

House&Home

KITCHEN AND BATH FORECAST

High, Low and In Between

By MICHAEL HSU

THIS year's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, held last week in Las Vegas, brought together more than 1,000 manufacturers from around the world, but the wares they showed were playing to very different audiences.

Hundreds of small, independent Asian manufacturers turned up — for the first time, a whole pavilion was formally dedicated to the Chinese — offering components and products generally aimed at the lower end of the market, even when their styling suggested higher ambitions. The Taiwan company Justime, for example, offered modern, European-style bath and kitchen faucets for \$25 to \$150 (www.justime.com).

"This is the first time we've seen such a powerful Chinese presence," said Bob Garner, the president of the National Kitchen and Bath Association, which organizes the event; there were nearly 50 percent more Chinese companies there this year than last.

The Europeans and Americans, meanwhile, maintained their longstanding focus on the high end, going to extreme lengths

Asian companies play the low end, Americans and Europeans the high.

to please the high-income customer. There was a fair share of one-upmanship. GE, for example, supercharged its Monogram Electronic Induction Cooktop with a 3,700-watt heating element — the most powerful induction cooktop on the market (available in September for \$1,849 to \$2,649; for dealers, geappliances.com). Asko accelerated the spin cycle on its W6903FI washing machine to a record 2,000 RPMs (the previous record was 1,600) to force more water out of clothes — 33 percent more, according to Asko — thereby reducing drying time (available in July for \$1,799; for dealers, askousa.com). Thermador outfit-

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LESS AND MORE

A low-cost Justime faucet, above, was shown at the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, as was a Siemens range hood with DVD player.



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ted its Professional Series Oven with what it claims is the largest rotisserie rack on the market, capable of handling a 12-pound turkey (available now for \$2,089; for dealers, thermador.com).

And Miele showed off the G7856 dishwasher — essentially a commercial-grade machine adapted for residential use — with a rapid cycle that takes only about 15 minutes. (Consecutive loads done in quick succession take just eight minutes, because the water doesn't have to be reheated.) The speed is possible because of "more aggressive direction of the water," said Dan McDougall, Miele's director of business development. "We've put our thumb on the end of the garden hose." Its price matches its performance: \$4,995 (available now; for dealers, miele.com).

Even the lowliest fixtures aspired to greatness. American Standard promoted its Champion 4 toilet flushing system (available in June for \$333 and up; for dealers, american-us.com) as the most powerful in the industry, claiming that it can flush 1,000 grams — roughly two and a quarter pounds — of waste.

As grand as this achievement seemed, not everyone at the fair was impressed. As Lenora Campos, the public relations manager for American Standard's Japanese competitor Toto, put it skeptically, "Who's delivering 1,000 grams of waste?"



The New Cleanliness? That's Entertainment

HIGH-TECH gadgetry made its way into the bathroom with a suite of shower products from Kohler, none of which had to do with actual bathing. "The shower isn't just about hygiene," said Michael Wandschneider, a product manager for "performance showering" at Kohler. "The shower is now part of the escape of the master bath."

Ambient Rain, for example, is an overhead panel that floods the shower with intensely colored light, while the company's SoundTile, a discreet and waterproof speaker developed with Polk Audio, promises to address the less-than-ideal acoustic environment. Tying it all together is the DTV II, left, a small wall-mounted device with an LCD screen and a knob that controls the various components — including, incidentally, the shower itself — which can stream MP3s from your computer's hard drive. It may sound complicated, but Mr. Wandschneider is confident that "for any homeowner that's used to dealing with their BlackBerry or their cellphone or their iPod, they'll get this." The fully loaded DTV II system will cost \$6,784 and be available in August. For dealers: kohler.com or (800) 456-4537.

Convergence was a theme in the kitchen as well. The Miele G 7856, far right, brought industrial technology home with its high-speed wash cycle. LG Electronics had an existing line of refrigerators with built-in televisions that it upgraded to high definition. Siemens, meanwhile, put a television and slot-loading DVD player into a range hood. The electronic components are sealed inside the hood to protect them from grease and smoke damage, said James Dawson, a Siemens brand manager, but the company recommends mounting the hood over induction and electric cooktops only — no open flames. The avantGarde multiMedia hood, which will cost \$3,499, will be produced within the next year. Information will be available at Siemens-home.com.

