchestrating the large-scale multi-year production of designing a building or space to fit everyone's wants/needs from owners, to operators, and everyone in between, all while fitting it neatly into the requirements set forth by city, state, and federal regulators and administrators. Add in the increasing awareness of the affect's buildings have on the environment and you have yourself a headache. With all that being said the kitchen proves to be its own set of challenges.

Chefs are notorious for being resistant to change and with more and more jurisdictions banning the use of gas it is becoming more difficult to get projects off the ground. It's not because the Architects aren't good at their jobs, but simply because chefs aren't good at embracing change that is thrust upon them. Chef's also hold incredible power in where a project goes. Owners often time consult their in-house culinary team on their thoughts on the kitchen space due to the fact that the lack of experience being in these spaces. The project owners are looking to improve the space not just for their own reasons but for the inhabitants of the space. So here are a few things I (a chef) think architects should know.

➤ **You don't know what it's like...**

- I. You as an architect more than likely have no idea what it's like to be on the line in 100+ degree heat day in and day out for hours on end while working at breakneck speeds. At any given time, you can be burnt, cut, or simply fall out from the intense heat and humidity in the space. It's an incredibly difficult job and having someone who can understand the challenges of the day-to-day operation goes a long way to meeting chefs where they are.

➤ **Hire a consultant who's been in their shoes...**

- I. Often architects will hire consultants they've been working with for years and have a report with. Having those relationships are great but when building the kitchens of the future you must bring in experts who can not only talk the talk but who have walked the walk as well. Seek out a professional who can bring their own lived experiences to a stubborn chef. This can prove critical to establishing a report and getting over the hurdles.
- II. Without these professionals there can be a real disconnect between the design team and the end users. They will bring any and all concerns to the table including those that have no basis in reality in an attempt to reverse the course of the design. The hope is that with an overwhelming list of concerns the owner & team might not be able to address them all and go back to gas.

➤ **Ask the right questions...**

- I. If you insist on bringing in professionals who haven't made the transition to an all-electric kitchen or been leaders in those types of kitchens, then I suggest starting with these simple questions.
 1. What are your concerns?
 - a. This will allow the chefs to set the stage for their concerns making them feel heard and a part of the design team. This will also serve the purpose of eliminating your burden of proof so to speak. Once their initial concerns are satisfied if they come back with more it will shed light into the disruptive nature of their concerns.

2. What are your pain points?
 - a. Let the chefs walk you through the problems of their current design and ingratiate you as an ally and one they can talk to about bettering their workflow & conditions.
3. What are your goals for the future of the operation?
 - a. This is a great question that gets the chefs thinking about the future and less on the right now. Questions like these are designed to get chefs to think critically about the space they have and where the future can take them.

These simple tips will help you get further with the chefs who might otherwise be a roadblock to creating the kitchen of the future which will save you time & money as well as help you reduce the overall effects the building will have on the environment.

Chef Chris Galarza is the Founder of [Forward Dining Solutions LLC](#), a kitchen electrification consultancy. As the country's foremost expert in commercial electric-kitchens chef works with governments, manufacturers, brands, designers, and chefs to create lasting sustainable kitchens and culinary ecosystems. Chef Chris has worked on notable projects such as Chatham University's Eden Hall Campus ([the world's first fully self-sustained university campus](#)), Microsoft HQ, and Castilleja All-Girls School.