

WINTER  
2024-2025

# INSPIRED.

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE INSPIRED HOME SHOW



**INNOVATION** | Celebrating innovation in home and housewares retailing—creative retailers and tips by experts

**DESIGN** | Discovering design for the home—new product highlights, designers and insights from design lovers

**TRENDS** | Movements that are shaping product design and consumer purchases

**INSPIRATION** | Experiences, stories and tips that spark ideas

# Time to Celebrate

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Innovation. Real-world experiences. Personal connections. A sense of happiness and joy. These themes keep popping up in this issue of **INSPIRED**.

In today's challenging and highly competitive marketplace, home and housewares retailers can find opportunities and benefit from the fact that people find happiness through their sense of belonging. There has been a swing back to customers wanting community, and in the midst of the digital developments all around, there is a strong desire for real experiences.

Home and housewares retailers should cultivate emotional connections and create awe-inspiring experiences. "People are seeking value propositions, so you need to offer them something different or exciting in a retail experience," says *gia* Expert Juror Scott Kohno. To help understand what this means for your business, this issue of **INSPIRED** provides insights and updates to help retailers navigate rapidly changing consumer preferences as well as differences between generations, sparking new ideas and inspiring innovation.

It's not an easy task to keep ahead of all today's changes and developments, and the hard work and commitment of

retailers deserves to get noticed. For 25 years, the International Housewares Association, together with leading home and housewares trade publications and associations worldwide, have been recognizing and honoring innovation and excellence in home and housewares retailing through the Global Innovation Awards (*gia*) program. We'll be celebrating the anniversary and the impressive history of *gia*-award-winning retailers – close to 600 companies from 57 countries on six continents – at The Inspired Home Show® 2025 in Chicago in March.

**2025 marks a very special milestone also for The Inspired Home Show – our 125th Show! Join us on 2-4 March to celebrate our rich history and explore everything new and next in home + housewares!**



**Piritta Törrö**  
International Marketing  
International Housewares Association



**Derek Miller**  
President & CEO  
International Housewares Association

# INSPIRED.

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# MICROVATIONS

by Anne Kong

*The late Martin M. Pegler was a renowned expert in retail design, celebrated for his exceptional ability to illuminate the field through detailed and insightful case studies. His vast knowledge and expertise left an indelible mark on the industry, making him a highly respected figure. As co-authors of the 7th edition of *Visual Merchandising and Display*, a text on retail design, I had the privilege of working alongside Martin, whose love for case studies was truly contagious. He had a unique talent for inventing new design terms to describe the nuances of these real-world examples, adding layers of insight to the text that made complex concepts more accessible. Martin's passion for innovation, coupled with his knack for creative expression, brought a depth and richness to our work that will continue to inspire future generations in the field. In his honor, I would like to share a case study that reflects the spirit of his dedication and creativity.*

Never underestimate the power of small innovations in visual merchandising, or what we call "Microvations." Microvations combine "micro" and "innovations," highlighting the impact that small, strategic changes can have on the sales floor.

A great example comes from the world of denim. Years ago, denim departments were overwhelmed with an excess of jean inventory. Stores carried 10 to 20 designer brands, each offering a multitude of styles, fits and intricate details like zippers, buttons, pockets and unique stitching. Retail spaces began to resemble bargain centers, crowded with chrome racks crammed with tightly packed jeans that frequently slipped off hangers, making shopping a daunting experience. Amid this abundance, no single brand could stand out.

Later, retailers decided to remove hangers and put jeans directly into the hands of consumers with the help of a dedicated salesforce. Store walls were lined with cubby fixtures and tables of folded jeans, arranged by size, style, color and fit. However, maintaining this setup proved unsustainable



JEAN DISPLAYS, SHUTTERSTOCK

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Let your next innovation be a microvation.  
Small, innovative changes that lead to big impacts.  
Think small steps, big leaps.

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over time. Eventually, jean retailers scaled back their offerings and enlisted the ingenuity of savvy visual merchandisers to display jeans in a way that highlighted their design details in a laid-back, stylish way.

Visual merchandisers considered the flat appearance of jeans when hanging and folded before realizing that consumers preferred a more relaxed, natural look with quick access to the jean label. They experimented with using an “S” hook, and the rest is history. Today, jeans are displayed on racks, walls, hooks and even suspended from ropes using a simple S hook through a belt loop. This tiny hook revolutionized the jean market for decades, spawning countless iterations. **Major jean brands literally rebuilt their identities on this methodology. Imagine this tiny hook and the impact it had on the denim industry.**

This year one of the Global Innovation Award (gia) winners showed the same level of energy. We were captivated by a stunning retail space where a deeply saturated wall contrasted beautifully with a hanging display of pots and pans in every size and finish, all arranged using an unconventional method for this category—it was breathtaking. This microvation instantly caught the judges’ attention, earning the Eastern European contestant ATELIER POTTEN & PANNEN – Staněk from the Czech Republic a well-deserved win.

Microventions don’t demand massive budgets—just a bit of creativity. You might draw inspiration from an entirely different retail category or even gallery visits where art is uniquely displayed. A microvation is the game-changer! It’s about the imaginative, the unexpected, the fun and the flair that elevates good visual merchandising into something truly exciting and engaging. It’s not just about showcasing the product—it’s about presenting it with surprise—shock—visual impact!

## TREND ALERT: LOOK UP

Since every inch of space on the selling floor is crucial for merchandising and product presentation, designers are now utilizing ceiling space to draw consumers’ attention upward. The space above the retail selling floor typically reserved for infrastructure such as ventilation, lighting, security and sprinklers has become the new focal point. Tiffany & Co created a textural surface using their signature turquoise boxes above the dining area in the Blue Box café at new landmark store in NYC. The dangling paper boxes seem to dance across the ceiling creating a celebratory atmosphere.

*Continued...*



POTTEN & PANNEN, CZECH REPUBLIC



TIFFANY & CO., NEW YORK CITY



POTTEN & PANNEN, CZECH REPUBLIC

Utilizing the ceiling with hanging objects and maximizing the airspace on the sales floor has become increasingly valuable in modern retail design. The linear tubular sculpture that rises from the tabletop at ATELIER Potten & Pannen – Staněk moves the eye throughout the space and forces our glance to land on different merchandise displays on the elongated tabletop. These sculptural gilded shapes have a soothing effect.

The burst of lush greenery and periwinkle florals immediately catches the eye from afar, perfectly framing the dinner table scene at LOEB AG in Switzerland. It vividly captures the essence of the season, the art of entertaining and beautifully complements the floral dining collection featured below.

This microvation is versatile and has the power to evolve with seasonal changes; it becomes a dynamic focal point in the store that shoppers will repeatedly return to experience. It can be used to showcase seasons, a designer promotion or a sale.

Incorporating greenery or color with strategic lighting that flatters and highlights the merchandise draws shoppers into the selling space. The circular light fixtures that grace the ceiling at Kookx in The Netherlands force the eye to embrace the fixtures below. They unconsciously create shopping zones with greater importance. These are the elements that pull shoppers off the aisle and closer to the product. Great visual merchandising goes beyond merely displaying stacks of products—it's about bringing those displays to life.

