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Opening Lines

Turn up the volume

As I sit to write this editorial, it's mid-December and I'm still reeling from the statistics rolling in from Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales. This All-American online shopping extravaganza has made it north of the border, and millions of Canadian shoppers happily logged on in search of a deal. Even more than Christmas, Cyber Monday has become the SuperBowl of online shopping. It's indicative of a dramatic shift in consumer buying habits, and presents a real challenge for retailers who rely solely on a physical storefront.

The numbers are staggering, and housewares are a big part of it. Cuisinart's griddler, the Dustbuster and the Oster electronic wine opener are perennial top sellers online. Amazon's Cyber Monday same-store sales jumped 46% last year, while eBay's climbed 32%. For multi-channel retailers, the greatest growth experienced in 2013 was through online sales. Walmart reported that Cyber Monday 2013 was the biggest online sales day in its history. In fact, Walmart.com processed more than 1 billion page views between Thanksgiving Thursday and Cyber Monday.

Though final numbers aren't yet in for 2013, Canadians spent \$18.9 billion online in 2012, which was up 24% from 2010. The latest stats show that 28% of Canadians prefer to shop online rather than go to the mall. But what's interesting is that most of those shopping for deals now do so in Canada. Only 2% of Canadians crossed the border to shop in American stores last November. That's the good news.

The bad news is that all the lowest price/best deal/free shipping hype is setting a dangerous precedent. That's especially true with small appliances, notorious for already low margins. Yet online shoppers are being conditioned to buy only the lowest price, plus demand free shipping and returns. Does that create a loyal customer, or a temporary shopper who will happily leave your site for a lower price?

Amazon is one company that has created legions of very loyal customers. That's because they track their purchases closely, and they learn what their customers want. They are a pioneer in the field of 'online personalized service' and as anyone who saw Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos interviewed on *60 Minutes* knows, this is a company that's ahead of its time. Knowing that shipping costs are a major factor, they are now testing drones to deliver packages that weigh less than five pounds (which accounts for 86% of Amazon's shipments). Bezos is firmly focused on investing for the future, but it has led to a paradox that puzzles analysts. The stock price is soaring – up tenfold since 2008 – and so are sales. But all that sales volume has yet to show a significant profit (unless, of course, you're a shareholder).

The same is true of Canadian online sellers like Shop.ca, a company whose primary draw is free shipping – on anything, anywhere. Many housewares retailers and distributors have signed on with Shop.ca, a business model built almost entirely on high volume, driven by relentless promotion and an expensive, ongoing advertising campaign. (It helps that TorStar is a primary investor.) Yet despite their aggressive marketing tactics and mass appeal, big profits haven't materialized.

The online marketplace is undergoing tremendous growth, but I don't believe it will ever completely eliminate bricks and mortar stores. Most consumers still enjoy a personal, tactile shopping experience with real live people – at least some of the time. The real challenge for retailers is how to best utilize all of these different channels and keep costs low while still making a profit.

Remember when all you had to be was a good merchant to succeed in retail? Today, you must not only be a good buyer and negotiator, you have to be a computer programmer, a mathematician, a marketing expert and a sales trend analyst. We are now dealing with incredibly well-educated consumers who can easily comparison-shop at the click of a mouse. How can anyone make a profit in a retail environment that no longer depends on how much you can give, but on how much you can give away?



– Laurie O'Halloran
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People In the News

• **Daniel Oehy**, president and owner of Swissmar, has taken on the additional position of general manager for Victorinox Swiss Army Canada. Swissmar has a long relationship with Victorinox Swiss Army, which recently merged with Wenger Knives. **Michael Tassou**, Swissmar's watchmaker for 15 years, will become watchmaker at Victorinox Canada. **Sheila Finn** will now be national sales manager for both companies.

• **Bob Coviello**, founder and president of HTI Buying Group, died last November at the age of 71 after a battle with pancreatic cancer. HTI, established in 1998, offers independent specialty retailers the opportunity to buy products and programs from member vendors on a corporate discount plan.

• Wal-Mart Stores has promoted **David Cheesewright** to president and CEO of Walmart International. He is currently CEO of Walmart in Canada, Europe, the

Middle East and Africa. Starting February 1st, he will report to **Doug McMillon** who was recently elected president and CEO, succeeding Mike Duke.

• **Janis Johnson**, president and founder of Gourmet Catalog & Buying Group, and **Wolfgang Wüsthof**, senior partner, Wüsthof-Trident of America, will be honored by the Housewares Charity Foundation during its 17th Annual Gala on Monday evening, March 17, during the 2014 International Home + Housewares Show in Chicago.

• On October 28th, Anglo Canadian Housewares (which has been doing business as Anglo Canadian Housewares/Breville) officially changed its legal name to **Breville Canada**.

• **Don Shacter + Associates** will be introducing four new lines at the Toronto Gift Fair: Soiree Home Lehman Glass, VM Concept and Artelegno.



DanESCO appoints a new president

Brigitte Roy was recently named president of DanESCO, replacing Bill Ferguson, who has left the company.

Brigitte comes to DanESCO with 25 years of consumer goods experience. Over the past eight years, she served as executive vice-president at Fruits & Passion, an innovative manufacturer, retailer and wholesaler of body care and household products. A marketing and sales specialist, Brigitte is known for her insight into emerging consumer trends and the ongoing need for innovative products, new marketing techniques and outstanding customer service.

"DanESCO's impressive portfolio of high quality brands was a definite drawing card," says Brigitte. "The company has an excellent reputation in the market, which certainly helped seal the deal for me. Plus, I'm a big fan of kitchenware and culinary products so it's a privilege to work in an industry that indulges my interests and passion!"

She believes that "DanESCO's job as a distributor is to help retailers grow their business through excellent category management and outstanding customer service. We have a deep understanding of our customers' needs and are able to meet them with a broad assortment of great brands and products."

The close relationship that DanESCO has with its vendors is an integral part of their success, according to Brigitte.

"Retailing today is about story telling through merchandising," she explains. "As a distributor, we need to help bring brand and merchandising stories to life with the ultimate goal of enticing consumers and driving retail sales."

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London Drugs – a legacy of innovation

Thank goodness for London Drugs. At a time of year when the mornings are dark, the trees are bare, and the country is awash in political scandal, the annual LD vendor breakfast remains a ray of retail sunshine. Held at the Mississauga Living Arts Centre on the first Monday of November every year, the event pays tribute to the many vendor partners who have contributed to LD's success and allows the company's executives to sing the praises of this exceptional B.C.-based retail institution.

For those lucky enough to secure an invitation, the presentation always concludes with an address by a world-class speaker. The impressive line-up over the years has included Tom Peters, Walter Cronkite, Neil Armstrong, Pamela Wallin and Bill Clinton. This past November, it was Hillary Clinton who took the stage for an inspirational address, followed by a question and answer session with Allan Gregg of TVO.

The morning kicked off, as usual, with a welcome from chairman Brandt Louie, the grandson of LD founder H.Y. Louie. He introduced his two sons, the newest members of the board of governors, to the audience. Both are graduates of Duke University who have clearly followed in their father's footsteps: Gregory Louie is a physician and Stuart Louie is a lawyer.

Brandt Louie, a chartered accountant, started with the H.Y. Louie company in 1972 and was made president in 1987. He succeeded his father, Tong Louie, as chairman in 1998 and has helped take the company into a new era.

He recalled how easy it was for his

grandfather to purchase a small drug-store called London Drugs 68 years ago from the previous owner with little more than a handshake. "Today we live in a world of takeovers and acquisitions," he told the audience. "But we remain strong and independent."

No other private company in Canada has reached the age of 100 while remaining in the hands of the same family. Brandt Louie has succeeded, however, in carrying on the family tradition with a business philosophy and entrepreneurial spirit that truly reflects his grandfather's vision. He is passionate about customer service, fairness in employee and vendor/partner relationships, and actively encouraging creativity and innovation.

Under his leadership, the group of companies under the H.Y. Louie banner have grown considerably and become more diverse. London Drugs now boasts 78 locations from Victoria to Winnipeg with a fast-growing online store. In addition, the organization now includes TLD Computers, London Air Services (an exclusive executive airline) and the Sonora Resort, an award-winning conference centre on the shores of Northern B.C. And the company is a recognized world leader in corporate and civic sustainability.

As with most successful companies, Brandt Louie has learned to depend on an exceptional group of managers, buyers and executives at London Drugs, many of whom have been with the company for decades. Wynne Powell, president and CEO, has been with the company since 1982 and is the catalyst for much of LD's positive growth in recent



Hillary Clinton captivated the audience with tales of her days as First Lady and as part of the elite government unit that directed the capture of Osama Bin Laden.

years, including the air service (he's a long-time aviation enthusiast).

As is his custom, Wynne leaped up onto the stage last November to deliver his annual address, his upbeat energy and unbridled enthusiasm for London Drugs providing a distinct contrast to the distinguished, serious delivery of Brandt Louie.

He told the audience that the high number of mergers underway in this country means less choice for Canadian consumers. At London Drugs, however, they are focused on offering more services, and more innovative products than ever before. A retail leader in electronics, computers and photography, the company was also one of the first chains to offer vinyl records in its stores.

"Consumers trust us and we work hard to maintain that trust by providing exceptional value," Powell says. "Customers today are searching for a shopping experience that feels real to them, both through services (such as free WiFi in stores) and products. We're flexible enough to take chances on smaller suppliers, and unique products."

London Drugs now enjoys successful e-commerce sales and their bricks and mortar stores continue to be among the most productive in North America, generating more sales dollars per square foot than many larger U.S. chains. It empowers its employees at all levels and rewards initiative. In fact, all sales staff are provided with iPads to better service customers and check products.

The company announced the 2013 vendor partners of the year at the November event. KitchenAid was honoured in small appliances and Thermos took top honours in housewares.

London Drugs has always tried to stay ahead of the retail curve, offering customers such amenities as in-store WiFi, stereo listening centres and personalized consultations with pharmacists.





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Young people more likely to buy online

Canadians spent \$18.9 billion online for goods and services in 2012, a 24% jump from 2010, the last time Statistics Canada conducted a survey.

Fifty-six per cent of internet users said they purchased goods or services online in 2012, compared to 51% in 2010, spending an average of \$1,450 over about 13 transactions, according to the federal agency.

Younger Canadians were more likely to shop online – 67% of internet users between age 25 and 34 made purchases from the web.

Despite the increases, online shopping remains a small part of the retail economy, accounting for just 4% of total retail sales of \$470 billion in 2012. However, a report released early last year suggested Canadian retailers were running out of time to launch online stores.

The survey, conducted by the U.S.-based Forrester Research, said 25% of online sales in Canada go through international sites, with consumers citing high prices and shipping costs for avoiding Canadian online retailers.

Nordstrom takes a novel hiring approach

Nordstrom will be taking a novel approach in hiring people to manage its Calgary store this year, the first location to open outside the United States.

"We're doing something we've never done before," says spokesperson Brooke

White. "When we open stores in the States, we take proven leaders at Nordstrom who are already running businesses. Within a Nordstrom store, every department has a department manager and that department manager hires their team," says White. Department managers are usually hand-picked to go out open a new store and bring the existing culture to the market.

In Canada, Nordstrom's will bring potential hires to Seattle from March to May. They are going to pay for their housing, food and their travel as they learn our culture and the job. Those managers will then hire their team to work in the Calgary market.

The Calgary store, located at Chinook Centre in a former Sears location, will open September 19th. It covers 140,000 square feet of space and will have 400 employees.

Other Canadian stores are scheduled to open in Ottawa at Rideau Centre (spring 2015), Vancouver at Pacific Centre (fall 2015) and two in Toronto at Yorkdale Shopping Centre and Sherway Gardens in the fall of 2016.

Nordstrom began as a shoe store, founded in 1901 in Seattle by Swedish immigrant John W. Nordstrom. It remained a shoe store until the 1960s when it bought a local department store. In 1971, Nordstrom went public. Today it operates 252 locations consisting of Nordstrom stores and Nordstrom Rack stores in 35 states. It also operates online and has a business called HauteLook, which offers 'off-prices' online.

Martha Stewart teams up with eBay

Brooklyn-based Etsy is about to get a new competitor when eBay joins forces with Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia to launch an online marketplace that will sell American-made handcrafted products.

The *Martha Stewart American Made Market* will feature craft, food and garden items handpicked by Stewart and her team at Martha Stewart Living, designed to "spotlight makers, support artisans, and celebrate the handmade".

The editors at *Martha Stewart Living* magazine will scout for new makers and products each week, the company said.

"We at MSLO want to give consumers access to well-crafted, unique goods, created by new generations of makers and carefully selected by our team," says Inbar Barak, senior vice president for digital programming and strategy at Martha Stewart Living. "eBay is a terrific partner for us on this journey, as they are giving these artisans a profitable marketplace to sell their goods, tell their stories, and market themselves with the Martha stamp of approval."

The new venture encroaches on territory established by Etsy.com, founded in 2005 as an online marketplace for handmade and vintage goods. The site has 30 million members, one million active shops and more than 20 million items listed. Based in San Jose, CA, eBay has 124 million active users globally and more than 500 million live individual and merchant listings at any given time.

