

## Trend Setters

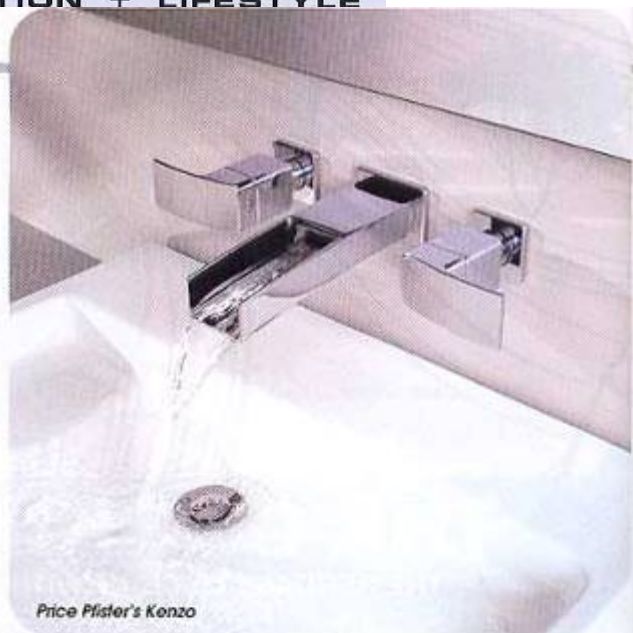
K/BIS 2008 blows away the Windy City

While the woes of American Airlines and inclement weather may have been on the lips of many at the 2008 Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, held April 11-13, they probably had little to do with what actually showed up in the exhibit halls of Chicago's McCormick Place. In fact, if one had to pinpoint one factor (or two) that, with a few exceptions, spurred the trends on display at this year's outing, it would most likely be the slowdown in housing and the economy. But lest you think that made for a somber and depressing showing, remember that human nature's ability to respond to bad or mildly bad news can take on many different manifestations. Hence, the following trends as noted by the editors of *K+B*.

**Affordable luxury.** Affordable appliances have always been available (that's what most of us editors have at home), but this year, several high-end companies introduced wares for the cash-strapped luxury-minded consumer. In its largest product offering ever, Electrolux showed its eponymous line of 130+ skus that aim to occupy the premium end of affordability, while Bosch unveiled its Ascenta dishwashers, which offer the company's much touted energy- and water-saving capabilities at a wallet-friendly \$549-\$799.

**Bold colors.** Maybe remodeling for resale value is a moot point and individualism is on the rise. Or maybe sober times call for bright, vivid hues that can uplift the soul. Whatever the reason, the show floor saw no shortage of splashy reds, regal blues, groovy purples and a range of vibrant greens that popped up on everything from washer and dryer units (LG) to ventilation systems (Elanco) to countertops (Silestone) and cabinets (Scavolini).

**Blue is the new green.** At the beginning of the year, some trend watchers predicted that the next phase of green would focus on air quality and water conservation, hence the color blue. Interestingly enough, the latter made a strong appearance on the show floor with a spate of dual-flush and low-flow toilets, as well as water-saving faucets and showerheads. Price Pfister debuted Kenzo, a 1.5-gpm wall-mount trough faucet that is being tested for the EPA's WaterSense label. And for those



Price Pfister's Kenzo

unwilling to trade in their toilets, Brondell's EcoFlow converts existing fixtures into dual-flush models.

**Green, version 2.0.** While sustainable materials and Energy Star appliances all play an important role in greening the home, other elements, perhaps less sexy and visually oriented, are equally deserving of attention from the eco-minded designer. Tankless water heaters, such as those exhibited by Noritz, Rinnai and Eternal, can reduce a home's energy consumption, and radiant flooring provides a more efficient way of warming up a room as well as comfort underfoot.



LG's steam washer and dryer in emerald green

**Smart storage options.** No plans to expand? Fear not. While the size of our kitchens may not be increasing at the same rate as their contents, cabinet and hardware manufacturers are coming out with an assortment of clever storage accessories to help keep the heart of the home well organized and clutter-free. Exhibitors such as Höfele, Whitney Design, Diamond Cabinets and Rev-A-Shelf, among others, showed all manner of extendable shelving, gliding corner units, wire racks and baskets, pull-outs and other items for kitchens and other rooms.

**Compact appliances.** Given the growing popularity of second kitchens, as reported by a recent AIA survey on residential design, that appliance manufacturers are offering more compact versions of their products should come as no surprise. Small refrigerator drawers such as

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those by Perlick and Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet provide point-of-use convenience that is perfect for places like an outdoor kitchen, entertainment room or even a nursery. Some appliances have been designed to

maximize space, as is the case with the GE Profile Single/Double wall oven, which installs in a conventional 30-in. oven space but consists of two independent compartments with separate temperature control.



GE Profile Single/Double Oven

**Wired shut (and open).** Last year, K+BB editors noted a prevalence of soft-closing cabinet drawers and doors that promised a quieter kitchen and bath. This year, companies like Grass America, Inc., Blum and Hettich took it one step further with self-closing and opening systems that feature an electronic drive and require little more than a tap to open and shut



TOTO USA's Neorest 550

a cabinet drawer—a blessing when your hands are dirty or just plain tired. Similarly, some toilets, including TOTO USA's Neorest, also sported sensor-controlled, automatic closing and opening lids and seats.

**Soft modern.** When times are tough and bank accounts lean, industrial-strength modernism may smack more of urban aggression than ultimate hipness. Consequently, contemporary-style faucets and fittings, such as Hansgrohe's

Axor Citterio M line and Grohe's Ondus, shed their bulk for soft curves and sleek profiles. Some appliances also sported rounder, user-friendlier handles, and cabinet companies, like Armstrong Cabinets, showed streamlined

transitional door styles in warm wood finishes. In Walker Zanger's Sonja, ancient patterns dating back to the Roman Empire were revitalized and updated with modern colors to appeal to today's homeowner.

**Integrated lighting.** Bathroom fittings and tubs that incorporate LEDs are nothing new, but this year, their ubiquity was impressive, as was the variety of other products that employed the tiny light sources to assist with such tasks as wayfinding at night, as in Kohler's Fountainhead toilet, or to add a touch of drama, as with the Raindrops sink created by Jamie Drake for Elkay. Refrigerators also found an ally in LEDs, which use little energy, produce no heat and have a long lifespan, and Element Designs broadened its illuminated offerings with back-lit backsplashes.

**Ultra luxury.** This may seem contradictory, but according to K+B's 2008 Market Forecaster, spending on high-end bathroom remodels is expected to grow this year. So, if money is no object, Ann Sacks can tile an accent wall with real turquoise for \$550 per sq. ft. Or designers can add a touch of Morocco and Asia with



Walker Zanger's Contessa, which features hand-applied gold leaf and retails for more than \$400 per sq. ft. At Jacuzzi's booth, a \$30,000 shower designed by Pininfarina, of Ferrari fame, seemed the embodiment of luxury with its curved wenge wood seat, multiple showerheads and a draining system that empties the water via slots between stone pavers lining the shower floor.

Mark your calendars now. K/BIS 2009 will take place May 1-3 at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta. ■

—Alice Liao