## LIFESTYLE DECOR

Furnishings and risers add depth and dimension, and sometimes even atmospheric lifestyle decor. They inject personality, create a brand image, evoke a lifestyle feeling and spark aspiration. When we humanize the product, we infuse it with life and excitement. The accessories and props we choose can be unusual and unexpected or subtly elegant and understated. Color combinations can be bold and avant-garde or timeless and classic.

It's how we present and display the product that makes all the difference. In this realm, there are no rigid rules, no charts, no guidelines. The visual merchandiser relies on a deep understanding of the brand, the customer's tastes, lifestyles and attitudes, as well as the store's overall image to create something truly remarkable as we see here at Maison Empereur in France.



LOEB, SWITZERLAND



KOOKX, NETHERLANDS



MAISON EMPEREUR, FRANCE

**Repetition of color, lines, shapes or forms can significantly enhance the effectiveness of a display composition.**

By repeating or reiterating an idea or motif, the concept becomes more emphatic, more impactful, and ultimately, more dominant—as demonstrated by F.S. Kustermann GmbH. The back wall of the window draws our attention to a table elegantly draped with natural, flowing folds. The addition of identical trees and greenery perfectly sets the stage for this captivating scene.

Staging and styling a scene create an immersive experience, encouraging longer browsing and boosting buying potential. Incorporating an elongated table or a series of smaller tabletops allows customers to visually engage (as we see here at Potten & Pannen) with the merchandise more effectively. A furniture piece can embody the brand's image and the aspirations of the shopper. It can also break up the monotony of fixturing on the selling floor by adding color, style and innovative merchandising opportunities.

By experimenting with bold and unconventional display tactics, stores can create unique shopping experiences that capture attention and leave a lasting impression. This approach invites customers to interact more with the space encouraging exploration. Pushing the boundaries of traditional display setups can lead to a more dynamic and memorable environment that reinforces the brand's identity and draws curious shoppers back for more. Let your next innovation be a microvation. Small, innovative changes that lead to big impacts. Think small steps, big leaps. | •



F.S. KUSTERMANN, GERMANY

# **gia**® global innovation awards

home + housewares  
**retail excellence**

**The IHA Global Innovation Awards (gia) program** was created to foster innovation and excellence in home and housewares retailing throughout the world. Since the launch of *gia* in 2000, there have been more than 550 *gia* Retail Award winners, from 55 countries on six continents.

A jury consisting of retail experts and housewares trade publication editors from around the world decide on the *gia* Global Honorees after looking at all aspects of the participating stores, including visual merchandising, marketing, branding, staff training and other innovative offerings.

## 2023-2024 National *gia* Winners:

COUNTRY	STORE NAME	STORE WEBSITE
Argentina	Negro House and Pleasures	negrohouse.com.ar
Australia	Granite Lane	granitelane.com.au
Austria	Redl Glas – Porzellan	glas-porzellan-redl.at
Belgium	Dhondt leef mooi	dhondt.be
Brazil	MUMA	muma.com.br
Canada	Bradshaws	bradshaws.ca
China	DOHMC Ltd	idhmj.com
Colombia	CRISTALERIA LA PAZ	cristalerialapaz.co
Eastern Europe	Atelier Potten & Pannen – Staněk	pottenpannen.cz
France	Maison Empereur	https://empereur.fr
Germany	Kustermann	kustermann.de
India	Pure Home + Living	purehomeandliving.com
Ireland	The Kitchen Whisk	thekitchenwhisk.ie
Italy	Cucina33	cucina33.it
Japan	Y.YACHT STORE Azabudai Hills	store.y-yacht.co.jp
Kazakhstan	Premium Home	
Mexico	Liverpool	liverpool.com.mx
Middle East	Home Centre	homecentre.com
Netherlands	Kookx	kookxwinkel.nl
New Zealand	Smith & Caughey's	smithandcaugheys.co.nz
Peru	Sodimac y Maestro	sodimac.com.pe
Poland	Premium Home	premium-home.eu
Portugal	COTTOOK – Kitchen's Life	cottook.com
Saudi Arabia	NICE	nice.com.sa
Spain	Trends Home	trendshome.es
Switzerland	Loeb AG	loeb.ch
Turkey	TAC	tacev.com.tr
Ukraine	PosudMeister	posudmeister.ua
United Kingdom	Divertimenti	divertimenti.co.uk
Uruguay	Home - Grupo Disco del Uruguay	disco.com.uy
USA – Giftware Retailers	Mix It Up Home & Gift	mixituphome.com
USA – Housewares Retailers	The Cook's Shop	thecookshop.com

Visit [TheInspiredHomeShow.com/Awards/gia-Retailing](https://TheInspiredHomeShow.com/Awards/gia-Retailing) for more information on the IHA Global Innovation Awards program and to find short introductions and images of all 32 *gia* winners of 2023-2024.





# Meet the 2024 *gia* Global Honorees in Retail

by Michelle Hespe

At the 2024 Global Innovation Awards (*gia*) five Global Honorees for Retail Excellence were applauded for their outstanding innovation: ATELIER POTTEN & PANNEN - Staněk from the Czech Republic, Maison Empereur from France, F.S. Kustermann from Germany, Kookx from the Netherlands and Divertimenti from the United Kingdom.

The Martin M. Pegler Award for Excellence in Visual Merchandising was awarded to Loeb AG from Switzerland and the *gia* Digital Commerce Award for Excellence in Online Retailing was awarded to Divertimenti from the United Kingdom.

Here are the five 2024 *gia* Global Honorees:

## Czech Republic

### **ATELIER POTTEN & PANNEN - STANĚK**

Art, design and a passion for cooking

ATELIER POTTEN & PANNEN - Staněk from the Czech Republic is a spectacular gallery-like space that is housed in a historical hotel building in the heart of Prague. Owner and founder Pavel Staněk has a 30-year history in selling high-end kitchenware across the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and his company now has 13 bricks and mortar stores and three online stores.

The group of POTTEN & PANNEN stores focuses on selling kitchenware and inspiring customers in its renowned academy cooking schools, and now Atelier has become a show-stopping flagship store that is a gallery, studio, design and kitchenware store all rolled into one stunning space where customers want to linger and enjoy the inspiring art, design and atmosphere.

Within Atelier, visitors discover a world of kitchenware and homewares presented as pieces would be in a gallery, with a 15-metre long solid brass table being the centerpiece that immediately draws a person's attention as soon as they step into the elegant space. Tendrils of copper pierce through the table and swirl into the air, as aromas would look, rising up from dishes being prepared in a kitchen.

Another whimsical sculpture that adds to this imaginary kitchen is constructed from pots and pans by kitchenware brand Mauviel. The pieces are assembled in waves, as though dancing through the air to silent music. Another inspiring creation is the one-of-a-kind Liani glass chandelier designed by famous Czech artist Maxim Velcovsky, which was produced by bespoke glass design company, Lasvit.

The *gia* judges commented that Atelier offers "drama at the highest level," noting that the store is "simply outstanding and a textbook example of how to create a store experience that keeps people coming back." They all agreed that Atelier is breaking boundaries with displays that offer "excitement and wow moments."

Pavel and his staff have always followed their mission of creating harmony between quality, design and excellent service. He says that POTTEN & PANNEN - Staněk stores "enable customers to elevate cooking, dining and everything related to a state-of-the-art-kitchen and experience."