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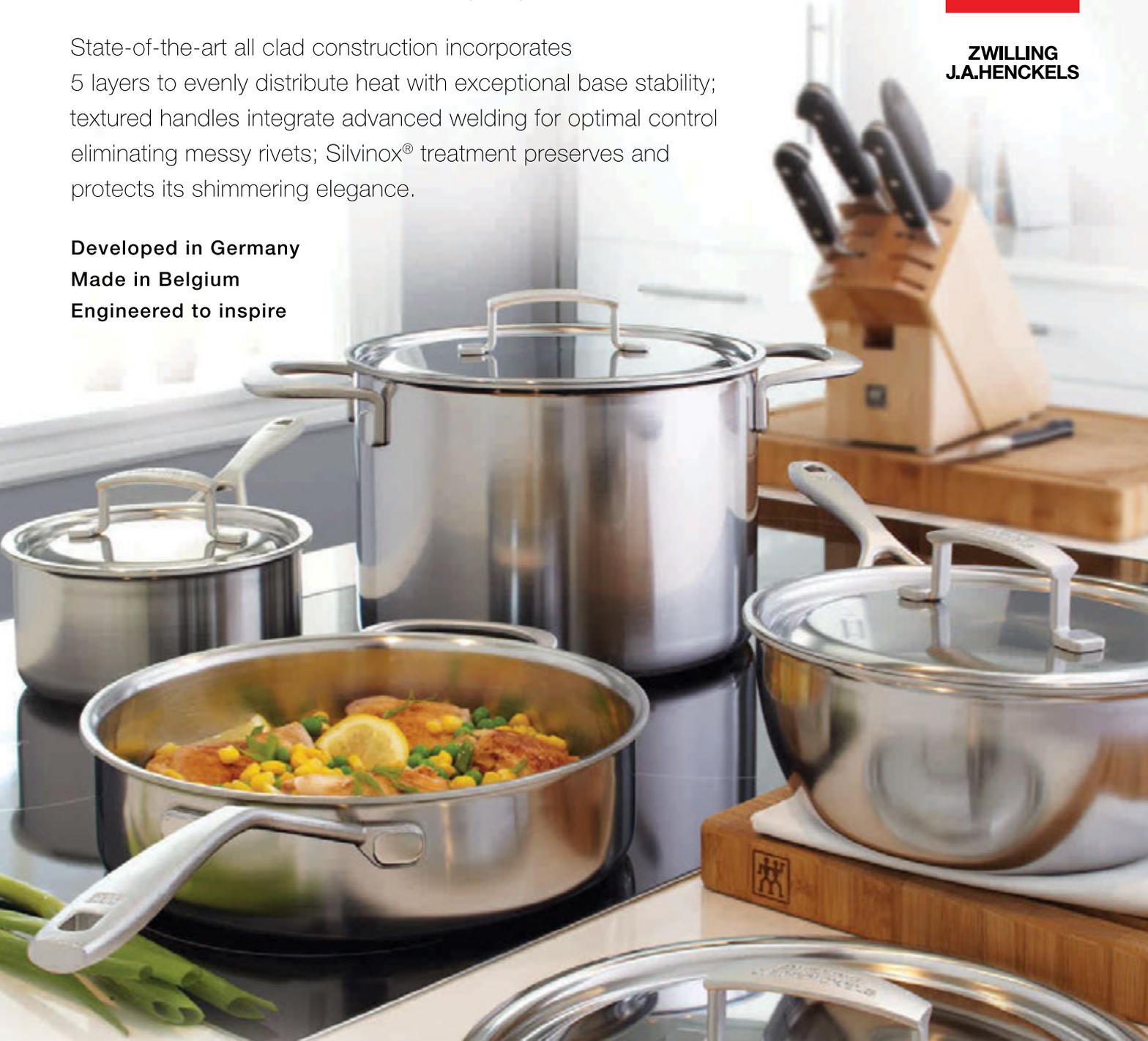
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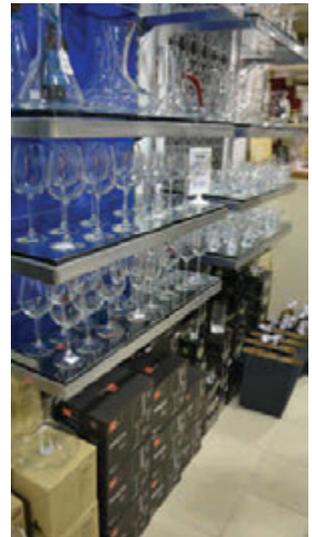


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New store caters to wine lovers

A new DecoCuisine store opened at Fleur de Lys mall in Quebec City in mid-November. Trudeau president Jacques Dubuc and renowned sommelier Jessica Harnois were on hand on opening day to welcome customers and members of the media. Owned by Gilles Parent and Gilles Robinson, about 80% of DecoCuisine's inventory is devoted to Trudeau products.



Keurig store will test drive new products

A new mecca for coffee brewers of the single-cup persuasion has come to Burlington, Ontario.

The first company store dedicated to the Keurig brand of single-cup coffee makers and espresso machines opened last November at the Burlington Mall, offering a vast selection of blends, all seven Keurig brewing systems, and accessories from sugar shakers to T-shirts. The new flagship location sells nearly 200 different varieties of K-Cups and Vue packs, the largest collection of Keurig coffee available in stores.

The store looks and feels like a finely appointed luxury kitchen. Handblown glass pendant lights hang over dark wood cabinets with quartz counters, where the brand's line of single-cup brewers and a new espresso machine sit ready to be test-driven.

Customers waited in line at the opening of the Keurig Store and the first 100 customers each received a free Vue brewer.

The Burlington store represents Keurig's first foray into brick and mortar retail after previously selling its products through other retailers, such as Target Inc., and online.

"We really want to view it as a learning lab and let customers tell us what they think about Keurig," says Brian Kelley, CEO of Green Mountain Coffee

Roasters, which owns Keurig. "We're launching a series of new innovations in the next few years and want to be able to get consumer feedback quickly."

In addition to Keurig's coffee brewing systems, Green Mountain is looking to expand into carbonated beverages. New K-Cups from Campbell's Soup are also launching this year.

The company said it opened its first store at the mall because it's close to the new Keurig headquarters under construction in Burlington. The company is slated to move its offices in Reading, Wakefield, and Woburn to the new location this year.

Online shoppers are more demanding

Consumers have become more demanding shoppers online, expecting discounts and free shipping with a group of younger shoppers called "online super buyers" leading the way, says an e-commerce survey.

Almost two-thirds of Canadians — 63% — say they opted to shop online in the last six months to save money, according to the survey by The NPD Group.

Those described as "online super buyers" are usually younger, make up about a third of web shoppers and buy "all kinds of stuff" — such as beauty products, clothes, games, toys and digital

downloads. They want lower prices and are the strongest influencers of Canadian e-commerce trends.

The survey found that free shipping is a big factor with 85% of those asked saying that it would encourage them to buy more online. But consumers 55 and over are still apprehensive about shopping online and shipping costs remain a barrier for them, the survey found.

As for online shopping, women and men have their own habits. The survey found that 65% of women were more likely to purchase online to save time and effort versus 62% of men. But the men expected lower prices online, while women expect prices to be comparable to what's in stores.

Black Friday sales decline in the U.S.

While Canadian online shopping is on the rise, U.S. retail spending during the four-day Black Friday weekend in 2013 reportedly dipped nearly 3%. It marked the first sales decline during that weekend in at least seven years, according to National Retail Federation data.

Although American retailers pulled out all the stops leading up to the holiday weekend, with many opening earlier on Thanksgiving Day and promoting deep discounts all weekend long, consumers actually spent 3.9% less per person than they did in 2012.

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Pantone picks colour of the year

Pantone has announced Pantone 18-3224 Radiant Orchid, a captivating, magical, enigmatic purple, as the colour of the year for 2014.

"While the 2013 color of the year, Pantone 17-5641 Emerald, served as a symbol of growth, renewal and prosperity, Radiant Orchid reaches across the colour wheel to intrigue the eye and spark the imagination," says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. "Radiant Orchid encourages expanded creativity and

originality, which is increasingly valued in today's society."

A modern and versatile shade, according to Pantone, Radiant Orchid permeated the runways during the spring 2014 fashion shows and is already making its way onto the red carpet.

Buying groceries online hurts impulse sales

For consumers, one of the great things about shopping online is bypassing the queue to check out. For producers of candy, magazines and gadgets that encourage impulse sales, it's a problem.

In Britain, the country where e-commerce is most popular, 13% of people do all or most of their grocery shopping online. Yet this only accounts for 5% of overall spending, suggesting consumers spend more when they visit a store.

Apparently online shoppers search only for what they need, usually sticking close to their shopping lists. They don't spontaneously buy magazines they opened while waiting to pay, or chocolate to eat on the go.

Even though retailers try to do the same thing by flagging special offers at online check-outs, it doesn't usually

work. Companies most at risk are Mondelez International, Mars and Nestle, the top three candy makers.

The latest survey of European shoppers by IRI found that 73% spent more time planning their shopping trips in order to avoid non-essential purchases amid the economic slowdown.

Worldwide, the retail confectionery market is worth \$196.5 billion, according to Euromonitor International, up 5.6% from a year ago. Nearly all sales are from stores, though online made up 0.9 percent this year, up from 0.6 percent in 2008. That is the same amount as purchased through vending machines.

The growth of mobile shopping poses a threat to grocery retailers, especially as small screens limit the opportunity to try to tempt shoppers with impulse buys. Mobile transaction volume and value will average 35% annual growth between 2012 and 2017. But smartphones also provide new opportunities for location-based promotions that are already driving sales.

Mondelez International, maker of Cadbury chocolate, has committed to investing 10% of its global marketing budget, which was \$1.8 billion in 2012, in mobile projects.

• CONSUMING PASSIONS •

- Fans of butter and cheese have reason to rejoice! A prominent British cardiologist has determined that eating saturated fats may actually lower your risk of heart disease. According to the *British Medical Journal*, scientific evidence shows that the common counter wisdom may have actually increased our cardiovascular risks. So what about all the obesity concerns? It seems the food industry initially scrambled to produce low-fat versions of their products, but that also removed much of the taste of the food. To make it more palatable, they replaced the fat with added sugar.

- Carrots aren't just good for your vision, they also help male fertility. A recent study in the *Daily Mail* investigating the effects of fruit and vegetable on sperm health indicates that carrots produce the best results. Researchers at Harvard University recently put 200 men a special diet and found that yellow and orange vegetables had the greatest impact on motility – the

ability of sperm to swim toward an egg. Men who ate the most saturated fat had the slowest sperm.

- Ambitious American students have developed a beer-pouring robot that can read your body movement and anticipate when you want another drink. Researchers from Cornell University used Microsoft Kinect sensors and 3-D cameras to help the robot analyze its surroundings and identify its owner's needs. It then uses a database with 120 various household tasks that identifies nearby objects, generates a set of possible outcomes, and decides which action to take without being told. The robot can put food in a microwave, pour cereal, tidy up, fetch a toothbrush and toothpaste and open fridge doors.

- Only 43% of American families eat dinner together every day. At least 25% of consumers eat fast food every single day, and 20% of all meals are eaten in the car.



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Retail Trends

App tells shoppers where to park

Anthony Casalanguida, General Manager at Yorkdale Mall, expected that Black Friday was going to be a big deal at his mall last year. Yorkdale polled customers and found that a substantial portion of them planned to participate in Black Friday, both in-store as well as online. Though he didn't expect Black Friday to be as popular as Boxing Day, in response Yorkdale put forth efforts to improve accessibility during an otherwise busy and potentially stressful time.

Since vehicle access to the mall continues to be very important, Yorkdale has modernized its parking. It is the only shopping centre in the Toronto area to offer a parking feature on its mobile App to update shoppers every 15 minutes on the best areas to find a parking space. In addition, all Yorkdale parking entrances are equipped with computerized tabulators that display the number of available stalls, while 'stop light technology' above each stall in the underground lot clearly shows drivers where there is availability to park.

Consumers can also have a live look at parking before they leave home with live streaming video of the upper deck parking on www.yorkdale.com. The mall also launched valet parking last November as part of its \$185 million expansion.

Starbucks gift card is golden

When Starbucks introduced its limited edition stainless steel Metal Card in 2012 at a price of \$450, many thought the company would never be able to sell the 5,000 cards that were offered for sale on Gilt.com. They were wrong.

Last year, the coffee chain was back with a card at the same price (\$400 is loaded onto the card for purchases), but it made it even harder to get them. Consumers could not buy the card in a Starbucks or on the company's site. They had to go to Gilt.com and order one of only 1,000 being sold.

Roughly 10% of adults in the U.S. receive a Starbucks gift card each December – they are the most "gifted" item in the U.S. But the Metal Card bestows upon its holder Gold Level status, with free refills and other perks. Each hand-assembled card features an artisan rose base metal with rose colored coating, laser-etched with traditional Starbucks lettering.

Online high-end candy retailer **Sugarfina** has opened its first-ever store, a 1,400-square-foot boutique in Los Angeles. The brand is known for its signature turquoise candy Bento Boxes and such "cocktail" candies as Champagne Gummy Bears, Cuba Libre (spiced rum and coke gummies) and Peach Bellini Gummies.

Designed as a "candy heaven" for adults, **Sugarfina** has a large glass skylight and airy "bubble" chandeliers that hang like clouds in the sky. The space includes a tasting bar with a selection of 60 candies on regular rotation. One area of the store is dedicated to "top shelf" candies – exotic offerings from around the world at a higher price point.

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* Compared to fresh fries prepared in a conventional Philips fryer.

Retailers prepare for luxury showdown

Canada's Weston family is bolstering its luxury presence yet again in preparation for this country's looming luxury showdown.

Holt Renfrew & Co. owners plan to expand their retail footprint by 40% by 2015. The company will also enlarge and re-brand the Ogilvy department store in Montreal with a \$60-million facelift and merge the banner with Holts in one giant 220,000 square-foot outlet.

"Competition brings out the best in us all," says Mark Derbyshire, chief executive of Holt Renfrew.

Holt's annual sales are estimated at \$800-million and are expected to hit \$1-billion by 2017. Canada's luxury market is tiny, estimated at less than 1% of overall retail, but many believe it is growing.

The Weston family, whose George Weston Ltd. business has a controlling stake in Loblaw, has shown consistent

faith in luxury retailing. The family's Searfidges Group bought Ogilvy from a private investment group two years ago.

Ogilvy, a retail jewel in the heart of Montreal, opened in 1866 and is beloved by shoppers for its traditional touches, including a bagpiper who plays every day at lunchtime and a lavish Bohemian crystal chandelier on the ground floor. Under the new plans, the updated store will add about 100,000 square feet of space for a total retail footprint of 220,000 square feet. The Holt Renfrew store in Montreal will close in 2017 when the updates to Ogilvy are complete under the banner of Ogilvy – part of the Holt Renfrew & Co. collection.

In addition to the arrival of Nordstrom, Holt's move dovetails with plans by Hudson's Bay Company to open up to seven Saks stores and 25 Saks Off Fifth outlet stores in Canada over the next few years.

Saks Fifth Avenue's Canadian flag-

ship will be built at the corner of Yonge and Bloor Streets in Downtown Toronto, replacing a 342,000 square foot Hudson's Bay store. The new store will reportedly be the second-largest Saks in the world, surpassed only by its 646,000 square foot Manhattan flagship.

The surrounding shopping area is expected to be elevated with the new Saks, potentially leading to luxury retailers moving or even relocating Eastward towards Saks on Toronto's Bloor Street. The approximately \$100 million that HBC CEO Richard Baker is willing to spend on the store will hopefully help alleviate downfalls with the current space, including low ceilings and awkward access points.

Baker says Toronto's Saks will be "twice the size" of Holt Renfrew's Bloor Street flagship. The retail portion of Holt Renfrew's Bloor Street store is somewhere between 120,000 and 150,000 square feet.

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New mall planned for north Calgary

Calgary officials have unveiled plans for a unique mega mall north of the city that will house more than 500 retail stores, services, and restaurants.

The New Horizon Mall will be a traditional Asian shopping centre concept with modern architecture and condo spaces in the centre. It is planned for the east side of the QEII highway, north of the Calgary International Airport, and just south of CrossIron Mills.

The facility will be about 280,000 square feet with underground parking. There are plans for about 400 locations to be housed on the ground floor of the mall, with another 100 on a second level.

There will be a couple of entertainment venues which will be constructed; a main stage on the lower level and a traditional Chinese stage on the upper level. In addition, there are plans to construct a hotel and a supermarket.

Construction of the new mega mall is expected to start later this year.

Canadian hardware dealers honoured

Five of Canada's top hardware and home improvement dealers were recognized as the winners of the Outstanding Retailer Awards last fall. The awards were presented at the Hardlines Executive Conference in October and identified excellence in a range of categories.

The winners of the 2013 Outstanding Retailer Awards are:

- **POPS Home Hardware** in High Prairie, Alberta, in the category of Best Building Supply/Home Centre under 25,000 square feet, sponsored by Taymor;
- **Kemptville RONA Building Centre** in Kemptville, Ontario, in the category of Best Building Supply/Home Centre over 25,000 square feet, sponsored by Super Remover;

- **TRU Hardware Breton** in Breton, Alberta, in the category of Best Hardware Store, sponsored by Schlage;

- **Chad Sonnenberg**, the owner of two RONA stores in Northern Ontario, RONA Elliot Lake and RONA Massey, in the category of Best Young Retailer of the Year, sponsored by Techniseal;

- **Wellington Home Hardware**, in Wellington, Ontario, winner of the Marc Robichaud Award for Community Leader, sponsored by Orgill.

