

THINGS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

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70 Tupperware

In 1946, America was booming, fresh off World War II and heading into the baby boom. At the same time, Earl Tupper unveiled his eponymous line of plastic food storage. Tupperware has grown with the times: From happy 1950s days to women entering the work force en masse. Today the company has sales of more than \$1.1 billion worldwide. In the early 1940s, Tupper -- like most American manufacturers -- devoted his plastics company to the war effort. But after the war, with the economy booming, he found new uses for plastic, especially as more consumers bought homes and refrigerators. The first products, the Wonderlier Bowl and the Bell Tumbler, offered homemakers lightweight and unbreakable food storage options. In 1947, Tupper introduced the legendary airtight seals, which he patterned after the inverted rim on a can of paint. Though the products didn't sell well at retail, Tupper soon discovered the untapped gold mine in home parties, launching the first party in 1948.

The company quickly gained ground as homemakers around the country hosted parties. The products were then removed from retailers altogether and for years Tupperware was sold only through direct sales. The products changed to meet consumers' evolving lifestyles, from the Tortilla Keeper of the 1960s -- meeting consumers' ethnic food demands -- to the MicroSteamer of the 1980s, in response to both the prevalence of the microwave and dual-income families with no time to cook.

Tupperware is still introducing new products to meet changing demands and has returned to traditional retail environments. The company has joined decidedly 21st-century retail: The products are available on the company's Web site. (Of course, there are still Tupperware home parties.)

71 Vellux Blanket

In a category in which products and players disappear with ominous rapidity, the Vellux blanket reigns as a true success story. Celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2002, the blanket is the number-one selling blanket at retail, with some 85 million units sold since its invention in 1967 by WestPoint Stevens.

"The fact is, there's only one Vellux blanket," said Alan Kennedy, vice president of merchandising and basic bedding for WestPoint Stevens. "If you're a retailer, you have to have it. If you look at every other blanket in the United States, all of them put together don't sell as much as this one blanket."

The product's success likely stems from its unbeatable attributes -- it's lightweight, warm, durable and easy to care for. The research team at WestPoint's Biddeford, Maine, plant was given the task of developing a blanket that would not have the problems associated with other blankets, such as shrinkage, pilling and difficult care instructions. Headed up by Frances T. Spencer, the team created a process that used a polyurethane foam base, reinforced with a mesh scrim and bonded with velvety nylon fibers.

Today Vellux blankets continue to be manufactured at the Biddeford plant as well as in a 2-year-old facility in Greenville, Ala. In an effort to grow even beyond its 95 percent market penetration, WestPoint Stevens continues to develop uses for the Vellux fabric. Last year, the company introduced a Vellux electric blanket, and this year unveiled a technique for printing on the fabric.

72 Vera Textiles

Vera Neumann, designer and manufacturer of the famous Vera textiles, brought the concept of cross-licensing to the forefront of the home furnishings industry. "Without Vera, there would be no Martha," said Marsha Brady, an expert on Vera who has been researching Neumann for the past four years. "There wouldn't even be a Hello Kitty vacuum cleaner, for that matter."

Neumann printed her first mat in 1947 and eventually grew her business into its own company, The Vera Cos., which manufactured such textiles as table linens and scarves, and her own brand, known simply as Vera. In turn, the company

eventually became the first to cross-license the brand across many categories. For example, Vera was the first designer license in ceramic dinnerware, which was produced by Mikasa. The brand's patterns could also be seen on sheets, towels, curtains and ironing board covers, among other household items.

"[Vera] was incredibly licensed," said Brady. "She was one of the first to totally blow out on licensing."

In addition to its contributions to the world of licensing, the Vera brand was also the first to bring color to the home furnishings market. "The term 'run of the mill' comes from how dull the textiles were," said Brady. "Then [Neumann] came and put big poppies on tablecloths."

Neumann was also one of the first women to found and run a company of The Vera Cos.' magnitude. She was also a pioneer in bringing designer looks to the mass market.

73 Wallace Grand Baroque Flatware Pattern

A consistent presence on the list of top-selling sterling silver flatware patterns for a quarter of a century, Wallace Silversmiths' Grand Baroque sets a standard in design for formal flatware patterns and includes a plethora of utensils, making it a natural for collectors.

Like many other sterling silver flatware best sellers, Grand Baroque, first introduced in 1941, features ornate and classical detailing -- scrolled and flaired handles that harken back to an even earlier period. Many of the sterling silver flatware patterns that continue to grace the best-seller's list were created around the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th and feature similar intricate designs, which lend themselves to a soft metal such as silver.

It is not only this design aesthetic that had made Grand Baroque, as well as other sterling-silver flatware patterns, more than just utensils for formal dining. It is also the collectible nature of the pieces that makes them so popular and provides them with an heirloom status. For example, the Grand Baroque pattern includes hundreds of SKUs, ranging anywhere from a fork to an asparagus tong.

74 Waring Blendor

The Waring Blendor was named for the 1930s band leader Fred Waring, who backed an idea presented to him by Hamilton Beach co-founder Frederick Osius.

Osius, who had secured a patent in 1933, talked his way into Waring's dressing room after a radio broadcast in 1936. And the rest, as they say, is blendor -- with an "o" -- history.

Waring studied the prototype, decided it needed a cloverleaf-shaped jar and sealed ball bearings for the bottom drive, which a friend at Chrysler Corp. helped him work out. Band members served as guinea pigs as Waring tested concoctions in the new mixer, which traveled with them in a specially designed case. But the real success came when he added liquor to the recipe and perfected the art of the frozen daiquiri, a drink that had previously taken bartenders up to 15 minutes to make.

The Pennsylvanians helped out by doing demonstrations in department stores like Macy's, Gimbels and John Wanamaker, but the real selling spree got under way when Rudy Vallee got involved. A frozen daiquiri enthusiast, Vallee was amazed by the speed and simplicity of the mixer and proceeded to step behind many a bar and show its efficiency to owners and bartenders, who immediately placed orders for themselves, as well as one for Vallee as a thank-you. The crooner eventually racked up 350 mixers that had been given to him as gifts.

In addition to its popular uses in bars, restaurants and eventually home kitchens, special editions of the Waring Blendor, with its trademark "o" spelling, have been used in developing serums for Rocky Mountain tick fever and yellow fever, as well as by Dr. Jonas Salk in developing the polio vaccine.

While new colors have been added, the Waring Blendor, owned by Conair, has maintained its signature style and continues to be a top choice among professional establishments and culinary enthusiasts today.

75 Waterford Lismore Pattern

Although Lismore, Waterford's most enduring and popular crystal pattern, was designed before Waterford became a big brand name, it can arguably be called the pattern that put the company on the map.

Created 50 years ago by Czech immigrant Miroslav Havel, who started with Waterford in 1947 and went on to become its chief designer, Lismore is a pattern that defines tradition. It is the most popular crystal pattern at Replacements, a retailer that specializes in old and new china, crystal and silver patterns. "For us, that was the centerpiece of Waterford," said Liam Sullivan, Replacements' spokesman. "The two names -- Waterford and Lismore -- are synonymous with quality. That's a big selling point for them."

Waterford continues to manufacture Lismore, and it has grown from a stemware pattern to include dozens of other crystal giftware pieces. It has lent its name and design to Waterford fine china, flatware, lighting, writing instruments, silver gifts, bedding and jewelry, placing one of America's favorite crystal patterns in almost every room of the house.

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