**To learn more about POTTEN & PANNEN - Staněk, visit [pottenpannen.cz](https://pottenpannen.cz) or see the POTTEN & PANNEN - Staněk *gia* blog.**





potten&pannen  
*Stanek*



# France

## MAISON EMPEREUR

History, heritage and the merging of new and old

Maison Empereur – affectionately known by its owners and regular customers as “The House” is a unique retail store, fascinating museum, welcoming café and a beautiful retreat in the heart of old-town Marseille.

Established in 1827, Maison Empereur is France’s oldest drugstore, it has been in one family for eight generations. The evolution of the store has always been based around listening to customers’ requests and ideas, and in this way, it has always remained relevant and loved by many. Staff always carry a small cardboard box and pencil in their aprons for jotting down these requests and keeping the inspiration flowing. “This is how our SEO is created over time,” says CEO and Founder Laurence Renaux Empereur. “Our pride is this loyalty, this closeness – this unwavering bond that remains, even against the passing of time.”

The House is bursting at the seams with old and new products, and many pieces of precious memorabilia. There are more than 250 products by French manufacturers and artisans that tell the story of homewares in France, and just as many products from other countries as well. Around the store, customers are continually delighted by the many handwritten and printed stories about the history of products, the history of the family and its long history in retail.

Exploring the store is like walking through a market, with something new and interesting at every turn, and 150-square-metres has been devoted to a museum honoring the store and the eight generations who have nurtured it. “We like to go beyond commerce and find the meaning that we are all looking for,” says Laurence. “We believe in the power of knowledge and the value of dedicating space to culture.”

The store is also home to a cozy café, and there is a retreat out the back so that if customers want to immerse themselves in the history of “The House,” they can sleep in the building, surrounded by antiques and other homewares picked to capture the essence of the store.

The *gia* jury noted that Maison Empereur is “a cultural and historical institution” and “a unique concept built upon its history.”

To learn more about Maison Empereur, visit <https://empereur.fr> or see the Maison Empereur *gia* blog.







# Germany

## F.S. KUSTERMANN

Decades of dedication to art of retailing

Celebrating 225 years in business, F.S. Kustermann in Germany is an institution that is dedicated to evolving along with its loyal customers. Back in 1798, the store was a foundry where cast metal objects were created over open fire. This piece of history has been preserved by the creation of a small hardware store in the heart of the enormous 5,000 square-meter department store that is now home to more than 70,000 products.

The company's tagline is "Munich's recipe for joy of life" and it operates according to the principles of the "Golden Circle" by author, presenter and TEDx speaker Simon Sinek, who famously said: "People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it, and what you do simply proves what you believe."

F.S. Kustermann's Managing Director André Garcia says that their business revolves around the "why." "We do it for the love of the home, which we believe is society's heart," he says. "This belief drives us and our staff to deliver our best, ensuring we provide products and services that enhance our guests' lives at home."

Embracing the new and preserving tradition, Kustermann is a department store for all the senses, where one can shop, taste, experience products (with over 700 product demonstrations per year!), celebrate special events and enjoy. Sustainability and social commitment are very close to their hearts, with store events used to collect donations.

The store itself is as impressive as its history. Set on a busy street in Munich, the commanding stone building has four magnificent two-story, high-arched windows with beautifully themed window displays in each. It's a place where it is immediately obvious that tradition, heritage, innovation and the modern world are merged seamlessly together.

The *gia* jury noted that although Kustermann has much history, it remains relevant – "always modernizing its approach to retail, with a continual stream of updates."

To learn more about F.S. Kustermann, visit [kustermann.de](http://kustermann.de) or see the F.S. Kustermann *gia* blog.







## Netherlands

### **KOOKX**

Keeping the fun and joy in cooking

Kookx from The Netherlands is the one-stop shop for everything someone who loves cooking could need or desire. It is also a cooking school, run by a father and son team – Robin Holleboom and his father Martin Holleboom – who believe that cooking should be fun, and so should a retail experience.

Kookx is extremely organized with three distinct sections to cover everything that it offers customers: first, a store for cooking products with regular demonstrations, cooking lessons, tasting sessions and events; second, a store to buy entire kitchens, including a service to have them installed; and third, a kitchenware store.

The *gia* jury loved the service, concept and the immaculate presentation of products and the design of the store. “Kookx has a unique, well-thought-out concept and superb presentation – combining a cookshop and a kitchen studio. There is tremendous dedication to lighting and design, which creates a sense of drama.”

Robin and Martin’s approach to having everything a customer needs in the one space has also led to the store having 11 kitchen layouts – all with their own style and atmosphere, so that customers step into a fully assembled kitchen with lighting, furniture, kitchenware and built-in appliances.

The service-with-a-smile approach to retailing that Kookx delivers is second to none. The staff all go the extra mile to create firm bonds with their customers, so that they feel a part of the Kookx family.

Frequent buyers are rewarded with Kookx goodies – such as a pack of its branded coffee beans, a high-quality Kookx-branded paring knife or a discount voucher for pans when they are purchasing a cooker. Staff are also encouraged to take products home to test them, and when a customer has a kitchen installed, they make personal visits to their homes to ensure that everything is as they wanted.

**To learn more about Kookx, visit [kookxwinkel.nl](https://www.kookxwinkel.nl) or see the Kookx *gia* blog.**





# United Kingdom

## DIVERTIMENTI

A celebrated beacon of kitchenware retailing

After six decades of selling kitchenware and hosting inspiring cooking classes and food-related events run by esteemed suppliers and chefs, Divertimenti is a beacon in London's culinary scene.

The iconic store opened its doors in Marylebone in the 1960s, at a time when London's culinary scene was positively exploding. The UK's capital had become a happening, fun and globally alluring hub of creativity and serious business. It was the perfect time for a store dedicated to cooking to open, and it was not only embraced by the general public, but also by famous chefs who found fame cooking for Divertimenti's customers. In fact, many a world-renowned chef – such as Gordon Ramsay – was given his first teaching platform at Divertimenti.

"Divertimenti has a long history, focusing on quality, with a reputation as a leader in culinary exploration," the judges noted.

Divertimenti is not only unique due to its long-established partnerships with chefs, but also because of it being a specialist store on an internationally renowned street with high footfall, in an affluent area where most retailers have been priced out of the popular location by cafes, brand showrooms and designer boutiques. The area is not a destination that visitors flock to for shopping, but rather is a famous food-lover's hotspot. Divertimenti has leveraged this rare positioning by turning the ground floor into a stunning showroom that lures in passers-by with its beautifully presented visual merchandising, which in turn sets the tone for the rest of the store.

Creative window displays are treated much like art pieces in a gallery – stunning still-lives for those who love food and cooking. An example is a display created around a 19th century French baker's table that is a cherished Divertimenti heirloom. It can be laden with vibrant, limited-edition pieces of pottery that are an irresistible drawing card for Instagrammers and history lovers. Or even more arresting – Divertimenti's \$15,000 Italian meat slicer in Ferrari red might be found surrounded by serving platters, vases filled with flowers and a high-end table setting that together, create a masterpiece to stop those walking by in their tracks.

To learn more about Divertimenti, visit [divertimenti.co.uk](https://divertimenti.co.uk) or see the Divertimenti *gia* blog.