The winners had to meet a range of criteria: excellence in customer service, overall store appearance, merchandising, marketing, employee management, community involvement and sales growth.

"Each of these stores stood out for their strength in providing strong customer service, meeting the needs of their communities, and maintaining a staff of dedicated and well-trained employees," explained Michael McLarney, Editor of HARDLINES. "They prove that some of the best retailing in this country is coming from one of the country's most venerable retail sectors."

The Outstanding Retailer Awards have been recognizing the best in home improvement retailing across Canada for more than two decades.

Best Buy Canada is gaining momentum

Best Buy's amazing turnaround keeps gaining momentum. The retailer's share price has more than doubled in 2013 as CEO Hubert Joly made changes that helped Best Buy compete against retail giants like Amazon and Wal-Mart.

One change that has been especially instrumental is its use of "space optimization". Last year Best Buy replaced 10% of big box store space previously allocated to physical media with more profitable products. Examples of space optimization include the new Samsung Experience shops and Windows stores. The new businesses are designed to replace stale, outdated merchandise and attract new customers.



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Taylor Precision acquires Metrokane

Earlier this month, Taylor Precision Products acquired Metrokane, the leading North American marketer of wine accessories and barware, sold primarily under the Rabbit and Houdini brands. (The line is distributed in Canada by Swissmar and there are no changes planned in that relationship.)

Metrokane is the company's second acquisition since its June 2012 buy-out by Centre Partners, a New York private equity firm in conjunction with Rob Kay, who became executive chairman.

Taylor will retain the sales, marketing and product design capabilities that have been the hallmark of Metrokane's success. "The founders, Riki Kane and Bob Larimer, will remain with the company for a long transition period. We respect what Riki Kane and her team have accomplished and will continue to support their brands, products and innovations in product design and packaging."

Kane founded Metrokane in New York in 1983, starting with a manual citrus juicer she discovered in Mexico. In 2000 the company introduced the Rabbit Corkscrew, the first of more than 100 wine accessory and barware products that created and now lead the category.

"Rob's vision for growth makes it clear that Taylor is the right partner for Metrokane to take our business to the next level," says Kane.

The company's owned and licensed brand names include Taylor, Homedics and Salter.

Ready to serve on game day

Totally Bamboo has introduced the perfect culinary accessory for football fans. The new football-shaped serving/cutting board is a great conversation piece. It can be used as a cutting board or a serving platter and is constructed from solid honey-coloured bamboo.



IHA releases state-of-the-industry report

The 2013 IHA *State of the Industry Report*, a joint endeavor of the International Housewares Association (IHA) and Raftery Resource Network, was released late last November.

Global housewares market data show an overall retail sales increase of 2.9% in 2012. In keeping with past reports, this *State of the Industry Report* provides a projection of global sales using current U.S. dollar valuations. It showed that in the U.S., average household housewares expenditures increased by 3.3% in 2012.

The average (mean) size of IHA member companies increased slightly to \$21.8 million. The median of the survey remained in the \$5 to \$9.9 million range. Size distribution shifted downward slightly as 68% of companies reported annual sales under \$10 million in 2012.

Over half (60%) of IHA member housewares companies produce all of their products offshore. Another third (34%) make some products in the U.S. and some overseas. For these companies, 86% of their products are manufactured outside of the U.S.

Most IHA member companies (90%) export product to other countries. Canada, Mexico, Western Europe, Latin America, Australia and Asia are export destinations for at least half of these companies.

On the retail side, discount stores and supercenters was the leading sales channel in all housewares categories. Several retail channels experienced flat percentages of total housewares sales versus last year, due to a large increase reported for wholesalers – 11.7% versus 6.9% in 2011.

Non-store retailing represented the second largest share of housewares sales in 2012. E-commerce retail sales continue to post yearly total sales gains. When combined, these housewares retail channels – Direct to Consumer via Manufacturer Website and Catalogs/TV and Internet Retailers – reached 15.0% in share of total housewares retail sales in 2012 versus 13.1% in 2011.

The top three categories for 2012 were cook & bakeware (16.7%), kitchen tools & accessories (12.4%) and tabletop (11.8%). Kitchen electrics slipped to number four.

The global market size of the housewares industry is \$314.3 billion, up 2.9% from 2011. North America, Western Europe and Asia make up 82% of all housewares spending by consumers.

China's 10.2% growth in GDP drove Asian housewares expenditures although it was slower than last year (13.4%). India had 5.4% GDP growth.

Canada's share of housewares expenditures was \$9.9 billion, growth of 3.2%.

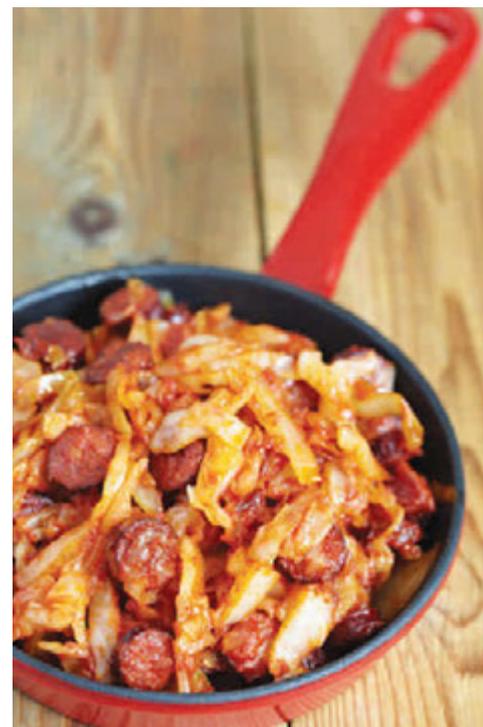
For more details, contact Perry Reynolds at PReynolds@housewares.org



The Remington iCoffee coffeemaker has made the cover of **Consumer Reports Hot List 2014**, the only housewares product to do so. The upscale coffeemaker, which utilizes a combination of steam and tumbling action to deliver added coffee flavour, was among three top rated coffeemakers featured in *Consumer Reports* lab tests, along with the Capresso Coffee a la Carte and the Bunn Trifecta. The iCoffee, left, was the lowest priced unit of the units featured, with a suggested retail price of \$170; compared to \$180 for the Capresso model and \$550 for the Bunn. "This machine did the best overall of the trio and makes the most coffee at a time," *Consumer Reports* noted in its lab test report.

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Home improvement sales are flattening

The year 2013 was not one of significant growth for the hardware and home improvement industry in Canada. In fact, for the majority of dealers, it was a year of slow or negative growth.

This was the sombre message delivered by *HARDLINES'* editor Michael McLarney at the 18th annual Hardlines Conference last October. McLarney noted that retail sales in the industry, as forecast by *HARDLINES*, were almost flat again in 2013, even as global e-commerce sales grew by almost 20% and topped a whopping \$1 trillion last year.

Sharing the preliminary results from the *Hardlines Third Quarter Business Conditions Survey*, he pointed out that just over half (55%) of dealers expected to end 2013 with increased sales over 2012. One-third expected sales to remain flat, and 12% expected sales to be down over the previous year. Suppliers are even more pessimistic: only 38% expect sales to increase; 41% expect sales to be down and 21% are facing negative growth.

Retailers must use multiple platforms

Traditional retailers are riding the tech wave as they look for new ways to drive traffic and sales across multiple platforms, and to make it easier for consumers to shop how they want and when they want.

Retailers like Nordstrom, which will open its first Canadian store this year,

have introduced internal innovation labs that develop and test new technologies to enhance the overall customer experience. Nordstrom is exploring and adopting new practices that add to its already high level of customer service, a brand attribute that for decades has set it apart from the competition.

Having a dedicated space and team allows the retailer to quickly vet and look into different initiatives or capabilities they might want to scale up. For example, the team worked with other internal departments to rethink the layout of Nordstrom's beauty department. The result is a new shopping experience that is easier to navigate and explore.

Other retailers are also experimenting with internal innovation labs. Canadian Tire recently moved a team of five employees into Communitech – a digital incubator in Waterloo, Ontario, that is funded partially by the Ontario government. The purpose is to experiment with new digital products and experiences for both its online properties and retail locations. The team experiments with products such as digital kiosks, mobile payments and apps that could enhance Canadian Tire's brick-and-mortar experience.

In 2012, Staples opened a Velocity Lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts to help accelerate mobile and online consumer solutions. The Velocity Lab can house up to 75 associates and features an open floor plan as a collaboration space. Staples taps some of the brightest minds from top universities in the area to col-

laborate on research and innovation projects. The Velocity Lab has already spearheaded the launch of digital initiatives, including a mobile-only flash sales promotion during last year's Black Friday shopping weekend.

Sears to close five key store locations

Sears Canada will close its flagship downtown Toronto store and four other locations in a \$400 million deal. The struggling Canadian department store chain will terminate the leases and return the locations to the landlords. The company operates 181 corporate stores.

Sears will vacate three stores by the end of February this year, and the other two by the end of February 2015. The company said 956 employees work at the five affected stores, but some may be able to move to other locations.

Three of the stores are in the Toronto area, including one that shares space with Sears Canada's corporate head office at the Eaton Centre. The company said it will hold on to four floors of the building for its offices.

The two other stores are in London, Ontario, and Richmond, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver.

Sears Canada's chief executive, Calvin McDonald, resigned last September, and chief operating officer, Douglas Campbell, took over. The company has suffered steep declines in same-store sales and has lost market share amid tough competition from U.S. retailers.

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More kitchenware at NY Tabletop Show

Tabletop wasn't the only category showcased during last fall's New York Tabletop Show; some manufacturers featured new cookware and kitchenware.

Gibson introduced both cast-iron and ceramic non-electric cookware under license with Crock-Pot. There is a new Dutch oven and flame-proof casserole with a see-through glass lid that captures the essence of a slow cooker.

Portmeirion focused on its Sophie Conran non-stick, ceramic-coated cast aluminum cookware, which recently won an award for excellence from a British trade magazine.

Meyer debuted Cucina under the Rachael Ray brand. The dinnerware portion of the collection is executed in a more subdued palette than is typical for Ray. The solid-colour, reactive glazed pattern has a hammered look and comes in pumpkin, cranberry, almond, mushroom and agave colours.

And Nambe added 15 SKUs to its Gourmet collection of wood and metal kitchenware.

Atlanta show moves to a new schedule

AmericasMart Atlanta and the Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market has announced its January schedule.

Showrooms are open Tuesday, January 7th until Tuesday, January 14 while temporary showrooms are open Thursday, January 9 to Monday, January 13.

AmericasMart is creating significant enhancements to the Atlanta Market experience, beginning with the show schedule, which shifts to a new Tuesday-to-Tuesday run this year. The January Market marks the launch of a greatly enriched website and the extension of free WiFi accessibility throughout the seven million square-foot campus.

Across the connected three-building campus, permanent collections are buzzing with expanded showrooms. As well, AmericasMart GIFT continues to present a growing collection of products

in various categories: Living & Entertaining; Gifts, Tabletop & Accessories and Gourmet & Housewares. They will be brought to life by cooking demonstrations from national culinary stars.

Plenty to see and buy at Ambiente 2014

Over 4,700 exhibitors are expected at Ambiente, the international consumer-goods fair in Frankfurt that will be held from February 7th to 11th. The 2013 edition of the world's leading trade fair for our sector attracted around 140,000 visitors from 143 countries. Visitors to Ambiente 2014 can look forward to a fair that is in keeping with the motto: 'Ambiente – the show'.

With 2,200 exhibitors, the Dining section of Ambiente is distinguished by the world's biggest selection of products for the table, kitchen and household segments. Thus, visitors will find major brands, exciting designs and innovations on the entire eastern part of Frankfurt Fair and Exhibition Centre. Hosting the Giving and Living sections, the western part of the Exhibition Centre offers a range of innovative supplementary assortments.

The latest Kitchen Trends will be presented in Halls 1.1 and 1.2 with a focus on kitchen accessories, table and kitchen textiles, paper napkins and barware for the young and trendy. Halls 3.0/3.1 feature the latest brands for home chefs including a broad spectrum of cooking, roasting and frying utensils, as well as cutlery, knives, kitchen appliances and machines.

Ambiente is seeing a growing number of manufacturers of small electrical appliances with brands such as Gastroback, Graef, KitchenAid and Severin. For the first time, Vitamix, a leading manufacturer of professional-grade blenders for home and business use, will present its products in Hall 3.1.

Another highlight for the 2014 event is the presentation of the 'Kitchen Innovation of the Year' Consumer Awards, which are given by the LifeCare Initiative for especially consumer-friendly

products in several categories: small and large electrical appliances, cooking and kitchen utensils, kitchen accessories and kitchen furniture and equipment. The awards will be presented in the Foyer of Halls 5.1 / 6.1 on February 8th.

Buyers will find the wide variety of products for the dining table on all three floors of Hall 4 and in Halls 6.2 and 6.3. The spectrum includes glass, porcelain and ceramic, silver and fine metal ware.

In the housewares/storage segment in Halls 5 and 6, trade buyers will find the complete spectrum for the basic household. As part of Messe Frankfurt's process of modernization, the facade has been given a new, architecturally elaborate and modern look.

The main trends for the table, kitchen, living and giving segments will be presented in Galleria 1 under the motto *Sovereign Composure*. The four trend worlds – stunning temper, subtle spirit, serene nature and striking mind – have been researched and interpreted by trend bureau bora.herke.palmisano. The show will be supplemented by daily guided tours and lectures.

With the Talents programme, Messe Frankfurt provides designers at the beginning of their careers with a free platform from which they can present their products and ideas. In the Dining section, the Talents area is located within the 'Table Contemporary Design' product segment in Hall 4.0.

The renowned Design Plus Award has been a valuable orientation aid for trade visitors for more than 30 years. Every year, numerous exhibitors from the Table and Kitchen segments enter the competition with innovative products distinguished by special design qualities. The award-winning products are put on show at a special exhibition in Galleria 1 throughout the fair.

At the Stars on Stage area, exhibitors will present stars of the international cooking scene, outstanding pastry chefs, wine experts and other prominent guests at a variety of events. A complete event calendar with details of the various activities at Ambiente can be found at www.ambiente.messefrankfurt.com.

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Chicago show appeals to specialty retailers

With over 2,100 world-class exhibitors, inspirational education, unique specialty retailer services, and retail benchmarking opportunities, the International Home + Housewares Show is an industry event that kitchenware retailers can't afford to miss.

The Chicago show is recognized as the leading global marketplace for kitchenware. Its configured into four expos: Clean, Contain + Sustain; Dine + Design; Wired + Well and Global Crossroads

Discover Design is the premier design destination at the show, featuring over 100 of the world's finest design and trend leaders. High-end products and collections for table, kitchen and home that are driven by innovation and inspired by design. The Gallery is a key destination within the section, featuring the most interesting new products from Discover Design exhibitors. The Gallery showcases products being judged for *gia* Global Innovation Awards for design. A special area, Design Debut, features first-time Show exhibitors.

Retailers visiting the show can get insights into the latest trends, social media strategies, visual merchandising, sustainability, retail success factors and consumer preferences at over two dozen education sessions. Highlights from this year's program include the Pantone Colour Forecast of the major colour trends for 2015 and the branding presentation by *gia* Expert Juror Martin M. Pegler.

