

taste

# Make meals for up to six

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opened last February, and ever since has been stormed by apron-wrapped urban professionals, suburban family folk and even empty nesters looking to stock their freezers with tasty, nutritious meals they

make themselves.

I dropped in last week, and different than a typical Dish visit I introduced myself to co-owner Chris Roscoe so I could get the goods behind the concept. (Besides, if I'm doing the cooking am I really likely to give myself a bad review?

Not so much.) It was during a trip to California for a family wedding that Chris and his wife Allie first encountered the meal preparation phenomenon. They had arrived late to stay with friends and were surprised when their hostess, who has two busy boys, had a tasty meal on the table in no time. She followed it with a repeat the next evening. When they asked, she let them in on her secret: once a month she and friends went to a meal prep operation where they assembled already chopped and prepared ingredients into sauces, marinades, pastas and complete dishes, then came home and filled the freezer with them. The day before cooking it she took a meal from the freezer, defrosted it in the fridge and popped it in the oven at dinner time.

The Roscoes decided to bring the concept to B.C., and enlisted the help of Allie's parents, Peter and Gerry Maw, to get their new business up and running. Not surprisingly,

it's been a hit.

"We get everyone, people who are very good cooks but love our recipes and just don't have time; and we get people who would burn water if they got the chance," says Chris.

Though it may sound unlikely to the non-cooks out there, it's true, preparing a meal at DinnerWorks is close to foolproof.

When I signed up for my session I selected three meals from the monthly menu that I wanted to make: Cilantro Lime Mahi Mahi, Shanghai Pork Tenderloin and Swiss Chicken Bake.

Upon arrival, Chris directed me to drop my belongings in a bin labelled with my name, tie on an apron and wash my hands. Then it was down to business. There is room for 12 people to work at once, each at a different meal station. Specific ingredients, already chopped and sporting the appropriate measuring device, are located in sectioned trays, while chilled items are in the fridge below. Follow the recipe neatly propped alongside, and in minutes one meal is done and packaged with provided

cooking instructions. Then it's on to the next station. Up to 12 meals, which each serve up to six people, can be put together in two hours or less, depending on how fast you can read directions, pour and whisk.

The cost is \$30 per dish, not unreasonable given the size of the meal and the amount of meat, chicken or fish that is included. And how's the finished product?

To date I've sampled two of my dinners. Soy sauce, ginger, cinnamon, honey and sherry lend thick strips of pork tenderloin a symphony of rich, subtly sweet flavours and a velvety texture. Though I sided mine with salad, rice and squash you can serve yours with whatever you like . . . you're doing the cooking!

The Swiss Chicken Bake — a popularity contest frontrunner, says Chris — is a ridiculously easy layering of plump chicken breasts, Swiss cheese, creamy mushroom sauce and breadcrumbs. It scored thumbs up all around when we packed it along to Whistler for a snowboarding trip and ladled it over potatoes.

The veggies are among the side dishes pre-made by DinnerWorks and available for purchase.

Judging by the results so far, I'm confident that the mahi mahi (now resting in my freezer in the same state it was after undergoing flash freezing at sea) will be a tasty conduit for the juicy flavours of cilantro, lime, honey and Dijon that I mixed into a marinade.

Also worth noting is that DinnerWorks seeks out high quality ingredients, local where possible, and if you're willing to pony up the extra dollars, even organic chicken is available.

"We knew by putting it in Kitsilano we were really going to have to take it to another level," says Chris.

Though they didn't intend their business to be a party venue, they've found it a wildly popular location for everything from baby showers to monthly get-togethers.

DinnerWorks is located at 102-1669 West Third Ave., Vancouver. Visit [www.dinnerworks.com](http://www.dinnerworks.com) to view the schedule and menu, and to reserve. Or call 604-731-1185.

[deanal@telus.net](mailto:deanal@telus.net)

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**January 2007 and June 2007**

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