DIVERTIMENTI  
EST. LONDON 1963



# Visual Trends

## Captivating Millennial and Gen Z Shoppers

by Rachel Crippin Clark

It's not just what you sell, but how you present it. As today's consumers look to in-person shopping as a way to escape stress and routine, retailers have an opportunity to reinvent how they engage with them. A valuable tool in these efforts is highly immersive and highly engaging store displays.

"Today's shopper just wants to have fun," says Anne Kong, a *gia* expert juror, educator and designer specializing in visual merchandising, exhibition design and brand activation. "Millennials and Gen Z value experiences over material possessions... Store displays need to be larger than life."

Retailers looking for inspiration should look no further than the wide array of pop-up shops, art installations and brand experiences appearing all around us, Anne says. They're often highly immersive, highly engaging and highly Instagrammable. They're also only available for a limited period of time.

A good example is the extremely popular Poppi World from healthy soda brand Poppi, which was one of many pop-up experiences in New York City during Fall Fashion Week.

"We were enveloped in this magenta environment from ceiling to floor... carpeting, neon, wall color, lighting, music and entertainment... to celebrate the launch of their new cherry cola flavor," explains Anne. "We were immersed in an interactive world where we were sipping, shopping exclusive merch and interacting with things like Infinity refrigerators and TV walls."

You don't have to be a trendy start-up brand to get in on the action. The iconic luxury brand Tiffany & Co. recently partnered with four contemporary British artists to create immersive displays in London inspired by the company's legendary window designer Gene Moore from 1955-1994.

But it's not enough to create displays that are visually appealing, says Anne. Millennials, Gen Z and even up-and-coming Gen Alpha are purpose-driven and want to see their values reflected in where they shop and what they buy. That includes sustainability, inclusivity and ethics for Gen Z, and convenience, quality and meaningful brand connections for Millennials.



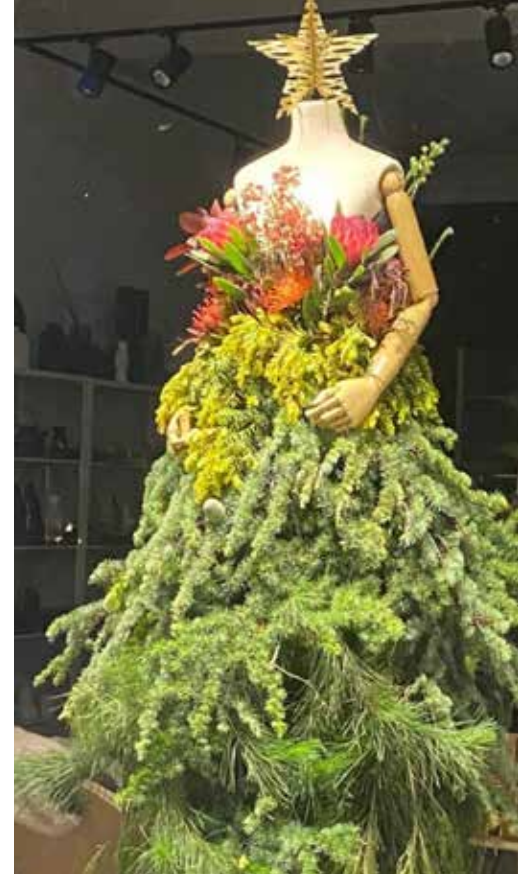
^ TOP: POPPI WORLD POP-UP EXPERIENCE, NEW YORK CITY FASHION WEEK



> RIGHT: HOMAGE TO GENE MOORE AND THE HERITAGE OF TIFFANY & CO., LONDON  
BOTTOM PHOTO BY RANA BEGUM



SETA BAZAR GOURMET, ARGENTINA



LUC DESIGN, AUSTRALIA

## Here are four key trends in visual displays and how to use them to connect with young shoppers:

### 1. Good Vibes

As consumers look at shopping experiences as ways to escape their daily lives, they're increasingly drawn to displays that exude good vibes. Anything that tells a fun story or conveys happiness, humor or positive energy fits the bill, Anne says.

Premium Home's (Poland) take on an outdoor meal conveys feelings of sunshine and warmth. Plenty of greenery and pops of yellow create an inviting motif that even includes a few birds perched on tree limb, apparently captivated by the scene.

Anne also likes the use of emojis as a contemporary way to communicate positive emotions, as Argentina's Seta Bazar Gourmet does with inflatable kiss balloons in this Valentine's Day display. "They're an excellent way to humanize messaging and make campaigns maybe a little bit more relatable," she says.

*Continued...*



PREMIUM HOME, POLAND

## 2. Natural Influences

Retailers can also engage shoppers with “eco-tecture,” which Anne describes as the harmony between architecture and natural elements, sustainability, biophilic design and eco-conscious living. The resulting effect is a satisfying fusion of both joy and purpose, she says.

Eco-tecture can be communicated more traditionally with flowers, greenery and other natural elements, as well as earth tones. But it can also be conveyed in less conventional ways, as Argentina’s Santo does with black wooden slabs – which appear to be hand carved – set against a stark white background and accented by gold and glass objects, explains Anne.



SANTO, ARGENTINA



@ESPINAS3



POTTERS COOKSHOP, UNITED KINGDOM

## 3. Information Sharing

Consumers today want to know how products are made, what they're made of and why they offer a good solution. That's why “edu-selling” or guiding customers to make informed decisions is a top trend in retail displays, says Anne.

It's important to note the key difference between selling and edu-selling; edu-selling is based on building trust and empowering shoppers to make their own educated decisions.

Displays that take the form of a “how-to” or “how it's made” tutorial are a good way to go about this, as Potters Cookshop in the United Kingdom does as it taps into the appeal of good craftsmanship and handmade goods.



SWAROVSKI, NEW YORK CITY



JADA AND DAVID



MONCLER



LOEB AG, SWITZERLAND

## 4. Chroma Strategy

"Nothing changes our minds faster than color," says Anne. That's why creative use of color is a "crucial" strategy in today's retail displays.

Perhaps the biggest color trend right now is using vibrant, bold hues or what Anne calls "bringing color to the max" – "even ordinary merchandise can be curated and cast into high-quality design elements." Many retailers are using bold saturated tones individually in separate zones, as Swarovski's New York City store does.

But this doesn't mean there isn't a place for neutrals. On the other side of the color spectrum, Loeb AG in Switzerland recently designed a stand-out display featuring one tan earth tone. With a simple graphic message filling the background space, the result is a highly sophisticated and striking presentation. | •

# DISCOVERING DESIGN

by Rachel Crippin Clark



LES MANDELBAUM & PAUL ROWAN IN 1979



UMBRA SOLIS ADJUSTABLE STANDING SHELF

## UMBRA

From selling a single product out of the trunk of his car to leading a global e-commerce business with thousands of home goods, Umbra president and co-founder **Les Mandelbaum** shares how his creativity, hustle and unwavering commitment to original design has made Umbra a leader in home and housewares today.

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND.

I was born in Toronto, Canada but came to the U.S. for college, majoring in music and sociology. I didn't really plan to get serious about music, but it was the 1960s and business wasn't cool...the Beatles were, right? So, I started focusing on playing bass guitar in a band. After a while, I realized it's hard to make it big in music and I'd better start looking at other things. I moved back to Toronto, and everyone was interested in the heavy duty "road" cases I used for my music gear (that I got in the States). So, I started a company here to make them. I'm still CEO and a major shareholder of that company, though I'm no longer involved in day-to-day operations. In fact, it's here in the same building as Umbra's headquarters.

