

Turn the Women Loose

While editing our lead story on Jardin de Ville – an impressive Canadian company that functions as retailer, manufacturer and importer of casual furniture – we were struck by the fact that CEO Johanne Bourque had designed their 3D collection, certainly one of the most innovative designs we've seen in our 20 years covering the industry.



Johanne Bourque

In the North American hearth industry, we know of no other female designer of stoves or fireplaces.

In the North American patio furniture industry, we know of no other female designer of outdoor furniture.

In the North American barbecue industry, we are not aware of any cooking product designed by a woman. (*Let us know if we're wrong.*)

And yet, we all know that it's predominantly women who make the final decision on all products for the home.

That fact, coupled with the success enjoyed by Bourque, Ritterband and Smith, should be more than enough to propel every manufacturer in these three industries to the Web in search of talented female designers.

What are you waiting for?

To Show or Not to Show

Our two major shows of the year are right around the corner, and questions loom about attendance – Who will be there? Who will not? Ask any exhibiting manufacturer if dealers should spend the money, and time, to attend given the economic *malaise* (yes, a nod to the Carter era) throughout the land, and the answer will be a resounding, "Of course!"

That emphatic statement will be followed by a laundry list of reasons to attend: to see, touch and feel new products; to see what the competition will be selling; to attend educational seminars; to network with your peers; to develop new merchandising ideas, and the list goes on.

All of these reasons are real and valid. If you're a retailer deciding whether you should go to the Casual Market this year, well, of course you should – unless you plan to get out of the business. If money is tight, book a red-eye flight; visit priceline.com or hotwire.com for a room under \$100; eat at low-cost restaurants.

When the Shoe's on the Other Foot

With the HPBExpo six months away, there are already manufacturers who have dropped out, or are considering doing so. Undoubtedly, these are the same folks who, in a normal year, would push their dealers to attend.

Well, there are just as many real and valid reasons for a manufacturer to attend as there are for dealers: to showcase your new products; to personally meet and greet your dealers, as well as those who may wish to become your dealers; to see what the competition will be selling; to attend meetings; to develop new ideas, and the list goes on.

Instead of not attending the Expo, the wiser course is to downsize your booth, show only your new products and bring far fewer employees to the show – unless you plan to get out of the business.

See you in both Chicago and Orlando.



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Richard C. Wright

By Richard Wright

A Woman's Touch

Monica Ritterband defies convention and creates a stove for Morsø that is the best launch in its 155-year history.



*Like a circle in a spiral
Like a wheel within a wheel
Never ending or beginning,
On an ever spinning wheel
As the images unwind
Like the circles that you find
In the windmills of
your mind*

*"The Windmills of Your Mind,"
lyrics by Michel Legrand and
Marilyn & Alan Bergman*

She has been a journalist for a national newspaper, news anchor on a national television channel, executive at a beer company (Carlsbad) and motivational speaker. Throughout that undoubtedly interesting journey, and underlying all these varied careers, Monica Ritterband has always been an artist.

Now, she's also a designer of a wood stove for Morsø, the 155-year-old Danish cast-iron stove manufacturer. The phrase Renaissance Woman does come to mind.

"All of my family on my mother's side are artists," says Ritterband. "My mother is a mosaic artist and, when I was just a child, I helped my mother on big assignments. She was the master and I was employed to make the background. At the time I was only 10 or 12 years old and did it for the pocket money."

Recognizing that her daughter possessed the necessary talent, her mother encouraged her to go into art. Like many (most?) children, she headed in a dramatically different direction than that recommended by her family; she became a journalist.

"I always liked to write, ever since I was a small child," she says. "For many years, through journalism, I was expressing what I saw and commenting on it. Now (with art), I am commenting on what I feel."

Art had been a magnet for Rit-

Monica Ritterband, designer of the model 7600 from Morsø.

terband throughout her life. "When I came home from my job I would go right into working with mosaics, making small sculptures," she says. "As the years went by I felt more and more that I had to go into the field my family had tried to push me into. It was another door I had to enter. In 1997, at 41, I realized that I wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, and that there was not one minute to waste. Art is not a hobby."

Ritterband quit her job and began her new career. Since that time she has created jewelry, paintings, sculptures both large and small, textiles, rugs, glass vases, kitchenware – the list goes on.

She has created huge, brick sculptures, and worked with bronze, steel, iron and brick. Her work has gone indoors and out, and from tiny sculptures to those weighing tons, and it has covered a variety much broader than most in her new profession.

In 2008 she contacted Morsø and told them she was interested in creating a stove. "I wanted so much to make a stove," she says. "In the stove business in Denmark, there are only male designers and I thought that I could put something into that world."

"Six months later I brought them a design. They said it was beautiful; the people in the glass department said it wouldn't work, that it wouldn't come through testing. They told me very honestly what the problem was, and I went back and worked really hard and fixed it."

MORE THOUGHTS FROM RITTERBAND:

- "A stove is a piece of art that changes all the time."
- "A stove is like a meditation, because it makes you breathe out."
- "Wood is the real thing. It's the soul. It's the basic idea."
- "There is something interesting about fire, and it's also dangerous."
- "You have to tame fire, like an animal."
- "You have to be very caring about it. You cannot have a stove and just put anything in it. We need a license to drive a car; I think there should be a license to drive a stove."



Wall-mounted 7670.

(The problem had to do with the volume of air needed to keep such a large window of glass clean.)

Morsø calls the end result the 7600 series; Ritterband calls it The Circle.

"I love the circle," says Ritterband. "The Greeks believed the circle was god-like. It's organic, round and

feminine. I wanted the stove to be pleasant to the eyes because it is such an important piece of furniture; it's the most important furniture that you have in the house. You can change a chair; you can change a table. They're not anchored to your life. But the stove is anchored to the soul of your house.

"I see the stove not only as furniture, but as a sculpture for the room. There are periods when it is not used, so it is important that it look beautiful even when there is no fire in it."

The 7600 has the largest viewing window in Morsø's history, and its cast-iron body has the gentle curves of a circle. There are four models in the 7600 series: freestanding; freestanding with feet; freestanding with pedestal and wall-mount. The feet are carved out of the base plinth and follow the curvature of the unit.

In Europe, according to Craig Shankster, president of Morsø US, "This was the best launch in Morsø's history. It's too early for results in the States, but we already have great commitments from U.S. dealers."

Such is the power of good design, with a feminine perspective. 