The Hall of Global Innovation gives visitors a visual summary of trends that are shaping the housewares industry. The exhibits include:

- **Going Green:** sustainable products and packaging, and exciting new materials.
- **gia Global Innovation Awards:** award-winning retailers from around the world showcase their best merchandising practices.
- **Pantone ColorWatch:** nine palettes representing the strongest colour trends for 2015.
- **IHA Innovation Awards:** innovative new award-winning products
- **Student Design Competition.**

Specialty retailers can also benefit from the free consulting with retail experts. The 45-minute consulting sessions cover topics from mobile and online sales to window displays and social media strategies.

More information is available at www.housewares.org/show/attend/nonUS.aspx

Tendence study explores window displays

Shop windows are gaining significance beyond the Christmas season. This attractive channel of communication is becoming increasingly important for the retail trade the whole year round claims a study of the Cologne-based EHI Retail Institute conducted on behalf of Messe Frankfurt for Tendence 2013. A high degree of attention, greater awareness and sustainable image cultivation are the main functions of shop windows for the bricks-and-mortar retail trade. For chain and department stores, as well as smaller retailers, shop windows provide an ideal setting for product and brand-specific claims. Well thought-out, creative visual-merchandising concepts for shop windows are also effective counterweights to developments such as e-commerce and the high-speed lifestyle of modern consumers.

As always, the focus of the shop window is on the product so the aim of the window dressing feature at Tendence is to showcase the various collections in a different and interesting light.

Storytelling, reduction, change of perspective, art and new technologies are all popular stylistic devices transcending the norm in window design. As a rule, the aim is to disturb habitual routines. We're seeing more unusual perspectives when everything is upside down, or catching the eye by deliberately keeping design elements to a minimum.

Storytelling in shop windows is a major retail trend. In this highly emotional setting, the product is deliberately pushed somewhat into the background with the use of technical extras, especially LED video walls, shop-window touchscreens and interactive modules. However, many retailers are still reluctant to use them because of the relatively high investment required.

Imagination instead of expensive investments is needed with window presentation furniture. As a rule, conventional presenters, displays and construction form the basic framework for the structure and height of the presentation. In line with the vintage trend, old pieces of furniture, such as sideboards, tables and everyday commodities with signs of wear and tear, are used to set trendy accents.

Prepared by the EHI Retail Institute in Cologne on behalf of Messe Frankfurt, the report entitled *The key to success – a study on the importance of window dressing in the retail trade* was released during Tendence in August 2013. With highlights such as the 'Window-dressing live' special presentation, Tendence offers international trade visitors a huge range of products for the home plus valuable inspiration for window dressing and in-shop displays. The next fair will be held August 30th to September 2nd, 2014.



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The psychology of sales promotions

By Candace Sutcliffe, Retail Manager, C.A. Paradis/Chef's Paradise, Ottawa



The word SALE has become an important part of a retailers' lexicon. Now, more than ever, consumers have a greater selection of products at varying prices. According to Behavioral Economist Dan Ariely, author of *Predictably Irrational*, shoppers enjoy the thrill of "hunting" for what they want at the price they want to pay.

An important part of the sales process is allowing customers to feel as though they are in control and getting the best deal. U.S. department store chain JC Penney learned this firsthand when they tried to eliminate the chase altogether. In 2009, then CEO Ron Johnston decided it was time to do away with their popular coupon program in favor of everyday low prices. Johnston invested hundreds of millions of dollars to update and renovate locations across the country, modeling the company after the Apple boutiques in an effort to target a new generation of shoppers.

This decision proved to be a devastating strategic mistake. Johnston had neglected the value of word-of-mouth hype that JCP shoppers shared during the couponing and limited promotion experience. The thrill of the hunt was lost, as was the core demographic that JCP had always targeted.

According to Ariely, if you let a customer choose between two items, they'll choose the cheaper one. But if you give them a choice between three or four similar items, they will ultimately choose the more expensive option (hence the logic of a good/better/best product assortment). His theory is that when the buyer makes a decision, they are in control and therefore feel that

they are making a rational buying decision. When you take away the choice, you eliminate the power.

This same logic applies to suggested retail prices and prestige pricing. SRP's are designed to set a perceived value. When a retailer sells below that value it is perceived as a deal. If, however, you sell at the reduced price everyday it becomes a new perceived value and the shopper may not feel that they are getting the best price, nor is there any urgency to purchase.

Target's much anticipated entry into the Canadian market may have suffered a little from this phenomena. Prestige pricing sets a social value on an item (luxury goods and premium car brands are the best examples) where the consumer is willing to pay a premium for the "prestige" of owning such items. The buzz or hype in buying and owning the item fuels the demand.

As competition continues to intensify in North America, retailers on both sides of the border are being forced to get out of the gate first with sales promotions throughout the year. Since the market value on housewares has become increasingly transparent, retailers of all sizes are now competing based on how early they are willing to cut profits in order to move volume. Most notably were this past year's Black Friday sales. No longer reserved to just one day, major retailers in the U.S. actually opened their doors on Thanksgiving Day, with promotions running throughout the weekend and some stores reportedly staying open for as much as 40 consecutive hours.

Retailers in Canada, the U.K. and

Australia are now trying to compete with the American shopping holiday, largely due to Amazon's global presence. Canadian retailers are also faced with keeping cross border shoppers local, and so many have adopted the event into their pre-holiday marketing strategy. However, Canadian retailers who do participate in Black Friday promotions may not be any further ahead in terms of fourth quarter profits since Boxing Day specials are now also being advertised before Christmas, in a final attempt to attract the customer first.

Effective sales promotions are designed to entice shoppers to take action for a limited period. Smart retail marketers know they must appeal to a buyer's "fear of loss". It has been proven that consumers respond better to what they might lose (such as a good deal or depleted inventory) rather than what they might gain. My preferred clothing retailer often offers a 40% discount on certain Wednesdays within the month but I still pay full price on occasion because I'm afraid they will be sold out of my size by then.

Whatever your promotional strategies are throughout the year, Ariely points out that when sales or promotions become expected, they actually lose their effectiveness. Too many pricing promotions can ultimately affect profit margins and hurt your image. 🐾

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International Retailer Profile

Everything old is new again

Michelle Hespe speaks to Karl Sorensen, owner and founder of the innovative Chicago retail store P.O.S.H.

Is it an antique shop? No, it isn't. Is it a tabletop shop? No, it's not really that either. Is it a gift shop? Perish the thought (even though you'll find a thousand and more gift ideas here). So what is P.O.S.H.?

P.O.S.H. is a remarkable retail store that was born from a marriage of wanderlust, and an idea that the shopping experience could be something different than it typically was in 1997, when the store was founded.

"When we opened, the mix of both vintage and new items in the same shop was simply not being done," explains owner and founder Karl Sorensen. "And it was that mixture that made P.O.S.H. stand apart from other home and housewares stores. The common desire to categorize everything and put things in neat, familiar boxes made it difficult for some people to get their heads around at first, but for most people, P.O.S.H. was a breath of fresh air."

Since P.O.S.H. opened its doors, there have been other stores that have adopted a similar concept and taken on its unusual approach to retail, but Karl just sees this as a form of flattery and continually strives to maintain his store's many points of difference. "It's all about attention-to-detail – an aesthetic formed by years of living in Europe, and the small, accessible pieces that are culled from the European markets."

Karl adds "most shops in the U.S. sell

huge pieces of furniture and big, expensive stuff, not relatively inexpensive, small things."

Of course, the most important ingredient that P.O.S.H. has is the passion that Karl has to always make the shop a fresh, interesting, romantic experience for people. "P.O.S.H. transports people to another place and time and is an escape from the busy streets of downtown Chicago and the harried pace of our 21st century lives," he says.

Although he has a somewhat old-

fashioned approach to retail, Karl is very aware that social media is practically a necessity these days.

"We have a Facebook page. It's pretty much de rigeur today, but for me, Facebook and business seems like a forced combination," he says. "I suppose FB is all about self-promotion on some level (look at my handsome friends and my fascinating, fabulous life!), but when businesses do it, it seems insincere to me. That doesn't suit us, because the P.O.S.H. approach relies on sincerity."



P.O.S.H. owner Karl Sorensen, above, blends new home decor items with vintage pieces for a cozy, chic atmosphere.

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International Retailer Profile

Karl goes on to explain that the social media outlet that has worked for P.O.S.H. is Pinterest, and it does make sense for this company. "It's an easy way for people to share things they like with each other and it takes the work off our plate," says Karl. "Also, since the sharing is coming from someone not connected with P.O.S.H., to me it seems more sincere and not so self-promotional."

Another more traditional drawcard that this store utilizes is music. "Music can have a powerful effect on people, and the P.O.S.H. 'soundtrack' is something that transports and inspires customers," says Karl. "Much like our merchandise mix, our music spans a broad range that somehow has a common thread. Generally, P.O.S.H. music is a combination of classic American standards sung by the torchbearers of the American Song Book, as well as some jazz, café music from France and chansons by some of the beloved French singers. The music is primarily from the 1920s through the 1950s, but of course some of the music is newer."

Karl laughs, as he says with pride: "There have been times when customers have become so swept up in the music

that they began dancing in the shop!"

Karl goes on to reminisce about some of the incredible finds that have made their way on to shop floor, such as beautiful china and the silver once used in the oldest social club in Chicago. "As long as we keep taking the path less-traveled, we will keep finding the products that prompt our customers to ask: "Where do you find all this stuff!""

The path less-travelled is one that has proven itself to be incredibly rewarding for Karl, and he has no hesitation when it comes to offering his advice on setting up and surviving in a rapidly changing retail world.

"The most important bit of advice to anyone with aspirations of starting out in retail is the importance of 'The Idea'. You have to have an idea or a concept that is completely unique, that will somehow captivate peoples' imaginations, and that can't be duplicated by a national chain retailer," he insists.

"The chain retailers will always be able to do it cheaper than the independent, single-location shop, but the little shopkeeper with a big dream has the ability to create something that feels fresher and more heart-felt than any-



thing devised by a corporation."

Karl also knows that it's his passion for P.O.S.H. that gets him through the long hours, the struggles resulting from an often-uncertain economy and the challenge of always offering his customers something new. "If people want the predictable, they will go to the national retail chain. If they are looking for something with personality and charm, they will hopefully go to the independent shops in their city (or even online) and ensure that those unique outlets not only survive, but flourish."

To learn more about P.O.S.H., visit <http://poshchicago.com>. For more unique concept stores and housewares retailers in Chicago visit www.housewares.org/show/attend/nonUS.aspx.

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Cuisina makes shopping simple

Offering a perfect mix of service, selection and low prices, Mario Brochu operates two successful kitchen shops in Quebec City and has big plans for the future

By Laurie O'Halloran

Mario Brochu learned the finer points of customer service at a very young age. Born and raised in Lévis, Quebec, he grew up watching his parents work long hours at the family business. In a historic city famed for its charm and hospitality, his parents were entrepreneurs who ran a hotel renowned for its wedding receptions. Mario helped out on weekends so it was only natural that, after graduating from college, he decided to buy a little motel himself at the age of 22 (with a little help from his parents).

"The motel only had 27 units but it was an interesting business," he recalls.

"I ran it for eight years, and I learned early on how to work a lot of hours, seven days a week. It was good training for retail, but once I met my wife and we started a family, I realized it was time for a change."

The experience ultimately did lead him to the retail field, where Mario knew it was even more important to meet customer expectations. So after selling the motel in the early '90s, he bought a Pot Pourri franchise with a partner. Then he bought another, and another. They were operating four Pot Pourri stores in Quebec before they ultimately decided to pull out of the fran-



chise group. They renamed their stores DécoCuisine (a chain that's still operating, see page 26) and continued selling kitchenware and home decor.

After nine years together, the partners realized they each had a different vision. Mario wanted to focus on kitchenware and saw a good opportunity to open a much larger store that catered to both women *and* men, a key demographic group that was being overlooked in the marketplace. He sold out to his partner in 2004 and launched his first Cuisina in Quebec City in 2005.

"I wanted to offer a larger selection of good quality kitchenware, with good prices and customer service," says Mario. "I wanted to offer good value."

The new store covered 8,500 square feet and, from the start, all employees were trained to explain every product, from knives to small appliances. At first, Mario says he simply concentrated on getting the best deals, but gradually started to grow the most successful categories, including tableware.

"I've always felt it was important to listen to the customer, to adjust your assortment accordingly, and to always an-



Cuisina owner Mario Brochu, above, opened his newly expanded (15,500-square-foot) store last fall in Quebec City.

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Retailer Profile



One lucky Cuisina customer won this entire kitchen in a contest held in-store last year. Below, Mario recently started catering to the restaurant/commercial market with a range of dinnerware. Below, an overview from the cash desk.



ticipate what they will want to buy next," he explains. "I always respond to my customers' needs because I want to give them a good shopping experience."

The strategy worked, and within a few years, Mario was ready to open a second, 7,500-square-foot store on the other side of the river, where the population is not quite as dense.

As the provincial capital, Quebec City is also one of the oldest cities in North America and is home to over a half million people. Founded by Samuel Champlain in 1608, the name given to the city (Kébec) is Algonquin for "where the river narrows". The city is situated right where the Saint Lawrence River narrows, with Cap-Diamant on one bank and Lévis on the other. A favourite romantic tourist destination, Old Quebec has been declared a World Heritage Site.

For Mario Brochu, the city has proven to be one populated with people who love to cook – and shop for housewares. Last summer, he closed his first store in order to replace it with a brand new one that's much larger, with room to grow. The new store opened last fall in a massive two-story building that will allow Mario to launch his online store later this year, followed by a cooking school, while pondering a third location, possibly in the west end of the city.

The new location is less than 15 minutes from the city's airport, situated in a corporate complex just off the highway. Designed to resemble a wholesale outlet, the shop is not what one would traditionally expect in Quebec City. The store itself occupies 15,500 square feet of the new building with a second-storey mezzanine level for offices.

A further 2,000 square feet has been set aside on the main floor for a cooking school, which has a convenient separate entrance from the store. There is also plenty of parking since this destination shop draws customers from all corners of the city, as was seen by the many cars pulling up on the cold, rainy morning in November when we visited.

Mario Brochu clearly knows how to set the right impression, from the hand-written price tags to the basic stacked box displays. "Simplicity is my goal," he says. "I want to make it easy to see the wide selection, easy to find the right product. If it's

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Retailer Profile

too complicated, or you give too much information, you confuse the customers.”

A shrewd negotiator and buyer, he is hands-on in all aspects of the business, and still does all the purchasing himself. It’s likely he will have to delegate more as his enterprise grows. His suppliers have little doubt he’ll make it happen.

“I always enjoy dealing with Mario because of his vision,” says Jacques Dubuc of Home Presence, a supplier and friend for 20 years. “Not only is he passionate about our industry, he is a true entrepreneur who is always on top of things and very loyal to his vendors.



Over the years he has built a strong retail concept that is unique and it works. He is not afraid to carry a large assortment in order to make an impact.”



Small appliances are a big category for Cuisina, with a good/better/best assortment. The simple displays have product piled on skids or on wire shelving and hand-printed sales tags. The light wood floors and grey/white walls provide a clean ‘outlet’ look.