### SO WHERE DOES UMBRA COME IN?

When I was on the road as a musician, I looked up a guy from my youth who was also into music – Paul Rowan. He was working as a graphic designer, but told me he had an idea for a new product – paper window shades with creative designs on them. So, he offered to design a catalog for my road case business if I helped him get the window shade idea off the ground. It was very casual, very impromptu. But that's how Umbra started. Umbra means "shade."

### WHAT LED YOU TO ULTIMATELY FOCUS ON UMBRA?

My dad and grandpa were immigrants, but they made their livings very differently – one as an entrepreneur and the other as a musician. I had both influences. I could have gone to work with my dad, but his company sold wooden doors and I had no interest in it. Even with the road case/hardware company, it didn't really inspire me. With Umbra, our product was original. It was creative. It was a good combination of both art and business.

**LES MANDELBAUM**  
Umbra President & Co-Founder







UMBRA PRODUCTS LEFT TO RIGHT: BELLWOOD GARMENT RACK, BELLWOOD CADDY & ORGANIZER, WAVY JEWELRY ORGANIZER, BELLWOOD BAR & STORAGE CART

**WHAT SKILLS DO YOU THINK HELPED YOU BUILD IT INTO THE POWERHOUSE IT IS IN THE HOUSEWARES INDUSTRY TODAY?**

Even when I was in bands, I tended to be the manager. The one booking the gigs, the one keeping the “crazy” musicians in line, things like that. Sure, I’m creative, but I’m a better organizer, a producer type of person.

**I UNDERSTAND THERE’S AN INTERESTING BACKSTORY TO HOW YOU LAUNCHED YOUR COMPANY TO THE INDUSTRY AT THE INSPIRED HOME SHOW (THEN KNOWN AS THE NATIONAL HOUSEWARES EXPOSITION).**

Back in 1981, we were selling the shades basically out of our trunks...going door-to-door to independent retailers in Canada. I decided to try to get into the Housewares Show, but it was sold out. We ended up at what was essentially a spillover show out in Rosemont. But it was terrible. And our booth didn’t even arrive on time because the trucking company went bankrupt. So, I decided to drive downtown to the Housewares Show at McCormick Place. I asked if they had any no-shows, and they did. So, they let us in – even though the Show had already started – and we were able to connect with a ton of buyers from chain stores. Even if they didn’t buy our shades, many told us they liked our aesthetic, they liked our attitude and they would welcome the opportunity to work with new, exciting vendors.

**FAST FORWARD TO TODAY, AND UMBRA SELLS A WIDE RANGE OF PRODUCTS ACROSS MANY DIFFERENT HOME CATEGORIES IN 120 COUNTRIES. TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN TO YOUR COMPANY’S SUCCESS.**

I decided very early on that we were only going to do original design. That’s part of our brand promise. To the consumer, Umbra means “this is not something you’ll find elsewhere.” Original design is beyond a label or a business attribute; it’s very important to me, my personal and mental health and the health of the company. To this day, we’ll abandon a new product idea if we find a similar design on the market...even if it’s in the final stages.

**YET, YOU DON’T JUST RELY ON DESIGN EITHER.**

I always say, “We don’t just get by on good looks alone.” Our brand promise is: Not only are we original, not only are we modern (we do restrict ourselves to modern design), but we have to be functional. Quality and function are key. And that’s true whether you’re talking about a soap pump, a curtain rod, a picture frame or a coat rack.

**HOW DOES YOUR TEAM COME UP WITH IDEAS FOR NEW PRODUCTS?**

I’d say one-third of our new products are derivatives of existing ones...we take a popular item and develop different colors, different sizes, different shapes. We reserve one-third of our product development for blue sky...ideas that don’t relate to anything we have...where we’re just shooting from the hip and taking a risk. And probably another third is custom products for chain retailers, because so many of them, in the U.S. in particular, are looking for these now.

**TODAY’S CONSUMERS ARE ESPECIALLY PRICE SENSITIVE. WHEN DOES PRICE COME INTO PLAY IN THE DESIGN PROCESS?**

Right at the very beginning. I’d say price is probably the toughest part of it because sometimes we have a really great idea...we just fall in love with it...but we have to walk away because we realize there’s just too small of a market at a certain price point. It kind of breaks my heart a little bit. But in the end, we have to face reality.

**BEING A GLOBAL COMPANY, DO YOU DESIGN WITH DIFFERENT REGIONS OR CULTURES IN MIND?**

There are certainly different preferences or needs around the world. For instance, people in Latin America like more color in their housewares, where people in the U.S. tend to be more muted. Or bathrooms in Japan are a lot smaller than other places in the world. But there’s also a lot of commonality. We can always do custom products for a certain region if a retailer requests them.

**WHAT’S NEXT FOR UMBRA AS YOU ENTER YOUR 45TH YEAR?**

We’re always looking at new products. But we’re also looking for ways to adapt to new realities in the various selling channels. We’ve got a great group of young people on staff who are helping with this, and I would also say the fact that we’re a private company allows us to adapt and move very quickly, so that’s good. A lot has changed, but a lot is the same. People still want unique, quality things for their homes.

To learn more about Umbra LLC and its products including the Cubiko Wall Planter, which was a 2024 winner of the IHA Global Innovation Awards (*gia*) for Excellence in Product Design, visit [umbra.com](http://umbra.com) | ●

# Housewares Trends with Resonance and Relevance

by Rachel Crippin Clark

This series of digital portfolios – now being published for free for the second year – is a comprehensive guide to emerging and enduring housewares trends around the globe. The portfolios are produced in partnership with Springboard Futures and its founder and industry trend authority Tom Mirabile; Dawn Evans serves as creative director. HomePage News is a digital B2B media platform operated as a service of the International Housewares Association.

“Trend today isn’t just about what’s new and next in product, it’s often driven by what’s now in consumers’ lives,” says Tom. “Success in the home industry is dependent on a brand’s resonance and relevance to the consumer. They want to know that you understand the life they’re living and the problems they have that need solving.”

Earlier this year, the Springboard team explored influential trade shows in the U.S. and abroad to track how lifestyle and design trends are influencing home and housewares products. They reviewed thousands of products; determined new, evolving, and enduring trends; and selected about 100 products to be featured in each of the 10 portfolios.

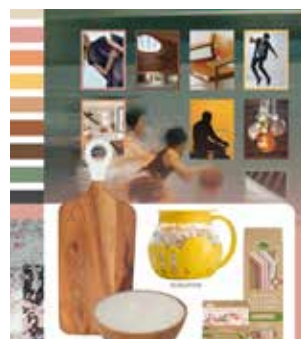
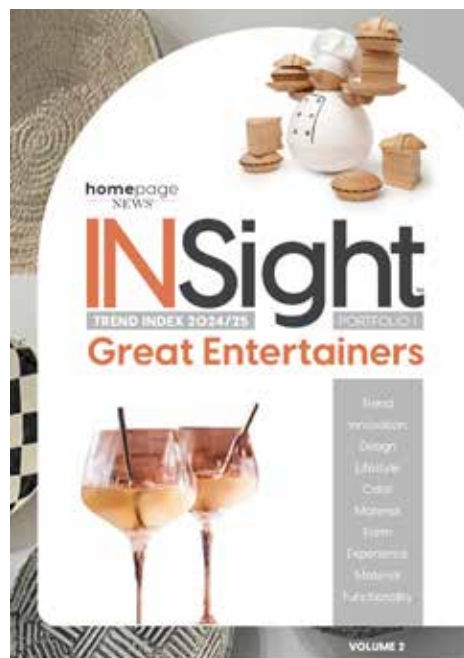
Each portfolio addresses the cause and effect of trend evolutions, which may include shifts in lifestyle directions, product categories or design themes.

