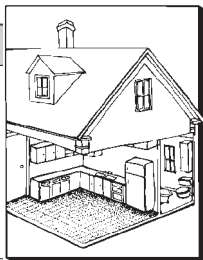


Born in The U.S.A.

by Patrick J. Galvin



Until recently, many foreign incursions into the U.S. bath and kitchen market have had the advantages of superior styling and snob appeal. But these advantages have all but disappeared. Now, many U.S.-made appliances, cabinets, sinks, faucets, and fixtures are practically indistinguishable from their equivalents made in Europe. And some products sold by U.S. kitchen and bath firms are actually being made in Europe.

That's my conclusion after visiting the 1987 shows: the NAHB show in Dallas and National Kitchen & Bath Show in Atlanta, and the International Kitchen & Bath Expo in Toronto.

In cabinets, the melding of European and U.S. styles is old news by now. Most major U.S. manufacturers now offer the contemporary, flush look of frameless construction with either wood or decorative laminate surfaces. And while many use melamine panels, many others cling to the older (and superior) technique of adhering laminate sheets to the substrate.

New Developments

But in major appliances, there have been some startling developments. Admiral started it by importing refrigerators made by Zanussi of Italy. Then Frigidaire introduced its "Euroflair" line including freezers and refrigerators made in Sweden, ovens made in Switzerland, and dishwashers made in Italy and the U.S.

Frigidaire, along with Tappan, Westinghouse, Gibson, Kelvinator, O'Keefe & Merritt, and Vesta, are owned by AB Electrolux of Sweden.



The display is American by Frigidaire. But the refrigerators and freezers are made in Sweden, the ovens in Switzerland, the ceramic cooktop in Denmark, and the dishwasher in Italy.

So these U.S. firms join several foreign firms already selling the Euro-look here, such as AEG, Andi, Creda, Firenzi, Gaggenau, Luwa, Miele, Roden, and Bauknecht.

Who Can Tell?

Led by Dacor and Thermador, many U.S. brands look more European than models from over there. Many U.S. makers offer solid burners from Europe on their cooktops and ranges, and styling is very similar.

U.S. brands do retain one big advantage in ovens and refrigerators,

in the view of most kitchen designers, and that is adequate size. In both product categories, European models look tiny in comparison.

To many shoppers at the '87 kitchen and bath shows, the European models definitely had their appeal. Notable was Gaggenau's modular cooktop units that made it easy to combine gas, electric, grilling and other cooking functions in two-burner modules.

The styling of Admiral's Continental series (from Italy) was a big hit too. But it was clear that the show stopper was Defiance, a small U.S. firm considered to be the most



Styling is European, but this faucet is all-U.S., by Artistic Brass.

innovative appliance manufacturer. It already offered variable proportioning of refrigerator and freezer capacity (by the homeowner) in side by side models, and a cubic-foot reservoir of 0° Fahrenheit air for instant chilling after loading. This year it eliminated all handles by recessing them into the door framework, and added leveling on all four corners from the front. And, more than other models,

Defiance looked like a walk-in closet when the door was opened.

The Euro-look has truly taken over the field, but now you can have it and "buy American." ■

Patrick J. Galvin is the author of Kitchen Planning Guide for Builders, Designers and Architects, and the former editor and publisher of Kitchen & Bath Business.