Noury Khobie at Orly Cuisine, a major supplier of both small appliances and cookware for Cuisina, has enjoyed working with Mario for over a decade. “He is an honest, straightforward individual who possesses a strong work ethic and a deep sense of integrity.”

He is also a risk-taker who is not afraid to make a commitment to a new brand or new product. Last year he started carrying a range of products for the commercial trade and restaurant business, and is hoping the online business set to begin later this year will help give him national exposure.

In the meantime, he will continue to promote his two stores with a full colour flyer that he distributes to over 200,000 homes every three weeks. He also does T.V. advertising during the holiday season, and radio all year long. Mario admits he doesn’t have a lot of time to relax with his wife, Martyne Ramsey, and their three daughters, aged 19 to 23. But he is used to the pace of his hectic life.

“I like 80% of my job,” he says, “but one downside is that I don’t have enough time to accomplish everything I want. I’m only one person!”

He does have a good support team in his 20 employees, all of whom look forward to coming to Cuisina each day and interacting with customers.

“I tell my employees that if you come to work here, you must love to work here,” Mario stresses. “There is a very low unemployment rate in Quebec so we must make Cuisina a special place to work in order to attract the best people.”

If he opens a third store, Mario will likely take on a general manager to oversee the retail operations. He can then concentrate on the design of the new cooking school and the website.

A self-confessed workaholic, Mario still finds time to play hockey three times a week, which keeps him fit and energized. “I’ve worked hard to build a successful store and I am very happy where I am today,” he says with a smile.

As I watch carload after carload of customers pull up to this massive new kitchen store, it’s easy to see why. 🐾

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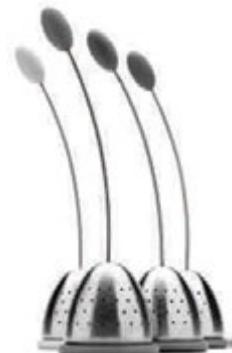


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Side by side

With a restaurant, inn *and* kitchen shop, Rosemari and Greg Poisson dominate downtown Port Colborne, catering to visitors from around the world who come to see the impressive Welland Canal, which happens to be right across the street

by Denise Gaze

The beautiful Ontario resort city of Port Colborne has a lot to boast about. Situated on Lake Erie at the southern end of the Welland Canal it is truly picturesque. The canal itself is one of the world's greatest man made wonders, allowing ships from all over the world to move cargo up and down the Niagara Escarpment. It's also

renowned as the first fair trade city in Ontario. More importantly, it is home to a truly entrepreneurial couple, Rosemari and Greg Poisson.

Creators of their own Port Colborne landmark, they are the proud owners of Canalside, a pub style eatery and inn. Next door to the restaurant is Rosemari's baby, the Canalside kitchen store.

After visitors have had a bite to eat at the restaurant, and shopped at the charming kitchen store, they can stay the night in one of the two rustic suites housed in the small motel above. They started with plans to just run their own restaurant, but this industrious duo were soon determined to make a bigger mark on the town they both love.



Everything on the historic main street of Port Colborne burned to the ground in a 1917 fire. The building that houses Canalside Kitchen Shop and the Restaurant were rebuilt with a second storey over an eight year period. Left, the Welland Canal is directly across the street and attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Retail Profile: **Canalside Kitchen Shop**

Born in Simcoe, Ontario, Rosemari, was adopted at the age of four by a family from Port Colborne. When asked about the unusual spelling of her name, she explains “my original birth name was different. My adoptive parents decided to name me after my grandmother, but they added something unconventional by spelling it without the e on the end”.

Greg was born in Windsor Ontario and moved to Port Colborne when he was ten. As an adult, he pursued a career in the hospitality industry and was managing the Winchester Arms when a lovely blonde walked into the bar one night under somewhat false pretenses. Turns out Rosemari had a friend who told her Greg was the right guy for her. So she went into the bar under the guise of soliciting a donation for a scrabble tournament, but in reality she wanted to check out the man who, as fate would have it, eventually became her husband.

One year later, Greg and Rosemari were married after a brief stint working together at the Winchester Arms. In

2007, one year later, they had taken over the restaurant.

Marriage is hard enough in the first year without running a business together but just two years after opening the restaurant, the couple gutted the upper level and created two rental suites. Both units have kitchens and are designed like a bachelor apartment. The front hotel room looks directly over the Welland Canal.

“We have people visit from all over the world,” says Rosemari.

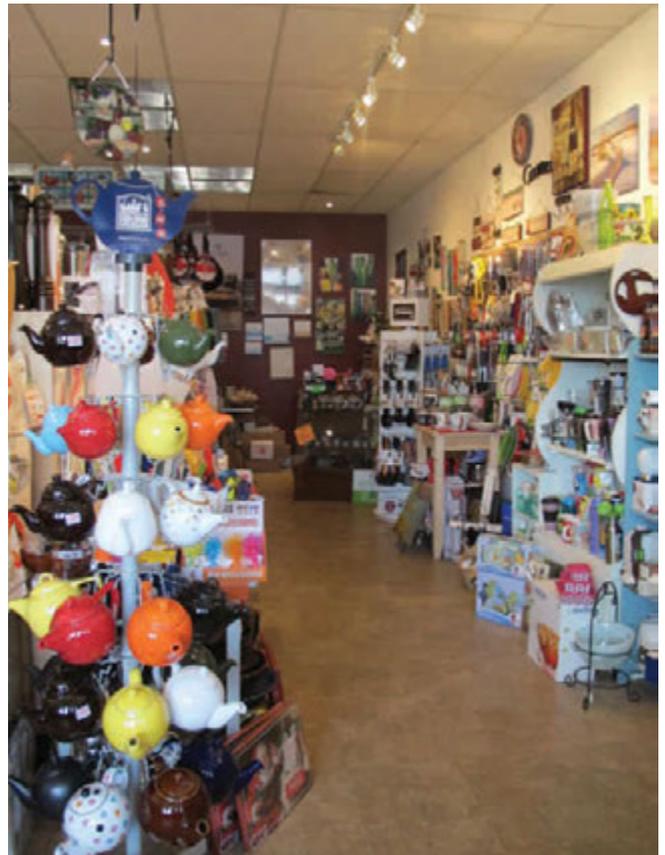
In the beginning, the restaurant was open till 2 a.m. They eventually scaled that back to 10:00 p.m. during the week and midnight on weekends. In the summer, Canalside restaurant offers live bands on weekends and an open air patio offering a spectacular canal view.

Rosemari was handling all of the ordering and administration plus cooking in the restaurant four times a week, but when the building next door became available, she didn’t hesitate and with Greg’s support, took a leap of faith.

The Canalside Kitchen Store opened



Rosemari Poisson, above, is a multi-talented multi-tasker who runs the Canalside Kitchen Shop, below. She cans her own jams and jellies, cooks periodically in the restaurant next door, operates a two-room inn above the store and regularly gets involved in community and charity events.



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Retail Profile: Canalside Kitchen Shop



The tiny 1,000-square-foot store offers a good assortment of kitchen gadgets, textiles and fair trade teas and coffees.



for business on Thanksgiving weekend just over two years ago. Most individuals would find it a lot to juggle but Rosemari says simply “I am a very positive person. I see the upside to everything and don’t let things get me down, even in this economy.”

She adds “the Niagara Region was hit hard when a lot of good paying manufacturing jobs were lost in the area.”

Despite the impact, Rosemari was not deterred. She enjoys the challenge of creating something from the ground up while still preserving the historic traditions of Port Colborne.

The building that houses the store was built in 1860 and the restaurant building was built in 1920. Sadly, everything from the restaurant to the corner burned to the ground in 1917. The merchants rebuilt over the next eight years, with a few changes. Before the fire, the restaurant building was only one storey. It was built around 1830, and was originally called *The LoveJoy Saloon*.

The restaurant’s floors are original, as is the brick wall. The bricks for the wall were actually made in Port Colborne back then. The rear exterior of the buildings features the same bricks. The lovely hand-stamped ceiling in the restaurant and in the hotel suites are made of copper. The couple opted to paint over them since there were already so many layers of paint on them.

The restaurant and the two adjoining buildings were all built by the same person, and were originally all connected. Through the years, the doorways were covered over. In the kitchen store, Rosemari has tried to find older, antique display pieces to compliment the age of the building. The original ceiling is above the drop ceiling in the kitchen store.

When Rosemari took over the shop, it was a woman’s clothing store. She admits opening up a kitchen store from scratch was a definite challenge.

“I started researching products on the internet,” she recalls. “Greg and I travelled to Niagara-on-the-Lake to speak with two store managers who advised us on which products were good sellers. As for the fixtures and shelving units in the store, I turned to the antique store next door to hunt for vintage pieces.”

Rosemari is grateful for the help she received from suppliers like Margaret Alsamgeest at Browne and Wayne Canning from Trudeau. She admits that with some product lines, she has just followed her instincts. Sometimes it’s been a hit, other times a miss.

“When the store first opened, we were a little sparse on stock, but it has definitely grown and we can’t say that now. It’s been a great adventure and a wonderful learning experience for me.”

One of the keys to their success as partners has been knowing each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Outgoing Greg, for example, loves people.

“Greg is the front man at the restaurant. He creates the menus and also serves the food. He genuinely enjoys welcoming customers into the restaurant and loves to tell them the history of Port Colborne”, says Rosemari.

And if they didn’t already have enough to do, a year ago the Poissons added to their workload once again when they opened a private banquet room catering to parties of up to 50 people with the eventual goal of starting cooking classes.

Rosemari has been in retail since her first job at Canadian Tire in the sports department. Her work ethic and ‘never give up’ philosophy was honed 24 years ago while working at Oldford’s Food Market in Ridgeway Ontario, just down the road from Port Colborne.

“I worked in the grocery store for four years, doing everything from working cash to ordering and stocking shelves. I worked in the deli and meat department and even ran the garden centre.”

She’ll never forget the advice she got from her old boss, Cliff Oldford, who told her “you might get down but don’t ever give up.”

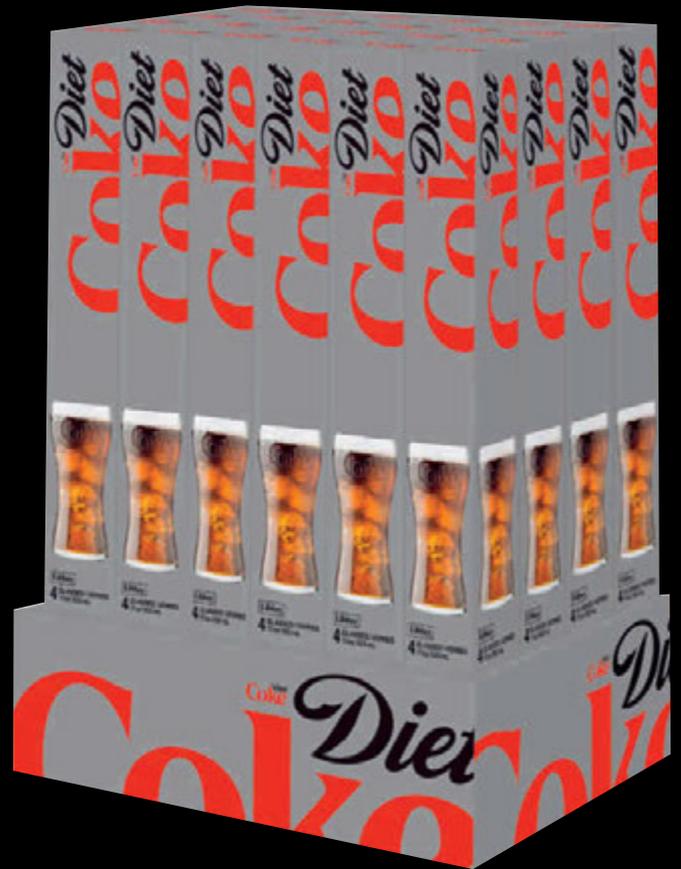
Rosemari took that advice to heart. For her, opening a kitchen store was a true labor of love – something she is very passionate about. She knows she could never have done it without Greg’s support, especially since they already had a pretty full schedule.

“I was the one who wanted to start a kitchen store, which naturally means finding more money and adding more

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Retail Profile: Canalside Kitchen Shop



The Canalside restaurant, run by Greg Poisson, below, offers an old-world ambience with copper ceilings and original, restored dark wood flooring.

pressure," says Rosemari. "But Greg told me if this is what I wanted to do, I should do it".

Today, the Canalside Kitchen Store is run by Rosemari and one other staff member, Tracy Tarran. She has a great deal of retail experience and is someone Rosemari can rely on.

Rosemari typically does all the buying for the shop which offers fair trade teas and coffees as well as homemade soups and homemade dressings under her own label: *Rosemari's Blend*. She

does all the canning, making blueberry and strawberry jam in season. "If it's a little slow in the restaurant, the kitchen store will be busy and vice versa. The canning also offers a bit of an escape."

Chock full of wonderful products, Rosemari tries to set her shop apart by looking for higher quality items not typically found in big box stores.

"Emile Henry sells very well and I love the way housewares companies like Browne and Trudeau stand behind their products," she says.

This cheerful store owner keeps customers coming back by offering a lot of personal attention. After shopping they can enjoy more personal service from her husband as he serves them a delicious meal at their restaurant next door.

"We are a small town so people have gotten to know us very well. At the store, we are happy to special order products for our clients at any time. Sometimes a customer will call to check and see if we have a product before going elsewhere".

Canalside is in the process of updating its web site, but they have been active on social media over the past year, garnering plenty interest.

"We post photos of products on face book frequently and since most people have FB on their phones, they get an up-

date right away," says Rosemari. "I also use local media from time to time and Greg can be heard on radio station 91.7 *Giant FM*. Five days a week he announces the restaurant's lunch specials.

Rosemari tells *Home Style* that many people know his voice. "They know Canalside and he'll promote the kitchen store as well."

Like any business in a tourist area, there are seasonal peaks and valleys. The peaks are in the summer when visitors can view the tall ships and all the other magnificent vessels sailing through the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Greg and Rosemari are lucky to be able to close the restaurant and kitchen store for 12 days every January to do repairs and painting if necessary. They also try to take a week away for themselves. Yet even in her travels, Rosemari is always on the lookout for new recipes and spices to try at the restaurant.

"In every country I visit, I buy a cookbook. I now have quite the collection," she says with a laugh.

The hardworking couple also participates in the Big Bike for Heart and Stroke fundraiser and have done so ever since they first opened the restaurant. Rosemari, who has two children from a previous marriage, a daughter, 24, and a son, 22, says her mother-in-law was very dear to her and died of a stroke. As a result, Canalside is happy to provide food and refreshments for the participants of the ride and they also have their own team.

Last year they contributed towards a large banner that reads "We Are A Fair Trade City" which hangs on Bridge No. 21 at the Welland Canal.

Always thinking of the next business adventure, Rosemari believes she and Greg will eventually sell Canalside and move up north to open a cottage or campground resort. Knowing the strength of this dynamic married duo, anything is possible, although leaving their beloved Port Colborne may prove to be the greatest challenge of all. ☺

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Time for Tea

What's hot in teapots, kettles, infusers and more

According to the *Canadian Food Trends to 2020*, a report commissioned by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, tea consumption is expected to jump 40% by 2020. It seems a growing consumer interest in health and wellness has led to increasing awareness of tea's functional benefits.