Insights from industry experts and current statistics are included, but the real stars of the show are the products themselves. Each item is pictured and identified by name, brand and/or manufacturer so that retailers can easily consider new directions for future assortments.

Six portfolios have been published so far, with four more on their way. They can be found at:

<https://www.homepagenews.com/insight24/>

Here’s what you can expect from each one:





WIDGETEER

## The Great Entertainers

This portfolio organizes inspirational products by five different types of entertaining styles driving design and function today: The Purist, the Naturalist, the Romanticist, the Anthropologist and the Connoisseur.

**“The ability to inspire quality time with family and friends” is the #1 lifestyle benefit consumers are looking for when shopping for home and housewares, according to the Springboard Futures/IHA 2024 Value Equation Index.**

At-home entertainers today are raising the bar for presentation, in addition to making preparation part of the party.

*Continued...*



KIKKERLAND



MASON CASH



LE CREUSET

## Easy Does It

This portfolio features innovative problem-solving products, thoughtful redesigns, multi-function products, and gifts designed to bring some cheer into everyday chores.

**57% of consumers say ease of use has the greatest influence on their home and housewares purchase decisions (when given a comprehensive list of features, benefits and design elements in the 2024 Value Equation Index).**

The result is a new mandate for products that deliver easier preparation, improved storage, multifunctionality, innovative technology and/or time-saving features.



LÉKUÉ



YOUCOPIA



DREAMFARM

## Pantone® ColorWatch

This portfolio features products that align with the seven color palettes in the PANTONE VIEW Home + Interiors 2025 color forecast.

**Each palette features nine colors that work together – in updated and innovative ways – to represent the styles and spirits of consumers today.**

The theme that unites all of these palettes is harmony, which Lee Eisman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, describes as “being in tune with ourselves, in tune with others within our immediate surroundings, and in tune with the greater world around us.”



FORTESSA



GOLDEN RABBIT

> RIGHT: DASH



58% of consumers say environmental responsibility is “very or extremely important” to their decision to buy from a retailer or brand.



BRABANTIA

## Future Focus

*This portfolio highlights products aligned to a new standard of responsibility: environmentally friendly materials, upcycled and recycled design and production, resource-aware design and production, and/or social and environmental stewardship.*

**58% of consumers say environmental responsibility is “very or extremely important” to their decision to buy from a retailer or brand (2024 Value Equation Index). That’s a 30% increase over 2023.**

“Today’s home and housewares marketplace is expected to deliver more of the time, space and experiences consumers crave...while creating opportunities for more conscious consumption that we can feel good about,” says Tom.

*Continued...*



MEPAL



ADHOC



EBNAT



GEFU



LAV



A BAR ABOVE

## Change is Brewing

This portfolio highlights three categories linked to everyday living and socializing: coffee, tea and the home bar. All have seen unprecedented expansion in both technology and consumer adoption.

Interest in at-home coffee craft continues to grow, with new technology helping make different types and methods both easier and more customizable. Time and financial savings from at-home coffee preparation are another key driver.

**Consumers are increasingly turning to tea and at-home tea rituals for the feeling of self-care they evoke.** (And that's not to mention the benefits functional teas may offer for stress, focus, sleep, digestion and overall health.)

Social media – and let's give some credit to the pandemic – has inspired many people to explore and expand their at-home cocktail creativity. As a result, demand has increased for home bar products which add ease to creation and style to presentation.





GUZZINI

## Adventure Capitalists

This portfolio spotlights products that bring new convenience and ease to time spent in the great outdoors, whether glamping, camping, grilling, tailgating, picnicking or just relaxing in the yard.

**Post-pandemic passion for outdoor activities continues to grow. But the new consumer wants more of the ease and versatility they've come to expect indoors.**

Manufacturers and retailers are responding with material and functional innovations, creating products that function equally well indoors and out. (For example, lightweight and durable dishes made of melamine or bioplastics that are so beautiful they work equally well indoors and out.)

*Continued...*



BUILT



SOPHISTIPLATE



ZONE DENMARK

"As digital life consumes more of consumers' time and attention, people are appreciating and craving connections to nature even more."

Tom Mirabile



PORLAND

## Forces of Nature

This portfolio concentrates on products and styles inspired by natural themes, elements and materials – an enduring but evolving trend.

**"As digital life consumes more of consumers' time and attention, people are appreciating and craving connections to nature even more," says Tom.**

Water and wood are two of the biggest natural influences on product design and style today. Also, stone is gaining popularity, thanks to its versatility and natural beauty.



AQUANOVA



ADHOC

## Striking Contrasts

This portfolio highlights some of the most important design and style elements influencing home and housewares style for the foreseeable future.

**"Today's consumer is more trend-informed and style-opinionated than ever. Staying astride current trends and avoiding short-term fads is critical to identity and integrity for both retailers and suppliers," Tom explains.**

Some of today's enduring styles are a study in contrasts: modernism and minimalism, blacks and whites, matte finishes and textures.



OPINEL



BRABANTIA



> RIGHT: PENDEFORD





GOURMIA



EMULZIONER

## Well Informed

*This portfolio examines consumers' growing definition of wellness and identifies new and innovative products to address their wellness goals and challenges.*

**Consumers' concept of wellness continues to expand beyond physical or medical dimensions to include mental, emotional and spiritual concerns.**

Since the definition of wellbeing can vary broadly among different people, solution and purpose-driven products can range from those that simplify healthy meal-making to those that focus on better sleep and relaxation.



PLANETBOX



UMBRA

## Clean Slates

*This portfolio features new and innovative products dedicated to storage and organization, as well as solutions that make cleaning faster and less of a chore.*

**The near-claustrophobic experience of the pandemic has created an enduring appreciation for clean and organized spaces all over the home.**

As we go forward, this holistic approach to "clean and tidy" encompasses closets, cabinets, garages, refrigerators, medicine cabinets and much more. | ●



KAMENSTEIN

# Estudio Futuro: Spring Summer 2025

## Houseware Trends

by Naomi Pollard, Director of Trend Services, TrendBible

For 2025, home and interior trends reflect an increasingly emotional relationship to the spaces and objects around us. Counteracting feelings of crisis fatigue and eco-anxiety, we'll see a focus on abundance and possibility. Keen to imagine a more positive way of living, householders follow their heart rather than their head and a growing rejection of conformity reframes what is beautiful, acceptable and desirable.

In its opening keynote at The Inspired Home Show 2024, global trend forecasting agency TrendBible shared a preview of its Spring Summer 2025 trend Estudio Futuro. Here we take a closer look at this bold, uplifting trend and how it will translate to interiors and housewares in 2025.