Controls on even the most straightforward appliances were made sleeker and more high-tech. Setting the temperature on Siemens's touchSlide electric cooktop, for instance, entails running a finger over a grooved strip rather than turning a knob. One



of the most appealing interfaces at the show,

though, was mid-tech: Bosch's 500 series wall ovens, inset, have actual knobs — so satisfying to turn — that can be pushed in when not in use to sit flush with the face of the oven. The 500 series starts at \$1,699 and will be available in July; for dealers: boschappliances.com.

LG introduced an industry first based on a low-tech process — vaporization — with its steam dishwasher, the LDF9810. "It gets out those tough, baked-on items — it breaks them apart — and uses less energy as well," said John Herrington, president of LG Electronics USA. LG also unveiled a steam dryer to complement its existing steam washing machine, which was introduced last year and starts at \$1,299. "Steam has all kinds of good connotations," Mr. Herrington said. "It's resonated very well with the consumer." The dishwasher costs \$1,599, the dryer \$1,149. Both will be out in the fall; for dealers: lgusa.com.



Not Just Another Pretty Face: Beauty From Grill to Sink

ONE of the more visually striking introductions this year was the Fuego Modular, designed by Robert Brunner, which lets you assemble a free-standing or wall-mounted outdoor cooking station with discrete modules dedicated to specific functions: grilling, washing, warming and storage. The modules, top, second from left, cost \$1,500 to \$2,000 each; for dealers, fuegoliving.com. Mr. Brunner also designed an ultraslick range hood called Horizon, top, second from right, which has a decorative, etched-glass panel that can swapped out for others in various patterns; for dealers,

zephyronline.com. Both products are scheduled to be available early next year.

Smeg, an Italian manufacturer of unabashedly colorful retro refrigerators, made its American debut at the show. A cargo container of the firm's diminutive 57½-inch FAB28U model, which design-conscious Americans have been lusting after for years, arrived stateside a few weeks ago. They should be available soon for \$1,999; for dealers, smegusa.com.

Jean-Marie Massaud's line of bathroom fixtures and accessories for Axor, including shower

heads, towel holders and bathroom faucets, drew a lot of stares; many of the accessories — like the stone-shaped tea light holders and flower vases — would feel at home outside of the bathroom. The faucets, which mimic a waterfall, top right, start at \$778, the tea light holders are \$102 and the vases are \$172. The collection will be available in July; for dealers: axor-design.com.

Not all beauty was so expensive. Vitra, a Turkish company unaffiliated with the Swiss furniture maker of the same name, unveiled a midpriced bathroom fixtures line called Mod, which, although

designed by Ross Lovegrove, is classically modern rather than futuristic or blobby. The pedestal sink, for example, top left, is trim and linear, part of an effort to reduce mass and make the line less costly in both financial and environmental terms, according to Ece Cokyasar-Potter, a Vitra account manager. The Mod sink starts at \$440; the line will be available in the United States in the winter. vitra-usa.com; for dealers, (877) 658-4872.

Likewise, Duravit unveiled its D-Code collection, one of the company's most affordable offerings, with clean and simple shapes that are easy to imagine living with over the long term. Sinks start at around \$200. D-Code will be available this fall; duravit.com.



Helpful Appliances Keep Water Conservation on Track

TWO new products help improve water conservation in the shower. Hansgrohe's Croma EcoAIR showerheads make the company's low-flow technology, which until now has been available only in the \$94 Hansgrohe Raindance showerhead, more affordable. The EcoAIR, like the Raindance, infuses water with air, but starts at \$28 and is available now. For dealers: hansgrohe-usa.com.

Those hesitant to commit to low-flow showering can toe the line with American Standard's FloWise three-function water-saving shower head, left. On

one setting it delivers a water-saving 1.5 gallons a minute, but it can be adjusted up to the federal limit of nearly twice that. It will be available in August for \$65; for dealers: americanstandard-us.com.

Bosch's Evolution and Integra dishwashers use an interesting technology called the Ecosense Wash Management System, which monitors the dirtiness of the wash water so the machine can adjust the length and temperature of the cycle accordingly. Bosch's less expensive Evolution line, right, starts at \$499, the Integra at \$699; both will be available in



July; boschappliances.com.

A similar feature can be found in the Spanish company Fagor's LFA-073 series dishwashers, which use what Fagor calls an "eco sensor." Those models have been out since late last year and start at \$1,099. For dealers: fagorameric.com or (201) 804-3900.