Canadians drink almost 9.7 billion cups of tea each year. That works out to 83 litres per person every year and that's 30 litres (120 cups) more than in 2006. Over the past year, specialty teas have been fuelling the growth of tea consumption in Canada, driven by Black, Green & Herbal tea.

For retailers who sell loose leaf teas and tea making prod-

ucts, there is a tremendous opportunity this year to increase the amount of specialty teas purchased by customers.

Next to water, tea is the world's most consumed beverage and outpaces coffee. In 2012, the Canadian tea market was worth \$423.8 million (both tea bags and loose leaf). Specialty tea sales totalled \$130 million in 2012.

Specialty tea continues to outpace regular tea (\$86,761,518) sales in dollar volume.

In terms of pounds sold, regular tea bags still dominate (73% tonnage) while specialty teas are rapidly gaining a greater share of the category (26.9 % tonnage).

With a concealed heating element providing 1500 watts of power, the **Chef's Choice** Cordless electric glass kettle will boil water faster than a microwave oven. The cordless 1.5-litre kettle features a comfortable ergonomic handle and convenient single hand. A push button lid opening allows the kettle to lift from its base for easy filling and pouring. It also offers an automatic shut-off function and boil-dry shut-off protection.



Browne & Co. is introducing this innovative Floatea floating tea egg from AdHoc. Featuring a stainless steel and nylon design, the tea egg always floats on the surface to keep it within safe and easy reach. The product comes with a convenient stand to collect any drips. The Floatea is safe to put in the dishwasher.



The new Fresco collection of stylish stovetop kettles by **Jascor Housewares** are designed to compliment the decor in any contemporary kitchen. Made of stainless steel with rounded, ergonomic handles, each kettles comes with all the bells and 'whistles'.

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Time for Tea

Made in Germany, the Finum brand offers a lovely range of products for tea lovers. Distributed by **Fox Run**, the collection includes stylish drinkware with unique filtering components designed to steep loose leaf teas, right. Fox Run is also introducing a line of whistling tea kettles from Reston Lloyd. The 2.2-quart stainless steel model, below, has a harmonic hum whistler and a sandwiched, reinforced bottom for use on gas or electric stoves. The 2.2-quart red kettle is made of enamel on steel with a heat-tempered glass lid, a fill-line indicator and a handle that folds down.



This cordless glass electric jug kettle from **Salton** has a large 1.7-liter capacity. It uses advanced heating technology with a concealed element that also permits fast, easy cleaning. It has an automatic boil and off switch with an indicator light. It automatically shuts off when the water starts boiling and quickly restarts the boiling process at the touch of a switch. It also features an Aquascreen water filter, water level markings on each side of the handle and a convenient cord wrap.



This new Tea Maker from **Trudeau** is crafted from heat-resistant borosilicate glass with a protective base. The comfortable handle features a heat guard to protect the user's fingers from getting burned. It comes with a rust-proof, removable 18/8 stainless steel infuser and a stainless steel coaster.



Salton helps keep beverages hot with this mug warmer. Perfect for home or office, it has an illuminated on/off switch and non-slip feet. It easily fits any mug or cup of coffee, soup or hot chocolate.



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Time for Tea



Sevy Import has expanded its line of tea infusers to include the new Meow tea cup and fish bowl. The item is sold as a set with an acrylic BPA-free fish bowl and 18/8 stainless steel infuser (the mug is not included.) The cat and the infuser are also sold separately. Simply fill the infuser with loose tea, perch the cat on the lip of the mug and immerse the infuser. After steeping, place the infuser in the fish bowl.



The Icona Collection from **Delonghi** includes toasters, espresso machine and electric kettles that offer true Italian design with a retro feel. The kettle, offered in three colours, has a large water level indicator on the back. It features a detachable base for cord-free convenience and has a large 1.7-liter capacity. There is a three-level safety protection system that includes auto shut-off when water begins to boil, thermal cut-off and auto shut-off when the body is lifted from the base. It also features a removable, washable anti-scale filter, cord storage and non-slip feet.



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Time for Tea



Paderno is launching two new kettles this spring. The Lawrencetown and Pinehurst kettles each feature an ergonomic handle for easy pouring and sturdy, 18/10 stainless steel construction. The kettles are safe for use on all stovetops, including induction burners, and are backed by Paderno's 25-year warranty. The kettles also feature an old-fashioned whistle to alert you when the water has boiled.



These exquisite teapots are from the Salt & Pepper BARISTA range by **Mann Marketing**. Made of new bone china, the red 1.8-liter teapot, above, has a stainless steel cover and tea filter inside. The 500ml 'tea for one' set, below, is made of white porcelain with a stainless steel cover. It comes with four-pieces: a personal teapot, teacup, saucer and tea filter. Both teapots are great for entertaining or enjoying a quiet cup of tea alone.



Starbucks targets tea drinkers

Whether it's the traditional Earl Grey or fancy variations, like carbonated teas or tea-infused alcoholic drinks, the number of options for afternoon tea is growing at a stunning pace.

During the past few years, more tea shops have established a quiet presence in neighbourhoods across the country, relying primarily on word of mouth to entice new customers, but the buzz is about to become much louder as Starbucks tries to grab a taste of the fervour.

Last November, the Seattle-based coffee chain opened its first "tea bar" in New York City. The company made the biggest acquisition in its history last year when it spent \$620 million to acquire about 300 Teavana stores, including 59 locations in Canada.

The rollout could find a particularly receptive audience in Canada where tea is the fifth most popular beverage, with nearly 10 billion cups consumed each year, according to Statistics Canada.

Starbucks wants to corner the tea market by expanding the Teavana concept beyond shopping malls and into major urban centres, with a significant push to begin in Canada this year. Last fall, the company began carrying Teavana products at its coffee shops which exposed more consumers to the fragrant coffee alternatives that range between \$3 and \$6 per serving.

Canadians' tea consumption is expected to rise 40% by 2020, according to a recent government agency report on food trends.

"Canada has always been a hot tea drinking country because of our British past," says Louise Roberge, president of the Tea Association of Canada, a lobbyist group for the industry.

Tea's popularity hit its peak before World War II but the beverage slowly began to lose its status after the war ended. By 1991, the hot drink had fallen to the lowest consumption level in its history in Canada, but that is all about to change.

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Gourmet Gadgets

Cool kitchen tools and useful utensils for the home chef



The “Yolk Out” by MDC uses a soft, ergonomic silicone bulb to suck up the entire yolk, leaving the egg white behind in the bowl. Then simply expel the yolk completely intact. It’s offered in three colours in a 12-pack countertop display unit.

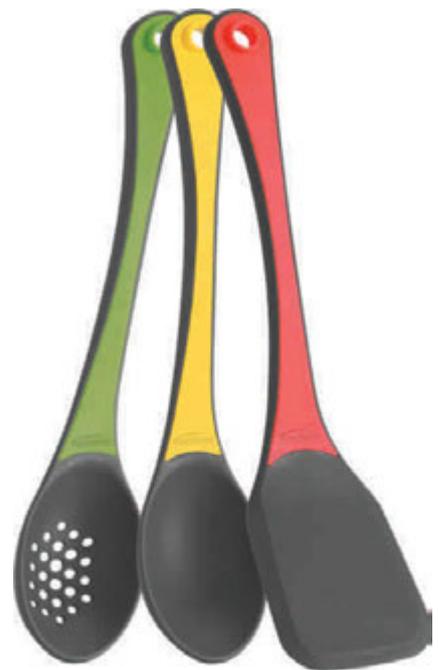


The razor-sharp bagel knife, left, slices through any bagel easily. The wide oval shape makes it easy to apply your favourite spread. The knife stores safely in a protective blade cover and comes in three colours. Also new from **MDC Housewares** is this silicone pasta rake. The fine ribs on the five fingers securely hold food in place.



The Beater Blade, available from **Jascor**, continuously beats, scrapes and folds ingredients for KitchenAid stand mixers. One of the most efficient tools in the kitchen, it eliminates the need to hand scrape the bowl and batter build-up on the blade. Ingredients are all thoroughly incorporated and mixing time is cut by up to 50%.

Trudeau offers a wide assortment of nylon and silicone gadgets designed to make life easier for the home chef. The new Toaster tong, below, has an integrated notch to safely push and pull toaster oven grills. It’s made of non-slip, heat-resistant silicone. Also new is a set of three stackable tools, shown right. The tools each have a handle ring that nests inside the other for easy, compact storage. Each tool is made of durable nylon with a silicone handle.



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Gourmet Gadgets

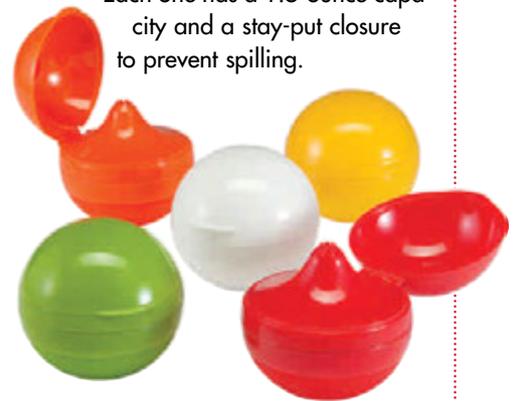


DanESCO has launched Silicone Sensations by OXO, above. The OXO Good Grips silicone spatulas offer a new take on a classic tool. The head and neck of the spatulas are easy to clean and each tool is heat resistant to 600°F. Each has a comfortable, non-slip grip handle that's safe for non-stick cookware. New barbecue tools include an angled silicone basting brush with bamboo handle, above right, and a stainless steel sauce pot with a basting brush integrated into the lid.



Classic Chef is promoting the Spiralfix spiral slicer, above. It easily creates vegetable spirals for an eye catching presentation at the table. Also new is the Flavour It line, shown below. These handy gadgets can be used to transport ketchup, mayo, mustard or dipping sauces in a lunch bag.

Each one has a 1.5-ounce capacity and a stay-put closure to prevent spilling.



These colourful non-stick ice cream scoops from **Product Specialties** feature an ergonomically designed handle. Solid cast aluminum provides extra leverage when scooping to reduce strain on the wrist. The non-stick coating ensures they're easy to clean and offer quick release. The scoops are top rack dishwasher-safe.



The Metaltex Rotomac from **COUNSELTRON** features Swiss design and technology. This compact, handy chopper is a must-have for every kitchen. Super sharp movable blades chop vegetables, fruits, nuts and more from coarse to fine in a few seconds. A revolving pull mechanism is easy to use and quickly prepares dips, soups, sauces or pesto. Requiring no electricity or batteries, its also environment-friendly.



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Obesity in children ages 6-11 is up 200% from 20 years ago. — cdc.gov

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Editorial Submission Deadline:
February 7, 2014
(laurie@homestylemag.ca)

Advertising Material Due:
February 19, 2014
(michael@homestylemag.ca)

Gourmet Gadgets



The joie Citrus Squeeze & Mist from **MSC** offers a convenient way to squeeze or mist lemons and limes. It has a one-ounce capacity and comes packaged in a blister pack. MSC also carries 'The Grate', below. This unique three-sided standing grater goes from fine to medium and coarse. The grater is removable and the unit comes in three bright colours.



Kitchen Innovations has introduced Garlic Perfection, above. It uses stainless steel blades to quickly slice, dice or grate garlic right in the container. The Zeal Rock and Drop herb chopper set transfers ingredients directly to even the smallest pan. It has a magnetic lock for safe blade storage.

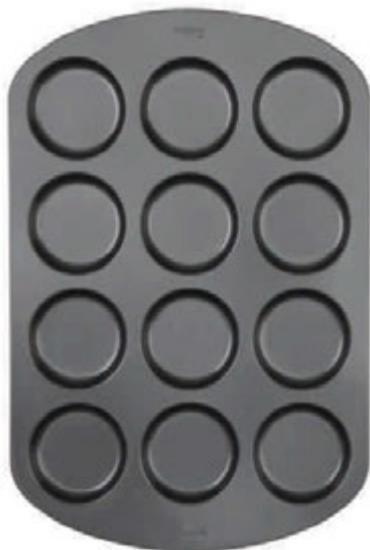


The Cuisipro Garlic Peel and Press from **Browne** can prepare an entire garlic in less than a minute. The sturdy base is used to crack and separate the cloves. The coated aluminum lid is used to press garlic, or it can peel then mince it with the built-in grate.





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Wilton brings colour, sweetness and fun to one of the most popular baking trends today - whoopie pies. Available in mini, standard and giant sizes, as well as many seasonal shapes.

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The Great Outdoors



DanESCO is launching the Artland Oasis range of traditional, vintage-inspired beverage servers and drinkware, above. With rustic simplicity, the metal stand keeps the glass jar elevated, making it easy to fill glasses from any table or countertop. A metal lid completes the vintage look.



DanESCO also offers a range of handy tools for the grill chef under the BBQ Devil brand. The line includes this stainless steel grill topper, above. It's perfect for grilling meat, vegetables, seafood and fruit.



Handwoven in Ethiopia of durable, easy-to-wash cotton, the Block tablecloths from Woven Promises come in two colour combinations and two sizes. The company will be exhibiting in the Galleria at NY Now.

The Final Touch Ice Bottle chiller, right, is simple to use and makes a great conversation piece. Just add water and freeze. It lasts up to six hours. Below, the Ice N'Dip chilled BPA-free serving bowl has a silicone snap-on lid and rubber non-slip feet. Both items are from Product Specialties.



Rustic Roasters are beautifully handcrafted roasting sticks. The handles bring a bit of the outdoors to the patio firepit and are ideal for toasting marshmallows. Made from naturally shed antlers and reclaimed wood. www.rusti-roasters



These garden stake sculptures from H&K Recycled Metal Art are handcrafted from recycled steel and copper by European artisans. Each piece is individually bent, cut, welded and brushed. winecaddys.com



Fox Run is introducing several new items under the French Bull brand of melamine dinnerware. The new bowls and salad servers, shown below, offer a full spectrum of colour. The melamine is food-safe, shatterproof, resistant to high heat, 100% BPA-free and top rack dishwasher-safe.



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Gift association undergoes a transformation

The Canadian Gift & Tableware Association has become the Canadian Gift Association, with the acronym **CanGift**. The new name and logo exemplify the association's renewed focus on sustainable connections, retailer success and thought leadership.

CanGift worked with Idea Workshop and Projektor to create the association's new look. Starting with the brand promise – to ignite interactions and empower connections between members and retailers – the team of designers developed a visual identity that reflects CanGift's four decades of experience, but also exemplifies a promising, multi-dimensional future. The new maple

leaf logo reflects the diversity of Canada and the building blocks of a dynamic trading environment fostering inspiration, engagement and sustainable connections. The new tagline is: Inspire. Connect. Succeed. Beginning this year, the CanGift shows will be called the Alberta Gift Fair, the Quebec Gift Fair and the Toronto Gift Fair. The term "fair" broadens the context of the association's events. The three fairs all now share a common tagline: Engaging Retail.

Home Style asked association president Peter Moore about the rebranding in the following interview.

What prompted the decision to change the name/rebrand the show?

