

2: The evolution of a kitchen

In a medieval bourgeois townhouse, there was no separate room designated for a kitchen. Archeological and architectural research has not found such spaces, nor are there any written records on the subject. Kitchens, as we understand them, were found in castles and monasteries, where meals were prepared for large groups of people. In urban homes, cooking was done in multifunctional rooms using large fireplaces, where the fire was lit at floor level, and a high chimney hood was installed that couldn't possibly catch all the smoke. Despite this, the same room was used not only for cooking but also for eating and sometimes even for sleeping. The fireplace, aside from its culinary role, served to heat and light the room.

Over time, the space for preparing meals was moved to a separate building in the courtyard or to the hallway of the townhouse. Such a stove, used for cooking over an open flame, with a vent passing through three floors of a stairwell, can still be seen in the townhouse at 34 Old Town Market Square, which belongs to the Museum of Warsaw. In all likelihood, it was built during the renovation of the building approximately in 1620. A painting from the early 17th century by the Flemish artist Frans Snyders depicts the interior of a kitchen from that era. In the foreground of the painted scene, there is a well-stocked pantry and a woman preparing food. The scene serves as a symbolic warning against excess. Oysters and birds skewered on a spit represent carnal pleasures, while a monkey hidden in a dark corner personifies the surrender to sensory impulses. In the background, a second, more modest female figure is cooking a simple meal from local products, symbolizing a healthy and moderate way of life, reflecting the Protestant ideal.

We can learn about meal preparation in the Middle Ages from iconographic sources. In paintings and engravings, an iron cauldron hanging on a hook with adjustable height is often visible, as well as a low spit or grill standing over the fire, with a vessel underneath to collect dripping fat. Such an artifact is also on display at the exhibition. A 14th-century trough, made of grey ceramics, was discovered during archaeological research at the back of a townhouse at 14 Wąski Dunaj Street. The most popular type of kitchenware was ceramic pots of various sizes. Each pot had a specific purpose, which was due to its porous texture—for example, a pot used for a sour

dish could not be reused for cooking milk, as the milk would curdle. Glazing the pots, which also added to their aesthetic value, might have helped solve this problem to some degree by making them easier to clean and reducing the absorption of food particles and smells into their walls. Pots with food were placed directly in the fire using a forked branch or, for better stability, set in an iron ring with legs. Three-legged pans were also popular until the 18th century, used for stewing, frying, or preparing sauces. Various types of ceramic kitchen vessels from archaeological research in Warsaw, dating from the 14th to the 18th century, are displayed in the first room of the exhibition.

The 19th century saw a breakthrough in the evolution of cooking processes. Industrial development and technological innovations led to numerous solutions that made kitchen work easier. The first major innovation was the introduction of stoves with closed combustion chambers, which eliminated the inconveniences of using an open flame. As a result, different types of cooking vessels, made from various metals, began to be used. In the mid-19th century, the first gas stove, invented by James Sharp, was showcased at the Great London Exhibition. Later, towards the end of the 19th century, Austrian Friedrich Wilhelm Schindler patented the first electric stove. However, this invention became widely used only after World War II and gained true popularity even later, in the early 21st century.

Illustrating these changes, this section of the exhibition presents a gas stove from the collection of the Museum of Warsaw and an ornate, cast-iron single-burner stove from the collection of the Warsaw Gasworks Museum. Additionally, through iconography—paintings, graphics, and photographs—we show how the appearance of kitchen spaces evolved historically, taking into account the social context. Visitors can familiarize themselves with the appearance and furnishings of a 19th-century kitchen through photographs taken by employees of the City of Warsaw Conservation Office, depicting kitchen furniture and fixtures from Warsaw tenement houses. The interior of a working-class kitchen in the Wola district during the interwar period is presented in the photographs of Aleksander Minorski, while postwar kitchen layouts are documented by Zbyszko Siemaszko. A contemporary kitchen is represented by Pola Dwurnik's painting titled "A Stunt Woman" which portrays it as a professional cooking laboratory—well-equipped, functional, and modern.