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KITCHENWARE NEWS

Housewares Review

SERVING KITCHENWARE, HOUSEWARES AND TABLETOP MARKETS

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New Products Span Fantasy to Function

by Joanne Friedrich

An economic upturn can be marked by several factors, including investment in the future. That's what the people who attended the International Home + Housewares Show in Chicago experienced when thousands of new products were put on display.

After what many conceded was a year of living cautiously, suppliers returned to the show for 2010 with plenty of introductions. However, there was still an air of cautiousness as many products stressed functionality and multiple uses, embracing the mantra of "more bang for the buck."

"Just the right piece for the job," is how Jeff Reigle, CEO of Regal Ware Worldwide, described his company's introduction of Unity cookware, which features different construction based on the task. For sauces, there are tri-ply pans made of aluminum and stainless steel; for sautéing and frying there are stainless steel pans, some coated with a nonstick surface; and for long, slow cooking the option is nonstick cast aluminum.

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Digital Culture Promotes Tech-Savvy Kitchens

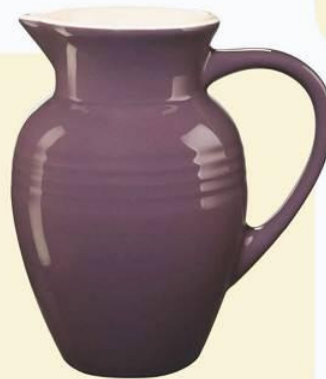
by Carrie Bui

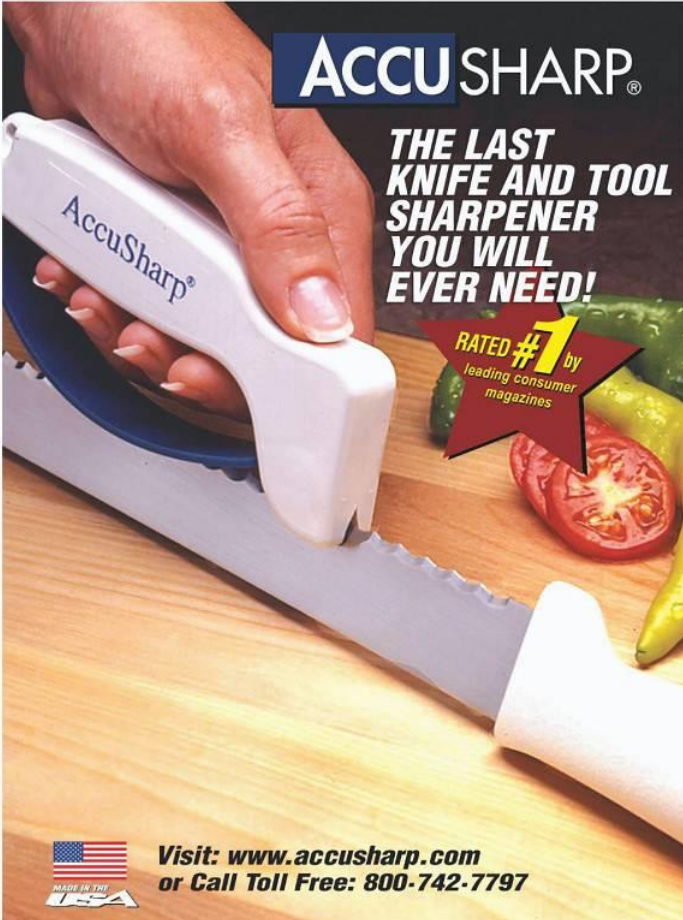
As consumers grow tech savvy, manufacturers are integrating that demand into their appliances. "I think that's a responsibility of manufacturers to keep up with the pace that people are living," said Paul McCormack, public relations director for Miele.

As people spend more time cooking and entertaining, the kitchen has evolved to become an integral aspect to the overall design of a home. "As the trend toward great rooms and open living spaces continues to grow, kitchens are becoming rooms that we live in, as well as cook in," said Sue Bailey, director-major appliance product management for Viking Range Corp. "Thus, kitchen design and the appliances chosen are an important part of the home."

Kevin Gillboe, head of design with KitchenAid, said he thinks consumers will start taking a more whole kitchen approach. Right now, he said, products are still sitting by themselves. Design considerations such as how the major appliances and the small appliances complement each other aesthetically and how they work together functionally will become determining factors in kitchen design as consumers begin to question how the pieces can share information.

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guest column

How Technology Changed in the World of Business

by Bernard Schnacke, President
Frieling USA

Two decades ago, when my wife Monika and I founded Frieling USA Inc., computers had just entered the business world, and the fax machine with big, smelly rolls of thermo paper was born. Funny how, just 20 years later, the fax machine doesn't get much use anymore. And typewriters—what's a typewriter?