The same motivations drove the rebranding of all three shows and the association as a whole. Over the course of the last four decades, our association has grown from six to over 1,400 member companies. Many new merchandise categories have emerged, some becoming quite dominant. New technologies and changing demographics have forever altered the face of Canadian retailing and how business is conducted. We want to adapt to and reflect those changes, ensuring broad industry success for another 40 years. Simply saying we've changed isn't enough. The rebranding is a tangible demonstration of our new, shared future.

Is this the first time in the association's history that the name has changed?

The most challenging element of the rebranding was agreeing on a new name. We actually looked at changing our name to the 'Canadian Gift Association' back in 1999, as part of a Millennium project.

With over 550 recognized merchandise categories on our show floors, the answer to a new name would never lie in a long list of product types. By the same token, we have outgrown our roots as the 'gift and tableware' industry.

After several facilitated brain-storming sessions with our consultants, it became apparent that we needed to think not of things, but of processes. Stripped down to its most basic, the one common element of all member companies and

their retail partners is the fact that their products are given by many as gifts. Our new acronym – CanGift – plays on that theme.

How long did the process take?

We began in December 2012. This was not simply a renaming exercise or a desire to update our graphics. The new branding needed to reflect a renewed organization – one that ensured sustainability well into the future by touching elements of our corporate culture, our strategic objectives and the needs of everyone involved in the industry.

We also changed the event names to "fairs", representing the inspiring and dynamic environment we will provide, enabling retailers to experience and trade in the newest ideas and trends our industry has to offer. We launched the rebranding on November 4, 2013.

What has been the reaction from CGTA members to the new look?

One of the challenges in a project like this lies in ensuring there are no hidden agendas by special interest groups, or biases introduced into the outcome because of inadequate input.

The fundamental research was done by our consultants using totally randomized samplings of our members, retailers and staff. The consultants conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with these individuals, many lasting over an hour, gaining insights into their wants and needs. This information was then distilled down to its essence using second order questions that identified



Peter Moore, the president and CEO of the Canadian Gift Association.

what really lay behind their comments and insights.

A series of workshops and brainstorming sessions were then conducted with staff distilling the comments from all stakeholders into a set of criteria we had to satisfy as an organization. Out of that work, which spanned several months, came our new brand promise and a new definition of our brand character. The new promise and character allowed us to define our new brand identity. So yes, members were included, as were retailers and staff.

Without exception, the rebranding is being enthusiastically embraced by our suppliers, our members, and the buyers they serve.

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Toronto Gift Fair

January 26th to January 30th • Toronto Congress Centre & International Centre

Sporting a new name and a new look, the former CGTA Gift Show promises to offer new inspiration to the thousands of retailers who will make the trip to Toronto this January. There are over 900 exhibitors throughout the two locations, with housewares concentrated in Hall 7 of The Congress Centre.

The slate of seminars for the spring show has also been refreshed. On Sunday morning, Leatrice Eiseman of The Pan-

tone Colour Institute will give a keynote address exploring future style trends. On Monday morning, Jill Wilcox of Jill's Table will present a complimentary seminar entitled "Real Life Retail". For details on these seminars and other events, visit www.cangift.org.

We highlight some of the new products being introduced at the fair on the following pages.

The All-Clad toaster is made of stainless steel with a die-cast design. Offered in a 2-slice or 4-slice version, it has six browning levels, defrost and bagel settings plus cancel button. The high-lift is ideal for smaller pieces of bread.



The Rowenta Steam Force iron pushes 30% more steam into fabric for quick results. It features LED display, anti-scratch stainless steel soleplate and a motion sensor that shuts off steam when the iron is not in use.

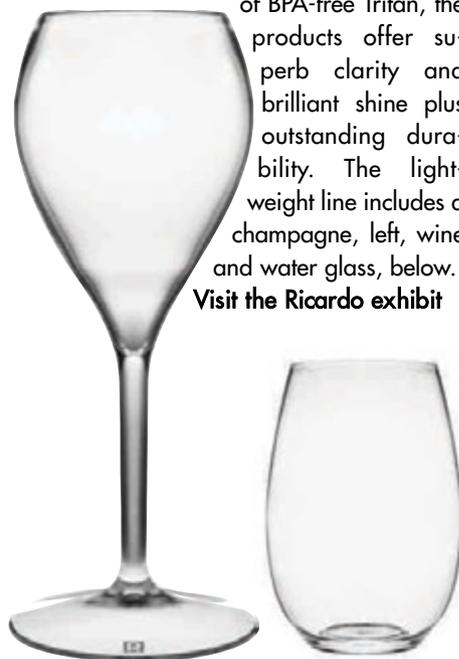


The T-fal OptiGrill lets Canadians enjoy the thrill of the grill year-round. It features a patented system that senses the thickness and size of foods to automatically adjust the time and temperature for the desired doneness. It also monitors the cooking process with an easy-to-read colour-coded display and melodic 'beep' notification. OptiGrill also has six pre-set programs to choose from. T-Fal, All-Clad, Krups and Rowenta brands are all from Group SEB.

Visit the Krups/All Clad exhibit

Ricardo will launch a new range of shatter-resistant glassware at the Toronto fair. Made of BPA-free Tritan, the products offer superb clarity and brilliant shine plus outstanding durability. The light-weight line includes a champagne, left, wine and water glass, below.

Visit the Ricardo exhibit



The Daisy silicone pot lid from Charles Viancin is now available in purple, as seen on our cover this month. These lids create an airtight seal to keep food fresh and seal in heat when cooking. Offered in five colours, they're reusable and safe to use at high temperatures.

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Toronto Gift Fair Product Preview



Q-Squared offers the Heritage collection, above. The melamine serveware is lightweight yet durable and scratch-resistant. The new Signature faux slate gift set, right, is also made of melamine with an extra layer of polish and gloss. Visit the Browne booth.



The MAUS line of beverage ware and wine accessories is made in Brazil. The design of the set, below, is inspired by a sailboat. It looks like glass but is made of BPA-free, unbreakable plastic. It's safe for the dishwasher and microwave, with thermal properties three times that of glass. The ice pack is shown left. Visit the Canitra exhibit.



These Rosanna cake plates and pedestals are each hand assembled and come in a Rosanna-designed gift box. The Duralex line of glass beverage ware, left, has been made in France since 1945. The glassware is true tempered, shock-resistant, thermal and safe for the dishwasher, microwave and freezer.

Visit Inter-Continental at Booth 8229

The Final Touch Kool Twister wine cooler and bottle pourer, below left, can keep white wines chilled for up to an hour, or it can cool a red within 15 minutes. Reusable, it features a no-spill through spout. The Conundrum decanter, below right, has been so in demand it's now being packaged in sets of two. While pouring in or out, the curves of the decanter gently disperse the wine to provide superior aeration and oxygenation.

Visit the Product Specialties exhibit.





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Toronto Gift Fair Product Preview



Protect-A-Pan cookware covers from Jascor are non-toxic and made of natural fibers, to help keep pans free from surface dust, fingerprints, animal droppings or residue. They are clean and ready for use at any time. One size of cover fits all pans.



The new Architec Hold Bowl from Jascor is designed with a stretch handle to hold three different ways, providing the user with exceptional comfort and dexterity. The feather light material of the 4-quart bowl features an 'egg cracking' edge.



The Fresco salad spinner, above, has a 1.5-litre capacity and is ergonomically designed. The non-slip handle and base allow for easy operation and added stability. The honeycomb pattern is an eye-catching bright green colour.

Visit the Jascor Housewares exhibit.



Artland has designed a new line of classically-shaped beverage bottles. Each is designed with a vintage label for milk or sangria to give the bottles an old-fashioned twist. The reusable, clear glass bottles have a stainless steel cap and rubber seal gasket to provide a hermetic seal that preserves the contents. Available from Danesco.



The Straight to Pan chopping board from Kitchen Innovations accurately transfers ingredients to the pan without any mess. It has a raised edge to guard against spills and a non-slip base with angled sides. It comes in three vivid colours. The company's drain and serve colander, below, has a fast draining function. With sturdy, easy grab handles, simply drain, shake and tilt to serve. Offered in red, purple and green.

Visit Don Shacter + Associates.



The Latte+ milk frother from Caffitaly, above, has a non-stick coated stainless steel bowl and a magnetic drive system. It can provide hot milk or rich, thick froth with the click of a button. The newest Écaffé coffee capsule, right, is Morbido, a blend of the best of Arabica and Robusta coffees for a rich, harmonious flavour.

Visit Caffitaly.



The Living Art collection of stylish dinnerware by Stoneage is offered in 16-piece sets. Each piece is made of fine porcelain and finished with a protective glaze. Four designs are available, including Cirque, shown above. **Visit the Danesco exhibit.**

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Toronto Gift Fair Product Preview



The Pavoni Daisy cup and saucer cupcake set, above, is made of surgical-grade silicone with fun, whimsical packaging. The Pensofal Pasta Si Click-In lid, below, has perforated holes and attaches easily to a 7-litre pot lid to allow boiling water to drain out. Both items will be exhibited by **B & M Marketing**.



This new 10-inch scrub brush from Lodge features a wood handle and nylon bristles. It's designed to make cleaning cookware easier than ever. **Visit COUNSELTRON**



The Oil Mister from Zyliss, left, dispenses oil evenly over the dish. It uses less oil for healthier cooking. The pump action enables continuous misting. It features a no-clog filter and stylish, modern design. Simply pump 7-10 times to activate.

Visit the Classic Chef exhibit



The Kid Zinger from Zing Anything lets users make a tasty juice using fresh fruit. It has a pop-up straw and rounded kid-friendly design. **Visit Don Shacter + Assoc.**

CANADA NIGHT EH!

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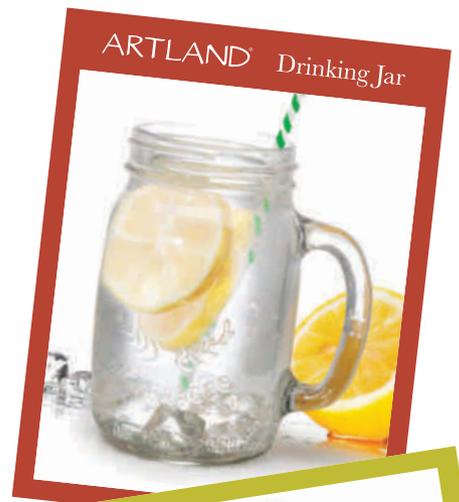




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NY NOW

February 1st to February 6th, 2014
Jacob K. Javits Convention Centre, NYC

NY NOW, the Market for Home + Lifestyle, will present its newly re-organized exhibit floor and related re-branding to tens of thousands of retailers attending the winter edition of the fair, Saturday, February 1, through Thursday, February 6, 2014. The event will be presented at New York City's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center and Passenger Ship Terminal Pier 94. Four comprehensive product collections – HOME, LIFESTYLE, HANDMADE and NEW! – will anchor the market, which has been extended by an extra week-day for the winter edition.

"Whether buyers are experiencing the new NY NOW for the first time this winter, or returning to the market following our successful summer debut, they will be amazed," says Christian Falkenberg, NY NOW director and GLM senior vice president. "The winter market will feature a wide depth and breadth of product offerings, as well as exclusive hotel and travel opportunities to better facilitate shopping and sourcing schedules this February."

NY NOW will feature 100,000 products in 400+ categories across the four collections. NY NOW HOME includes Home Furnishings + Textiles, Tabletop + Gourmet Housewares and Accent on Design. LIFESTYLE showcases Baby + Child, Gift, Personal Accessories, and Personal Care + Wellness. HANDMADE separates artisans by process and provenance with Designer Maker and Global Design; and NEW! highlights market newcomers on Pier 94.

To complement market activities, a five-day slate of educational seminars and special events will be offered for NY NOW participants. More than 40 seminars will cover a range of topics, including colour and design trends, importing, visual merchandising, online commerce and social media, sustainability, marketing and other retail strategies. Sponsors and presenters include representatives from leading trade and consumer publications, as well as support from industry associations including ART (The Creative Home Furnishings Network), ASID (American Society of Interior Designers), CRAFT (Craft Retailers & Artists for Tomorrow), Day Spa Association and IFDA (International Furnishings & Design Association).

Special events held in conjunction with the winter market will include Gift For Life's 22nd Anniversary "Party for Life" Fundraiser on Monday, February 3rd; the Housewares Design Awards Gala & Ceremony on Tuesday, February 4th; as well as NY NOW's popular "Night on Broadway," which will feature specially-priced tickets for the Tuesday, February 4th performance of *Motown: The Musical*.

Complete information and registration is available online at www.nynow.com/programs.

An expanding range of "green" home and lifestyle resources will be highlighted at the **SustainAbility: design for a better world** program at the winter 2014 edition of NY NOW. This initiative includes a juried product display, eco-friendly product design awards, and an educational session addressing sustainable and socially-responsible product design.

The SustainAbility display will feature some 120 products from 70 NY NOW exhibitors which were selected for meeting established criteria, including the use of eco-friendly products and production processes, as well as socially responsible, philanthropic or fair-trade oriented business practices. The display will also include products from Artisan Resource, a GLM-managed tradeshow matching artisanal craft producers and production resources with volume importers, direct import retailers and wholesalers.

"The range of 'green' products continues to broaden, with virtually every home and lifestyle category represented in some way, from personal accessories and body care to stationery, tabletop, textiles and products for children," reports display curator Ilene Shaw of Shaw + Co! Productions. "There's also an increasing nod to humor in the designs through the use of colors, patterns and creative material repurposing."



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The beautiful pinch bowls will add a rustic touch to any dining table. Made of luscious reclaimed Ambrosia maple, they are perfect for nuts, spices, seeds, even olive oil. The company also produces a chalk pad and stand for grocery lists and messages. **Visit Peg and Awl at Booth 9202**

Ribbon is the name of this latest collection from Chilewich. Ribbon is created on old ribbon machines in the garment district in New York. The extruded yarns in the tabletop textiles are functional for both indoor and outdoor use. Available in place mats and runners in a variety of colour combinations.

Visit Chilewich at Booth 3704



These lovely Euro napkins are hand-woven and made of soft Ethiopian cotton. The designs feature the subtle stripes of popular European design with bright, primary colours. Napkins are 20 inches by 20 inches and can be folded to show the stripe in horizontal or vertical positions. The napkins can be machine washed and dried and come in yellow, adobe and blue.

Visit Creative Women at Booth 201 (Galleria)



Julia Knight's garden collection is in full bloom with the latest tableware introductions. Tulip bowls are available in a variety of colours and shapes that nest together. The Seaside Chic collection includes beautiful serving trays and mussel or conch shell bowls, below right. The Welcome Home assortment includes a range of pineapple bowls in three colours, below left.

