

MIAMI, FL

➔ Challenge

Design a video production and monitoring system for the challenging environment of a hospitality management school kitchen and restaurant.

➔ Solution

Rely on Crestron technology, including DigitalMedia™, Capture HD®, Crestron control, and Crestron Fusion®.



“

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— Dale Gomez

Florida International University

Really Cooking

Wine Spectator Restaurant Management Laboratory offers a unique educational experience

Looking for an out-of-the-ordinary dining experience?

How about a world-class restaurant that doubles as a culinary theater, where you can watch the meal being prepared, interact with the chef, and even meet celebrity chefs like Michelle Bernstein or Allan Susser and watch them demonstrate how to cook a signature meal.

Of course you'll have to travel to Miami Beach, to an unusual establishment with an unlikely name: the Wine Spectator Restaurant Management Laboratory on the campus of Florida International University.

The lab is part of FIU's Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and it's used to teach food preparation and restaurant management.

Making this unique teaching and dining experiences possible is an award-winning video system based on Crestron technology.



South Beach origins

According to Dale Gomez, Director, University Computer Systems at FIU, the idea for this unique establishment came out of the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, which the university established and organizes each year. “Since its onset, we’ve wanted to create a new five-star style restaurant for our hospitality school,” Gomez says. The festival provided the means, as well as the idea. It’s the nation’s largest wine and food festival, with almost 70,000 people attending each year. It generates roughly \$2 million annually for FIU.

The restaurant laboratory opened last year in a ceremony hosted by Martha Stewart. It has seating for 140 guests, a 38-foot main cooking line (the largest in South Florida), a two-story wine tower able to hold 1400 temperature-controlled bottles, a wine tasting room, and a bar.

Chaplin faculty use the lab for lectures in various issues in restaurant management, as well as demonstrations of cooking and serving techniques. Its most important purpose, however, is to give Chaplin students the kind of hands-on experience they will need as they enter the job market. Throughout the school year, students plan, prepare, and serve gourmet meals to the public for a flat, \$20 fee. The facility also hosts a variety of special events, including wine tastings and special demonstrations by guest chefs.

The video system, designed to support the educational program and to entertain patrons, includes nine



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Panasonic® pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras and ten Sharp® and Samsung® flat-panel displays, including a 90” LCD monitor above the bar. Four Crestron touch screens double as monitors for instructors, including a 24” touch screen, which provides a large work surface for annotating lectures and demonstrations.

There’s a video conferencing setup used to connect classes in Florida with an FIU hospitality school in Tianjin, China. It also gives students in Miami and Tianjin the opportunity to talk to experts in food, wine, beer, and spirits around the world.



There's a Crestron DVPHD video processor that allows quad-window displays on the various monitors, dual Crestron Capture HD recording devices tied into a Blackboard™ and a video-on-demand server, and a DM32X32 switcher, which allows staff to send video and audio from any source to any combination of displays and other video devices.

Designing the video system

Zoran Visnjic, a Senior AV Sales Engineer at Tampa-based integrator AVI-SPL, says there were several challenges to designing and installing this unique video system.

“First, a kitchen is a harsh, noisy environment, full of fumes and heat,” he explains. The AVI-SPL team used domed cameras to protect their mechanisms and lenses. They also programmed an audio processor to filter much of the noise picked up by microphones in the kitchen.

Coverage of all the possible activities required some careful thought and communication with FIU faculty. The AVI-SPL team located two cameras over the main cooking line, one in the cold food/dessert preparation area and one more in the expo area, where student expeditors check the orders for accuracy and ready the food coming from the chefs for the wait staff. One more camera covers a chef's demonstration table in the restaurant; another covers demonstrations in the wine room; and three more cameras are placed above the bar capturing drink preparation, plus 360-degree views of the restaurant.



For audio pickup, AVI-SPL provided four wireless mics for chefs' demonstrations, plus 12 boundary mics, which can be placed on the dining room tables for student or guest participation during video conferences.

The location of the monitors was crucial. The team installed two Sharp 70" displays in the restaurant in addition to the 90" unit above the bar, so all of the guests can see clearly. There's another 70" near the chef's table that chef/instructors' use as a confidence monitor, and also to see students at distant locations during video conferences. There are two 32" Samsung displays in the wine tower, two more on the cooking line, a 55" in the expo area, and another in cold/dessert.

The Crestron touch screens are carefully placed throughout the lab. Two wireless 8" touch screens are docked outside the kitchen. A 12" touch screen is



located on the bar and the 24" touch screen is built into a custom lectern located at the bar. "An important goal of the technology is to allow the chef instructors to have a full interactive feel for the venue," Gomez says. "They can be anywhere in the facility and fully manage its operation using the Crestron touch screens."

In addition, FIU uses Crestron Fusion throughout the campus to monitor classrooms, provide troubleshooting and tech support, and to schedule Capture HD recordings. "We love Fusion," Gomez says. "It's fantastic software."

Gomez says FIU has standardized on Crestron technology for many years. "When I first took over as IT manager, we had rooms that were mixed and matched with many different brands of equipment," he explains. "Our main issue was compatibility." He says that FIU soon standardized on Crestron control systems, and when the company introduced its DigitalMedia platform, they began using it for all of their signal transport and switching systems.

"The reliability of Crestron technology is the number one reason we use it, but we appreciate its flexibility as well," he explains. "We tend not to use any other brands for components that Crestron can provide." He and his staff are Crestron-certified programmers, and they recently completed an upgrade of AVI-SPL's system programming in-house.

"We love the facility, and we are constantly making upgrades," Gomez says. Among other things, he says they are adding AirMedia™ and Capture HD devices to several of the Chaplin classrooms, experimenting with flipped classroom teaching methods and active learning technology.

Gomez welcomes anyone who is curious about the restaurant laboratory or who just appreciates fine dining to come in for a meal. You can register online at the Chaplin website, hospitality.fiu.edu/dining-events.

Integrator
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www.avi-spl.com

Photos courtesy AVI-SPL (page 2 left and page 3 top 2) and FIU (all others)