I've always had a knack for technology though, so first order of business for our start-up company was to buy a computer. A fancy one with a 40 MB hard drive, no less! We also got a dot matrix printer, a multi-line phone system and even one of those brand new telefax machines to communicate with our German factory. There weren't many businesses yet with a fax machine. I vividly remember people's comments: "Oh, I don't have a fax machine, but the gas station down the street does. You can send your fax there, and I'll swing by tonight and pick it up."

Every Saturday, it was feeding time for our computer. I sat there with a cup of coffee and slowly fed our computer 50-plus floppy disks to back-up all the data. One Saturday, I decided to do something else instead, only to be rewarded with an unrecoverable hard drive crash the next week. Since that day I am a strong believer in back-ups. Every hard drive will fail. The question is not if, but when. Why put your entire business at risk today when backing up is swift and easy—nothing like the tedious process from 20 years ago.

Over time, our business grew into a sophisticated computer network consisting of two high-speed servers with redundant power supplies and a fully automated back-up system that even changes the media. There are also master back-ups in the bank safe and monthly offsite back-ups at our house. We use hard drives in raid configuration that mirror each other so that if one drive fails it can be hot-swapped without losing data. Our servers are connected to a dedicated power outlet that is connected to a huge uninterrupted power supply. They feed a bank of workstations, each of which has a UPS of its own as well.

At every desk, we have two 19-inch LCD monitors. Gone are the days when we had to toggle between screens, only to have forgotten the information from the other screen the very second we switched. For example, I may be writing an email on my left monitor while I make reference to an

Excel spreadsheet open on my right monitor. Not only do I see both at the same time, it makes copying and pasting easy, too. This sounds a lot more sophisticated than it is; all new computers can do this. All you need is a video card that supports a multi-monitor option, or you can very inexpensively add a second card into one of the free expansion slots for less than \$40 plus the additional monitor.



Is your computer system prepared in case of a natural disaster? I don't believe one can be 100 percent prepared for all eventualities, but our set-up is close: Not only are we permanently connected to our home office, but also—via remote access software—can operate most of our office functions from almost anywhere. Because we didn't want to be crippled during a long-lasting power outage, we have a high output power generator to keep us humming if needed.

If you are about my age, you will remember that each business got a book from United Parcel Service in which to enter the day's outgoing boxes with shipping addresses, box weights, shipping method, etc. It is so much easier today where your Internet shopping cart can be integrated with your FedEx/UPS programs to avoid keying in all data twice.

Other things that improved over the years are our high-speed 50ppm color MFS copy/fax/scanner/printer/e-mail document server and our IP-based telephone system.

A hint of nostalgia sets in when I think of the many label sheets we've fed into our typewriters, only to lose a sticker down and behind the drum. How could we function today without a high-speed barcode printer for price stickers, UPC codes and UCC 128 labels. Those printers, although quite robust, have a tendency to break down when you can least afford it, so in my opinion, it is worth it to have a back-up printer available, especially when you have a lot of ticketing to do, or need to print a lot of mailing labels.

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Retailer Profile

Mrs. Cook's *by Joanne Friedrich*

From a 500-square-foot shop in an out-of-the-way strip mall to its current 3,000-square-foot location in Seattle's University Village, Mrs. Cook's has crafted its independent kitchenware store model by serving the neighborhood in which it resides.

"We started as a neighborhood store, and we wanted to stay that way," explained Owner Carol Bromel, who founded Mrs. Cook's 34 years ago. Over that time, says Bromel, the store has grown and evolved until it landed in its current destination shopping location 17 years ago.

The store is named after Hylie Cook, the grandmother of Bromel's husband, who presented her with a collection of family recipes upon her marriage. Its customer base, while diverse, is made up of a core constituency of well-educated female shoppers, she said, in the 32 to 60 age range.

However, noted Bromel, "we're seeing more young people" and the store has sponsored bridal events to tap into this customer. "There's a move to a younger demographic," she said, as more 20-somethings rediscover cooking at home.

When it comes to stocking her store, Bromel said she differentiates Mrs. Cook's from the shopping center's other cookware-oriented tenants—Williams-Sonoma and Crate & Barrel—by having several lines within different categories. "We try to offer quality, but we don't exclude those who don't have a big budget," she said. "Ours is a broader range," she said, supplemented by special orders, so customers can get whatever they want.

Additionally, she said, the store is focused on stocking the kitchen, with a smattering of everyday dinnerware and glassware. Mrs. Cook's is a top seller of Emile Henry bakeware, and also carries dinnerware by that brand. In addition, they offer Tag dinnerware in various colors and some basic white tabletop items. Most people are either trying to fill in their current dinnerware selection, she said, or they are collectors of brands such as Emile Henry. Glassware is geared toward everyday

use and entertaining as well, with most SKUs in the wine and barware category.