Visit Julia Knight at Booth 3024



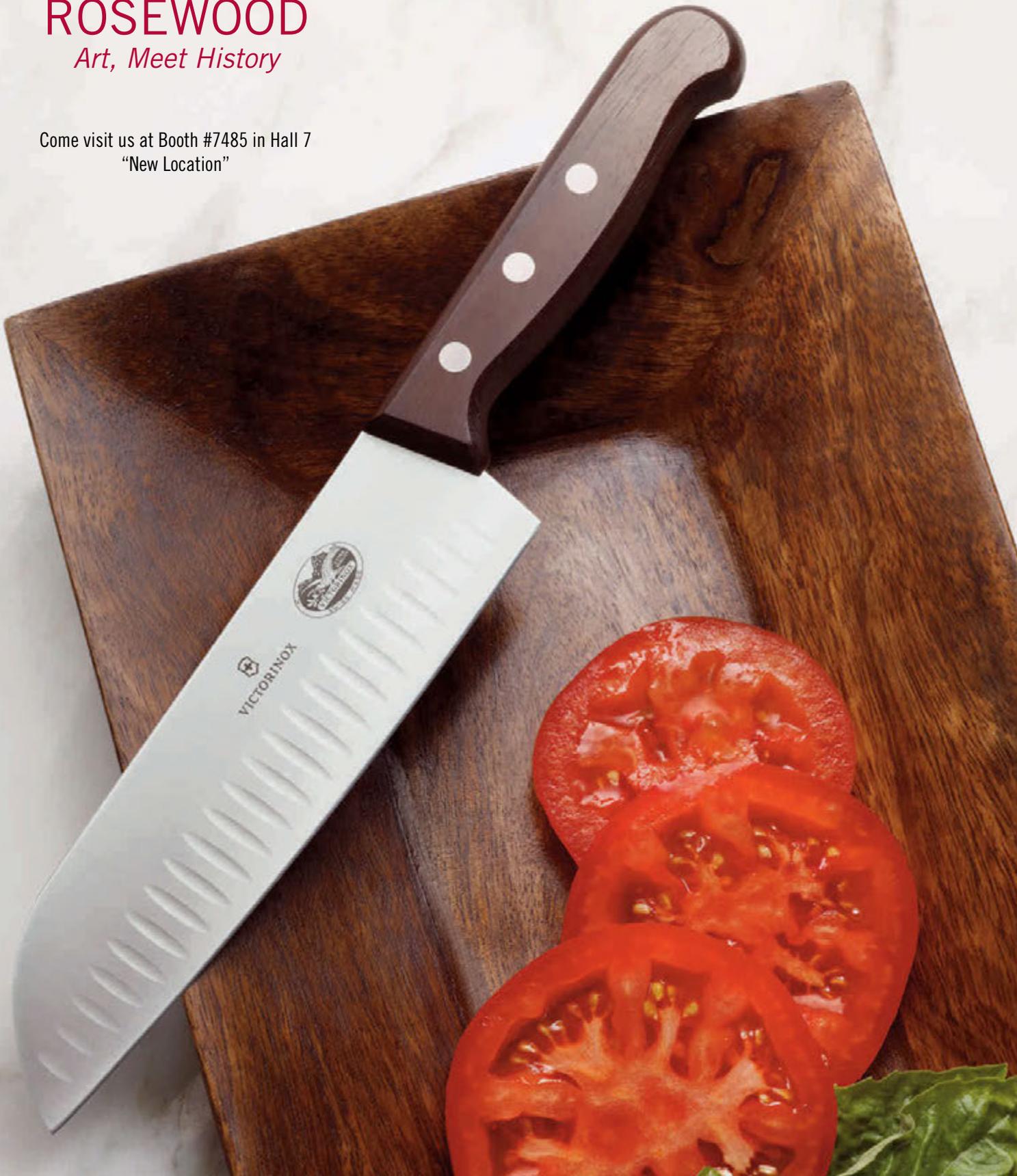


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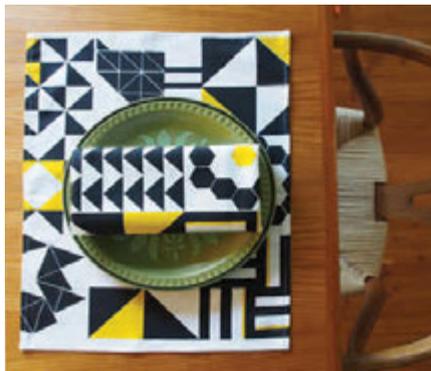
Uatt Gift Trading is launching a line of barbecue/kitchen aprons that will surely put a smile on the face of the wearer – and the women in the room! Practical and fun, the polyester aprons have an adjustable strap and make an ideal gift. **Visit Uatt Gift Trading at Booth 14047**



Canada's own LUprints will introduce the Napanee Utility tote, below. Durable and stylish, it features a key clip and inside phone pocket. Perfect for shopping or a day at the beach.



Fox & Finch hand-printed napkin and placemat sets, also from LUprints, are made from a linen/cotton blend and are screenprinted using eco-friendly inks, below. Made in B.C., they're available in sets of four. **Visit LUprints at Booth 9445**



Paradise is the name of this cheerful floral pattern from Linum. It features playful flowers and leaves that will coordinate with any home decor. The line includes a beechwood serving tray, above, pot holder, apron and oven mitt, below. **Visit Linum at Booth 2277**



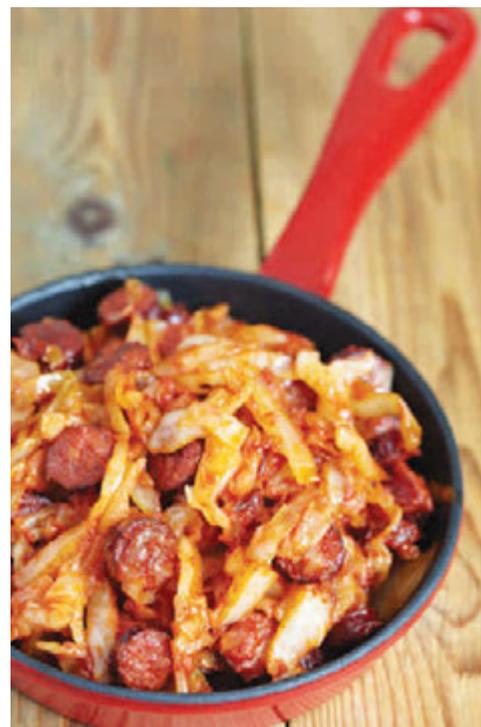
The Forlife folding tea infuser comes with a handy BPA-free plastic carrying case. The stainless steel infuser has extra-fine holes to brew fine loose leaf teas and large leaf teas. The folding capability of the handles makes it compact enough to store in a handbag or desk drawer. **Visit For Life Design at Booth 3546**



Mudita Mull Designs will introduce their distinctive new Birdcage Collection, left. This Birdcage cake stand symbolizes the singing black bird that is let out of its cage. Crafted from stainless steel and black nickelplate, the statement piece works beautifully as a cheese or dessert stand with a metal cloche on the glass dome. A symbolic golden key cheese knife and cake server, made of stainless steel and lacquered bronze, complement the set. **Visit Mudita Mull at Booth 3655**

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BOOTH **7287**



The Lava Lunch bag keeps food warm up to six hours and allows food such as lasagna or even grilled fish to be transported easily. The lava rocks are designed to absorb heat energy right from the microwave and slowly release it.
Visit Lava Lunch at Booth 7057



The Final Touch Fill & Store makes filling plastic bags quick and easy. Invented by a Cordon Bleu Chef, it holds the bag firmly to prevent spilling. It works with most brands of bags, including resealable bags. It's perfect for soups, stews, pasta and sauces. It's compact for easy storage.
Visit Product Specialties at Booth 3779

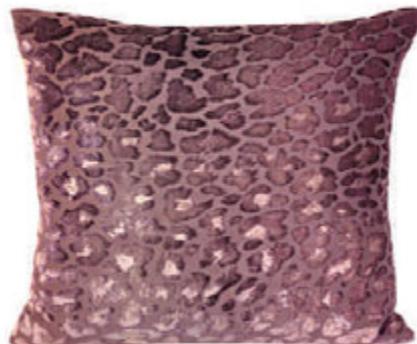


Shupaca offers one of the world's most coveted natural materials, ALPACA, in a variety of styles, including scarves, throws and blankets, above. Organic and eco-friendly, the material is hypo-allergenic and as soft as silk. The collection fuses contemporary styles with traditional fibers.
Visit Shupaca at Booth 100

The Deck kitchen towel, shown below in teal, is made from 100% Turkish cotton, designed to be super absorbent. Offered as a set in several colours, it features bold stripes and a bright palette to fit into any kitchen.
Visit Nine Space at booth 2845



This colourful, elegant tea towel is made from 100% durable cotton and printed with eco-friendly, water-based ink. This particular style features a variety of French pastries, such as the eclair.
Visit The French Farm at Booth 3533



Kevin O'Brien Studio presents a charming line of pillows for the home. The Leopard velvet pillow, shown left in mauve, is offered in several colours. The timeless print is given new life in the form of velvet. The pillow has a zip closure and comes with a feather-down insert, made to order.
Visit Kevin O'Brien at Booth 2644



The Quest Pomegranate tray is decorative yet functional. The oval tray is made of hammered stainless steel with gold tone pomegranate accents. The collection also includes pitchers and serving bowls.
Visit Quest Gift & Design at Booth 2744

Remembering a retail landmark

Sadly, late last November, it was confirmed that Tim Kingsmill had sold the iconic building that housed his family's department store for 148 years. The historic building in London, Ontario was purchased by Pillar, a non-profit organization. The department store will begin its liquidation in April and will close its doors on July 31st. After hearing the news, retired industry sales rep Wally McTaggart felt compelled to share this touching story.



In the late 1970s our oldest son, Mitchell, met a remarkably beautiful girl at his high school in London, Ontario. She would come to our house and I remember her sitting on the kitchen counter in the lotus position while she was drying the dishes and I was washing. Though she wore no make-up, her personality was magnetic. This beautiful girl was working part-time at Kingsmill's Department Store and doing a little modelling on the side.

Karen Baldwin went on to win Miss Canada a couple of years later. She then became the first Canadian girl to be crowned Miss Universe. I can remember our entire family was sitting around the TV on that special pageant night to see Karen's big win and to cheer her on.

Karen and Mitchell never dated but were very close

friends. She even convinced Mitch to enrol in a Toronto modelling course, which led him to doing a little modelling for Braun and the G.W. Robinson Stores.

The two of them kept in touch for a short while but once her career blossomed and she went to the United States to head up her own TV show, they lost contact.

The last time I saw Karen was when a vendor in our industry hired her – shortly after her Miss Universe win – to sign photographs at the fall Home Hardware show in St. Jacobs. She signed one of the photos for Mitchell.

I had some fun with the guys in my booth when I realized that Karen was at the show. I had them accompany me to the booth where Karen was having her picture taken with the dealers. I told them that when I reached Karen in the line-up she would probably be giving me a huge hug and BIG kiss as well. The guys were skeptical, but that's exactly what happened! The two of us had a good visit. The laugh was on my pals and the beer was on them for dinner that evening.

Karen, shown below, was a beautiful person inside and out. She never came back to the London area without visiting her old friends at Kingsmill's where she always remembered her first job.

Like so many London residents, my family loved to shop at Kingsmill's. All their customers will truly miss this fantastic department store. It was a genuine Canadian landmark.



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Laura Bulley

Sales Agent for Alessi, Jascor, Kosta Boda, Salton



We are just seconds into our interview when Laura Bulley takes a deep breath, pauses and admits that she is extremely nervous. You never would have known. Poised, confident and articulate, she has a lovely speaking voice that would sound right at home on TV or radio. You can tell she's had professional training (Toastmasters and Dale Carnegie), and it's also easy to see why she has been so successful as a product demonstrator and sales agent.

Laura grew up in Toronto, the youngest of three children, but had to become independent at a very young age. Her mother died when Laura was just 11 years, and it had a devastating impact on the family, especially her father. Laura persevered, finding an inner strength that would guide her for many years.

She graduated from the University of Toronto (paying her own way) with a Bachelor of Science Degree. The sciences were her first love, and though she hoped to work in R&D, life took a different route when she decided to accept a position as a product trainer with Calcan in 1985. She needed to pay off her student loans, and the company was promoting an exciting new technology – fax machines – that she thought looked promising.

Though she quickly learned the training didn't start until after she sold the machine, she embraced the concept. Her first call was to Abbott of England, where she and an associate hauled a big, clunky fax machine up icy steps on a bitterly cold day. Unfortunately, Laura couldn't get the machine to receive a fax, but she was able to joke about it and when she returned a short time later, she got the sale. She made such an impression on the folks at Abbott, she was offered a job at the company.

"I accepted because I was moved by the beautiful products," Laura recalls. "I also felt the industry was conducive to the development of long-term relationships with retailers, which is what I wanted to establish."

She remained happily at Abbott until 1991 when she married Patrick, a financial analyst. The two were on their honeymoon when Laura got a call from Trudeau asking if she would come in for an interview. She didn't really know

anyone at the company, but she was aware of their brand. They wanted her for their high end giftware lines, and after testing by an industrial psychologist and a surreptitious meeting with Robert Trudeau at the airport, she flew to their Montreal head office to accept the job.

Working from her Toronto home, Laura handled predominantly high end accounts plus all the regular local accounts in the GTA. When export managers visited she would take them to see the retailer. In 1996, Lladro, one of Laura's favourite lines, was dropping its distributors to set up their own subsidiaries. Trudeau kindly helped her get her next position as director of Disvasa Canada (the Canadian subsidiary for Lladro).

Over the next eight years, Laura was on the run, setting up offices and warehouse space, ordering computer systems, hiring people. "It was a fantastic learning experience," she says.

It also involved a great deal of travel: twice a year to Spain, regular visits to the head office in Panama and weekly trips across Canada. She was responsible for the entire domestic market, the duty-free market and Alaska, overseeing three sales reps and two office employees.

Then in 2000, Laura had her first son. Her second son was born two years later. Even though she had a superb nanny, by 2003 she was exhausted, and with a new house to renovate, decided to take time off. She spent eight months at home figuring out her next steps.

"I'm a go-getter and I needed an outlet for my energy, but not at the same level as before," she explains.

She started selling Alessi in 2004, and then in 2006 brought the upscale Italian line to a new agency she set up with two partners. After a year, Laura decided she wanted to build the business in her own way, and left.

Though she took Alessi with her, it wasn't long before Laura was able to procure an extraordinary stable of international brands such as Blomus, Orrefors and Kosta Boda, to name a few. Then she expanded into kitchenware with Salton and Jascor.

"What I really love about Salton and Jascor is that they are very entrepreneurial, always developing new lines and evolving," she says.

"Jason Hutton is doing a great job establishing Salton as a niche supplier of gourmet appliances and Jascor has made gourmet inroads with brands such as Mark McEwan."

"Laura is a confident and very tenacious sales person", counters Jascor, who adds "she always provides valuable feedback that helps us understand the market better."

Laura now calls on everyone from small independent retailers to larger chains such as Hudson's Bay and Indigo, plus premium/incentive firms. NY Now is her main trade show, and her customers know they can always count on her to do a wonderful job demonstrating the products.

"People naturally have a thirst for knowledge," she explains. "I believe very strongly in product knowledge sessions for staff and consumers. I've spent my whole life learning, I would have made a good lifelong student, but I also enjoy teaching, which is really not much different than selling."

Laura's passion is one of her greatest assets, but her honesty also comes through. The success of her customers is very important to her. "I think you need a moral compass to guide you and to create a path that will make others want to join you. That's true in business and in life. The ability to inspire others is very important to me. It's what makes me strong and fuels me."

She also loves the people she gets to work with, both on the vendor and retailer side. "This is a nice, gentle business," says Laura. "It's not intensely competitive, with backstabbing and dirty tactics. I like to be able to make a good living selling beautiful products to wonderful people."

In light of the loss she suffered so early in life, Laura's intense drive is inspiring. I'm sure her mother would have been very proud. ☺

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