## Estudio Futuro

Contemporary Latin American artistic culture and individuality sing out in this bold and uplifting trend. While the vibrant market streets of Oaxaca and Mexico City provide aesthetic inspiration here, the intermingling of community and creativity influences how we gather in our homes all around the world.

Maximalist decor thrives in this trend, radiating an abundant, empowered atmosphere, with richly textured homes drenched in juicy hues. Textiles playfully blend reinvigorated Mayan, Aztec and ikat geometrics with saturated eco-friendly fibers and dyes.

## Color Drenched

This color palette is expressive and fruity. Acidic splashes of lime quench thirst, while Rio Red and potent Fuchsia shades add intensity. Neutral, natural fibers and colors provide a low-key backdrop for the more saturated tones to thrive. Pair Fuchsia Red with Celosia Orange for a vibrant combination, or use the warm Apricot Cream with Golden Glow to neutralize the acidity of Lime Punch.



“With such exciting newness emerging from the Latin American design scene, the crucial challenge for buyers and designers is to honor and emphasize the emotional energy that is captured in the design, architecture and culture of these regions without appropriating culturally specific ideas.”

Naomi Pollard, Head of Publications, TrendBible

**TrendBible** is a global trend agency and leader in predicting the future of life at home. It works collaboratively with the world's best brands helping them seize tomorrow's opportunities. Estudio Futuro forms one of four trends published in TrendBible's Spring Summer 2025 Home & Interiors trend forecast, available now on its trend subscription platform **My TrendBible**.

## Artisanal Everyday

Contemporary artisanal techniques transform everyday objects into artworks that can be both functional and beautiful.

The work of traditional craftwork is elevated through fresh shapes and vibrant colors, creating exciting original designs. Lesser-known techniques like thatching and materials like ixtle are centered alongside humble recycled materials reminiscent of days at the market.



## Starburst Motifs

Both shape and surface designs are serrated and spiky in this trend, adding a sense of movement and energy.

Prickly pear, horned melons and dragon fruits provide inspiration for abstract motifs while loosely illustrated lightning-inspired zig zags or starburst designs create vibrant repeats. More subtle serrated elements can be found edging hard goods, on handles and lids, providing design-led details that add a sense of craft to even the most engineered of products. | •



# Connecting Through Color: More Personal Than Scientific

by Rachel Crippin Clark

If there's one thing color expert Leatrice (Lee) Eiseman wants retailers to know, it's that "Color is all about emotion and what it says to the prospective consumer." But Lee – who is executive director of the Pantone Color Institute and director of the Eiseman Center for Color and Information Training – also is the first to point out that all customers are different and a color that appeals to one may not to another.

In other words, it's more personal than scientific.

That's why it's important to think in terms of color combinations, considering what has worked well in the past, as well as looking for ways to update your marketing, merchandising and store design.

**"When we do trends – like the color palettes Pantone introduces every year at The Inspired Home Show – our mission is not to abandon everything that has come before," she says. "Our goal is to build on our color stories, creating a feeling of freshness and variety that blends with familiar."**

It's important to point out that how color affects us emotionally is no different if we view it on a screen or in a store, says Lee. But what's especially important is the context of how a product is used. That's why lifestyle imagery is winning out over product hero shots, and why in-store display is so important.

So, what are some good color strategies for selling home and housewares products these days?



EL CORTE INGLÉS, SPAIN



AMITH NAG, SHUTTERSTOCK

## Personal Connection

In this era of digital everything, many people are craving opportunities for personal connection and touch. For that reason, Lee encourages retailers to feature colors and textures that communicate tactility – whether they're soft and smooth or bumpy and uneven. There's no right or wrong color here; her advice to retailers is to think about "something that's meaningful to you and makes you want to reach out and touch."

Color can also be used to help tell the story of how a product or products can help fuel personal connections in our lives. Think of a photo or display that shows a group of people sitting around a table enjoying a meal. The colors and staging can "humanize the usage of a product and make you feel like you'd like to be part of that group or you'd like to re-create that feeling in your home," Lee explains.

## Creative and Bold

Open a home decorating magazine and you'll probably see bold paint colors and creative wall treatments like color blocking and stenciled patterns. But Lee says this might be too big of a leap for some people. "The housewares industry has a huge advantage in terms of helping consumers be creative with color," she says. "It's a much easier place for people to experiment and is much less intimidating than painting four walls."

*Continued...*



WICHITS, SHUTTERSTOCK

And even if a consumer doesn't end up purchasing a product in a bold new color, the fact that it was available – and displayed and marketed – might be what attracts them to a store and draws them in; either to buy that same product in a more standard color or to shop your store for other products and ideas.

## Fashion Cues

Lee encourages retailers to make connections between fashion trends and our homes, saying what we see on runways are usually a good indication of what shoppers will be looking for next in their homes.

Right now, one of the international fashion trends she's watching is the proliferation of "Western Wear" and cowboy/cowgirl influences. This look, which has a "comfortable, casual feeling to it," sometimes involves earthy tones like tan, brown and dark red, but sometimes has brighter tones like turquoise or true red.

Retailers can help make connections simply by incorporating these colors, but also by the clothes models wear in ads or the accessories used in in-store displays.

## More Insight from Lee Eiseman

### 1) BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY FOR RETAILERS?

Social media. There are so many opportunities here for colorful story-telling and putting products into context, Lee points out. Social media content can lead to in-store as well as digital sales.

### 2) BIGGEST MISTAKE RETAILERS MAKE?

Relying on the same old colors. "Even if you have a dedicated group of consumers who know they can depend on you to offer something in a certain color, you've got to tweak things a little bit to get them to pay attention," says Lee. "If you can show them how to incorporate new colors or refresh their look a little bit, you've done your customer a favor."

### 3) ADVICE FOR IN-STORE DISPLAYS?

Pay attention to where products will be displayed, especially the amount of natural light and the quality of artificial light. "Lighting affects color significantly," explains Lee, who recommends using a lighting expert in addition to your store's designer or merchandising team. | •



EL CORTE INGLÉS, SPAIN



AMBIENTE GOURMET, COLOMBIA



Be Among the First to Discover the 2026 PantoneView Home + Interiors Forecast at the The Inspired Home Show 2025

Lee Eiseman Keynote Address:  
Monday, March 3 • 1:00 PM

Pantone® ColorWatch Display:  
All Show days and hours

Connect with Lee: [LeatriceEiseman.com](http://LeatriceEiseman.com)



# Make Way for Mocha Mousse

by Rachel Crippin Clark



With an eye toward comfort and indulgence, global color authority Pantone recently announced PANTONE 17-1230 Mocha Mousse as its 2025 Color of the Year. It's a rich, soft brown that Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, calls flavorful and warm.

**"Underpinned by our desire for everyday pleasures, Mocha Mousse expresses a level of thoughtful indulgence," says Lee. "Sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time an unpretentious classic, (the hue) extends our perceptions of the browns from being humble and grounded to embrace aspirational and luxe."**

Continuing the harmony theme that Pantone featured in its 2025 PantoneView Home + Interiors palettes, Mocha Mousse feeds into consumers' collective desire for balance.

"Harmony brings feelings of contentment, inspiring a positive state of inner peace, calm and balance as well as being tuned in with the world around us," says Laurie Pressman, vice president of the Pantone Color Institute. "With that in mind, for Pantone Color of the Year 2025, we look to a color that reaches into our desire for comfort and wellness, and the indulgence of simple pleasures that we can gift and share with others."

