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DESIGN DISPATCH

Color me greener and bigger

Primary colors, larger sizes and eco-friendly materials abound at kitchen and bath show.

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K Las Vegas designer Laurie Haeffle looked adrift in a sea of shiny refrigerators, churning dishwashers and spashing faucets at the annual Kitchen/Bath Industry Show.

"It can be overwhelming if you're not focused," she said, laughing at a retractable purple Lyeser sink that was twisting itself to bring out the water.

"There's no lack of imagination in my business."

Each year, manufacturers in the \$20-billion U.S. kitchen and bath industry display their latest inventions at this show, which ended May 16. With the aid of logo-forming waterfalls, towel-wrapped models and tiki bar margaritas, more than 900 exhibitors hoped to sell their latest home gizmos, including high-tech tricks we've been promised since "The Jetsons."

The show factor would seduce any remodeler, but a seasoned designer such as Haeffle navigated the show at the convention center with an eye for the truly useful, new and beautiful.

There were more environmentally conscious products, more statement-making colors and more European-styling in the larger sizes Americans want. No longer do U.S. homeowners seeking sleek imports have to settle for do-it-yourself refrigerators or one-size-fits-all ranges.

It's costly for European makers to upsize while maintaining the same appealing proportions, but many manufacturers are willing to pay the price. When Italian appliance maker Paolo Bertazzoni, head of a 125-year-old family-owned company that makes professional-style ranges, built-in cooktops and ventilation hoods, decided to sell ranges in the U.S. this year, he kept the exterior the same but modified almost everything else. "Only 4% of the parts we sell around the world are common to our American products," he said, standing next to ovens that now come in four widths — 24, 30, 36 and 48 inch — and primary colors.

Tools built for professionals are also creeping into more residences. Chef Charlie Trotter was roasting a rack of lamb in five minutes in a new version of the TurboChef Speedcook oven he uses at his restaurants. Miele had a quick-performing dishwasher with specialized baskets to accommodate an entire load of glasses, utensils and plates. The company also brought its commercial washers and dryers across the Atlantic to be sold as super-capacity appliances for estate homes. And Dornbracht designed a restaurant-style, long-hose spray faucets for a deep home kitchen sink.

With so many choices, said Haeffle, it's easy to create a pretty kitchen.

"The hard part is to design for how a family lives," said the Newport Beach designer who has been creating high-end residential spaces since 1960. She said she is open-minded about new products but that before she recommends anything to her clients, who pay as much as \$200,000 for kitchen cabinetry, appliances, lighting and flooring, she needs to know the basics: What door do they use to bring in



COLORFUL: Bertazzoni modified ovens for the U.S.



SO CALIFORNIA: Heated glass towel warmer.



HOOKED: Stick-figure handles by Soko.



FLASH: TurboChef's hearth-shaped Speedcook oven.

the groceries? How big and how many refrigerators do they need? Does Mom or Dad cook alone, or is it a family affair? "The house has to function for them, and it has to be simple."

"The words 'simple' and 'functional' were Haeffle's guiding principle during her daylong hunt for things to fill what have become the two priciest rooms in a house: the kitchen and bath. "These items should be an investment that will last for years," she said, stopping to do a double-take at a Kohler shower panel that imitates a Vegas light show with colored beams and synchronized music.

"I enjoy the novelty of some of these things, but I would never use that," she said. "I could be wrong. In 30 years, everyone's bathroom could have a dancing

light show." Practical to the core, Haeffle shook her head at most high-tech devices — "Who needs a singing bidet with a remote control?" she asked — but she liked the Whirlpool Centralpark refrigerator with a docking station on top of one of the doors. Plugged into it was a hanging monitor that showed movies or a slideshow of family photos. There will soon be a tablet personal computer that can be attached. These add-ons could be replaced as their technology improves without having to toss out the refrigerator.

"This makes sense since most people keep their refrigerators 15 years and their electronics and PC only a few years," she said. But none of her clients, most of whom live in Beverly Hills, has



EARTHY: Teragren introduced a parquet bamboo butcher block countertop. Green products using solvent-free finishes and recycled materials were plentiful.

Kitchens of yesteryear

FAMED photographer Julius Shulman likes to point out that the Case Study House architects "were not chefs." Kitchens in many of these midcentury homes that he photographed were so minimal that whipping up family meals could be challenging.

Mark Robinson of Boffi Los Angeles gives the creators more credit: "Fifty years later, there are components first shown in these houses that

still work today."

You be the judge. Shulman's images of modernist kitchens will be on display May 25 through June 30 at the Boffi showroom in Santa Monica. Also on view will be the first reissue of Joe Colombo's 1963 Minkitchen, a 3-foot square cabinet on wheels. The updated version has an induction cooktop and a mini refrigerator. Price: \$40,000.

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ever requested a computer on a refrigerator. "I still can't imagine anyone wanting to access the Internet while standing at their refrigerator," she said. "That's what wireless laptops are for."

Making more sense to her was Miele's new refrigerator and freezer, which automatically sets different temperatures in four zones for specific food and has a transmitter that will alert the company if there is something wrong with the appliance. "Owners of most refrigerators don't usually know there's a problem until the food's spoiled and there's a flood on the floor," said Haeffle. "I like this."

Another device she found useful was a touch feature added to Blum's already easy-to-close drawers. "If your hands are full because you're doing five things at once in the kitchen, you can just tap the drawer with your elbow or knee and it will open," she said.

She also liked the look of Dacor's new microwave in a drawer. "When microwaves are high, it's like you're pulling a hot bowl of soup over your head. If they're on the counter, they use up space. This one is under the counter and behind an attractive straight front."

There were plenty of green products using solvent-free finishes, recycled materials and sustainably harvested wood. Te-

want stainless," said TurboChef's Leslie Hoffman, touching one of her company's hearth-shaped, orange speed ovens, "but some people want a little kitchen jewelry."

Pewter, bronze and even gold leaf speckled countertops and hardware. Soko Studio had a line of stick-figure and tree-branch shaped handles and towel bars in cast stainless steel and bronze, and Los Angeles-based sculptor Martin Pierce debuted ergonomic, stainless-steel door and cabinet hardware.

Throughout the day, Haeffle had seen an endless line of specialized ovens, coolers and cabinets for outdoor kitchens. Also new on display were ways to bathe under the stars: Jacuzzi had showers that attach to exterior walls for a "rain-forest experience," explained company president Phillip Weeks. Samsung had lightweight acrylic bathtubs — not hot tubs — to put on terraces. And for cold nights, Thermique showed a prototype of a portable, weather-proof towel warmer that can be moved near the pool or spa.

"That's so Southern California," said Haeffle, smiling.

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