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Appliances respond to today's needs

10:08 AM CDT on Monday, August 11, 2008

Many home appliance makers were green before it was cool. Their drive to develop more energy-efficient designs is now leading them in unexpected directions. "Manufacturers have been designing energy-efficient refrigerators since the early 1990s," says Sara Staley, a salesperson at Ed Kellum & Sons with 28 years of experience selling home appliances. "The government mandated that manufacturers reduce the amount of energy pulled by refrigerators, and as a result they have become more and more efficient over the years."

Household dishwashers are also heavy users of natural resources with high water usage and heating requirements. For a number of years, European manufacturers such as Bosch, Miele and ASKO have been among the leaders in designing energy-efficient dishwashers sold in the U.S.

"European brands are generally more energy-aware than American brands," says Jeffrey Goodman, vice president of Skanadario by Goodman Supply. "Lower-end domestic makers concentrate on producing appliances that are affordable for more Americans."

While energy-efficient appliances often cost more initially, over time consumers can save money through lower utility bills. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the average homeowner spends approximately \$1,900 a year on energy costs. By choosing energy-efficient appliances, consumers can save about 30 percent on home energy bills while also reducing their contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and the depletion of natural resources.

The government requires manufacturers to label their products with energy usage information. The U.S. Department of Energy and the EPA have devised a voluntary EnergyStar rating system that indicates when a product meets strict energy-efficiency guidelines.

And the efficiencies can be significant. More than \$30 can be shaved off of your annual utility bill by using an EnergyStar-rated dishwasher.

"Newer models have a water saver option that senses when the rinse water runs clear. Cycles are shorter, so both water and electricity are saved," Mr. Goodman says.

Household refrigerators carrying the EnergyStar label require 20 percent less energy than other models. Compared to models sold before 2001, the energy saved equals 40 percent. EnergyStar-rated clothes washers use less water and energy with a potential savings of \$550 over the life of the product.

According to the *Annual Energy Outlook 2007 Report*, "About one-seventh of all the electricity generated in the U.S. is used to air-condition buildings." By looking for air-conditioners with an EnergyStar label, customers can purchase units that are about 14 percent more efficient than traditional models.

A few appliance manufacturers are taking efficiency further. By focusing on cutting the time required to prepare meals, they are responding to changing lifestyles and reducing energy usage.

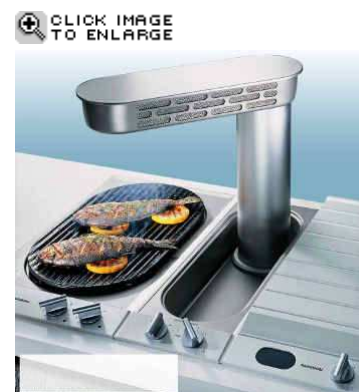


Photo courtesy of Skanadario by Goodman Supply
Gaggenau's swivel ventilator is one of many high-tech appliances available today. The appliance twists and turns to go wherever it is needed with two automatic positions.

"A major trend right now is high-speed steam ovens like the Combination Steam and Convection Oven made by Gaggenau," Mr. Goodman says. "They provide speed, convenience and healthy cooking since they use little to no fats."

High-speed convection ovens cook five times faster than traditional ovens. Steam ovens cook most types of foods with pressurized steam.

Miele and Viking also make high-speed convection ovens. Miele produces a steam oven as well.

Another new design is an induction cooktop, such as Miele's MasterChef Induction Cooktop, which uses a radiant element to safely and quickly heat foods. Compared to a conventional electric cooktop, the induction process cooks foods two to three times faster.

Mr. Goodman says that most of his customers – custom builders whose clients often choose environmentally friendly appliances – prefer steam ovens but that many people are also interested in speed ovens.

"People like the idea of induction cooktops, but most of my market prefers the control of cooking with gas," he says. "Right now induction cooktops don't have the appearance of gas ranges. They look more like electric cooktops.

"High-tech appliances will continue to evolve, but one thing will never change: Appliances that help the cook prepare fast, easy, healthy and delicious food will furnish the kitchen of the future," Mr. Goodman says.

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