The shop-local movement has impacted Seattle as it has other parts of the country, said Bromel. "People are very knowledgeable about what they want and where it comes from," she said. Seattle, which is home to Pike Place Market and its seafood and fresh food stalls, "has been ahead of the curve" in that area, she noted. "Seattle has always been ecologically minded, so there is certainly a movement to shop with local stores," even if it isn't organized as such, she said.

To distinguish itself from the competition, Bromel said they not only stock a broader array of merchandise, but also keep the look fresh with professionally created displays every other week. "For me, it's about freshness," said Bromel. How products are displayed definitely impacts what they are buying, she said. Some stores, she said, have a hardware store look with everything neatly stacked on shelves. "But if it's just sitting there, it's not as enticing."

Bromel likes to keep the center of the store "spiced up all the time." And it doesn't necessarily have to be new items that are featured. "You can take products that are languishing and put them in a new display and it affects the way people see the product."

Over the three-plus decades she has operated Mrs. Cook's, Bromel said trends have come and gone and come back around again. In cookware, she noted, cast iron was strong, then it was anodized aluminum then stainless steel "and now its back to cast iron."

"Things go in cycles with consumers," she said, or evolve with the trend. In Seattle, where coffee is still king, Bromel doesn't sell many espresso machines, but rather does a good business in stovetop espresso makers.

The fourth quarter continues to be the biggest sales time at Mrs. Cook's, she said, although bridal registry and related sales continue to grow. Bromel said she brings in some items just for the holidays, "but it's more that it's a

of cake. My photography hobby comes in handy as we can quickly produce any type of photo needed in my in-house studio.

Are you tired of email spam? So was I, which is why I went on a mission to reduce it. It is amazingly easy: Change your email address from, say, Peter.Smith@xyzshop.com, to an address that is a bit more encrypted, such as PS211@xyzshop.com. Those nasty spam generators try every possible name combination in front of your domain name until they get it right. Under no circumstances should you reply to those emails, or you'll get even more spam.

It is truly amazing how things changed,



big gift time." She probably sells more cookbooks during the holidays, she said, but most customers are looking for regular merchandise, not holiday-themed products.

Thanksgiving is another big draw, she said, so Mrs. Cook's doesn't start promoting Christmas until after Thanksgiving.

As for buying products for the store, Bromel relies on her manufacturer's reps for information, as well as what she scouts out at shows like the International Home + Housewares Show in Chicago.

Bromel said these days people are willing to make due with what they have, so she isn't as interested in bringing in new products unless they are truly useful. "If it has good function, it makes sense, but not just because it is new," she explained.

Her store "is on the bandwagon for color," she said, but again within specific areas, such as Emile Henry or Le Creuset cookware. "We don't feel we need to have our Microplane graters in every color," she said. "We have to make choices." And if customers want a KitchenAid mixer in one of the colors they don't stock, there's always the opportunity for a special order, she said.

While Bromel said she enjoys the kitchenware industry, it's the overall aspect of running a retail store that appeals to her. "It's fun to learn new things about accounting, human resources and displays," she said. Mrs. Cook's employs 14 to 15 people, mostly on a part-time basis, with holiday help raising those numbers to 25 to 30.

She also feels fortunate that she can turn to her two long-time managers, one of whom has been with the store for 32 years and another who began sweeping floors at age 12. "If you give people responsibility, they will rise to the occasion," she said.

and the pace is getting even faster. Those big "car phones" evolved into cell phones, and now there are smartphones. Is it a blessing or a curse that we can email from the road and even abroad? My wife is convinced one day a real luxury is to be "out of reach" again, to turn the smartphone off for a weekend or an entire vacation. But why would I? Let me tell you about my iPhone and my favorite apps...

Bernard Schnacke is president of Frieling USA Inc., a vendor of specialty products for gourmet stores, consumers, hospitality and foodservice operations and creator of the MILKchiller. Frieling is based in Charlotte, N.C.

GUEST COLUMN (cont. from 6)

In today's environment EDI is becoming increasingly important as many of our customers are using this system. On the multimedia side, I also consider an FTP server, a live video set-up and a fast T1 telephone line equally important. We often remind ourselves that customer service is No. 1, and to do it right, we must be able to rely on top-notch technology. Busy phone lines just won't do the trick, and an email system that collapses, or large messages that can't go through aren't acceptable either. Providing product photos or videos to our customers and up/downloading artwork for catalogs, gift boxes or promotional materials is a piece