

Sink Not Included

What today's traveling chef needs to make it on the road.

Text by Jill Santopietro Photographs by James Wojcik



"I do not mind borrowing a spatula or spoon," says Eric Ripert, the chef at Le Bernardin. "I will never borrow a knife." And thus was born the chef's case: a necessity for today's mobile cook. Some are elegant, like Alain Ducasse's handmade leather Goyard bag; others are utilitarian, like the toolbox belonging to Jacky Pluton, the chef at Pluton's in Chicago.

The flying gourmet can no longer cradle his or her treasured kit

through security. "I'll wrap everything, duct-tape the outside and put a lock on it," says Michael Leviton, the chef at Lumière Restaurant in Woburn, Mass. One of his cases arrived at our photo shoot in a four-inch-thick cocoon of duct tape and bubble wrap. Another chef's was padded with plastic half-pint containers, and a third was escorted by a bodyguard. Here is a glimpse into the cases — and the characters — of six chefs.

Ian Lai, Northwest Culinary Academy of Vancouver

Rarely is a chef's tool kit mistaken for a clarinet case — unless it's Ian Lai's. His velour-lined, Japanese-made knife case, as well as most of the various brands of Japanese blades it carries, were given to Lai by his brother-in-law, a former executive chef in Japan. "I think it has a lot of karma," Lai says of the case, which is nearly 30 years old. "There is a lot of energy in the tools. They have history, and I respect that history." The knives are joined by a thermometer, pliers for boning fish and deveining lobster, a caliper and wood-handled stainless-steel chopsticks. Artwork by Lai's daughter is there for inspiration.