After all, the color suggests chocolate, cocoa and coffee...treats that can be comforting as part of a daily ritual, but ones that can also be elevated to feel quite decadent.

When it comes to applications in the home, Mocha Mousse is an adaptable neutral tone that blends effortlessly with many colors.

It can be applied to flooring, painted walls, wallpaper and within home décor and housewares. It works equally well in heavier materials such as leather, velvet and knitted weaves, as well as lighter ones like jersey and satin. It's also a natural in nature-inspired materials like wood, stone, rattan and wicker, which are especially popular right now.

For more information, visit <https://www.pantone.com/color-of-the-year/2025>

# Unleashing the Potential to Thrive in Homewares Retailing

by Juanita Neville-Te Rito

As we have navigated quickly-changing consumer preferences, societal shifts and economic conditions in the last few years, the global homewares market has proven itself to be a resilient force. But how can retailers position themselves for future growth in a competitive landscape?

By embracing the trends that shape our living environments, cultivating emotional connections with customers and harnessing the power of innovation, retailers can unlock new avenues for growth, foster loyalty and cement their place as indispensable partners in the creation of personal sanctuaries... and in broader terms, the art of living well.

Read on for what this means in 2025 and beyond:

## Take Advantage of Social Media

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful catalyst, shaping consumer preferences and driving purchasing decisions. This influence is particularly pronounced among younger consumers, with nearly half aged 16 to 34 turning to platforms like Instagram and Pinterest for inspiration when planning a room makeover. (Analysis.org)

The highly visual nature of homewares lends itself to social media, making it an ideal canvas for brands to showcase their offerings and forge emotional connections with target audiences. Collaborations between homewares retailers and social media influencers have become a potent marketing strategy internationally.

### TOP TIP

Individual owner-operators without the budget to work with high-profile influencers can still harness the power of social media. Think about ways you can engage your own customer base, since individuals can also be highly influential within their own group of friends. This could take the form of incenting a shopper to post a recent purchase or inviting them to a VIP event at your store, where they bring friends and post their experience on social channels.



ALLISON AUTRY, PEOPLE.COM





KELLY CLARKSON homes

Kelly Clarkson Home

Only at Wayfair

4.6 ★★★★★ NYC-inspired looks for any style.

Introducing the latest looks in Kelly Clarkson Home, inspired by Kelly's move to NYC. These new pieces keep the fun & feminine essence that you know and love, fused with a fresh, urban influence.

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city vibes. chic styles.

KELLY CLARKSON HOME, WAYFAIR.COM

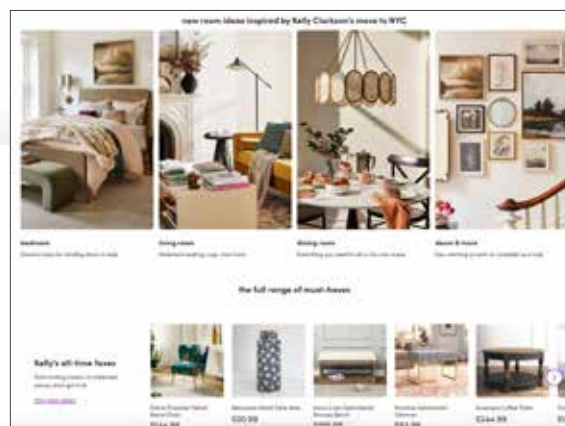
## Incorporate Lifestyle Brands

Social media has also fueled the rise of lifestyle brands in the homewares sector. These trend-driven, fashion-forward brands cater to consumers who view their living spaces as an extension of their personal style, blurring the lines between fashion and interior design.

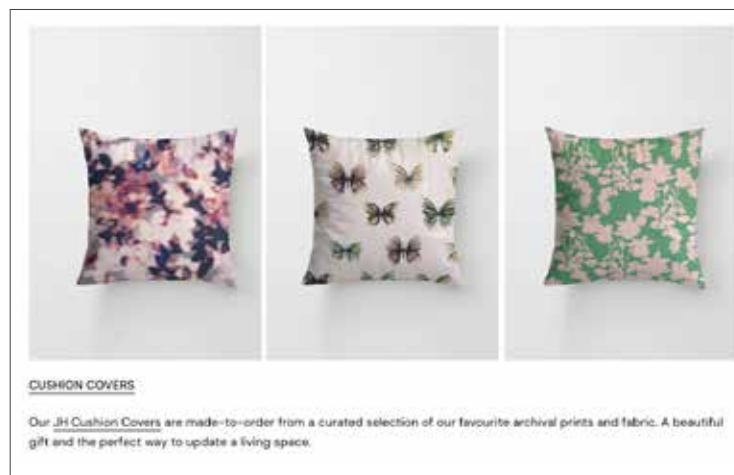
Clothing brands have been at the forefront of this movement, expanding their offerings to encompass homewares and creating comprehensive lifestyle propositions. From H&M and Zara to Country Road and Witchery, these brands are tapping into the desire for cohesive, aesthetically pleasing living environments that reflect their customers' fashion sensibilities.

### TOP TIP

You can dip your toes into these category extensions one at a time. Just make sure to promote these to brand loyalists as a way of attracting new customers, as well as drawing existing ones back into your store.



KELLY CLARKSON HOME, WAYFAIR.COM



CUSHION COVERS BY FASHION DESIGNER JULIETTE HOGAN, NEW ZEALAND

## Offer Seamless Experiences In-Store and Online

As the line between physical and digital shopping blurs, OMO (Online Merges Offline) is gaining traction worldwide. In Japan, located in the Seibu Shibuya department store, Choosebase Shibuya combines the best of both worlds, allowing customers to browse in-store while interacting with products digitally through QR codes. While in store, shoppers scan products with their smartphones and add them to a virtual cart, making the shopping experience convenient and fast.

OMO appeals to today's customers – especially younger generations – by offering flexibility and efficiency. They enjoy the convenience of online shopping without sacrificing the ability to physically interact with products.

This model also enables retailers to minimize physical stock while still showcasing a wide range of products. It's also an excellent way to test new products without committing to larger orders, helping your business stay agile and responsive.

### TOP TIP

To capitalize on OMO, think about how you can introduce elements like QR code shopping or virtual product displays in your store. You can use it to introduce limited-edition items or feature emerging designers without needing to hold large inventories.



ALL IMAGES ON THIS PAGE: CHOOSEBASE SHIBUYA, TOKYO



## Provide Solutions for Transient Living

The average age of first-time home buyers has significantly increased all around the world. This trend has given rise to a new breed of consumers who find themselves in temporary living arrangements, whether cohabiting with parents, roommates or renting.

For these individuals, the concept of "home" transcends physical structures. On a practical level, they seek homewares that are modular, adjustable and capable of transforming even the most modest spaces into personal havens.

On a recent trip to Singapore, I had the chance to visit Muji Plaza Singapura, which reopened in late 2023 to support this exact trend. This included Muji Renovations, which is a one-stop shop for renovations and home furnishings. The concept features sample rooms that bring to life products and designs that are designed to move and grow with you.

### TOP TIP

Retailers can tap into a burgeoning market of consumers seeking comfort and stability in their temporary living situations by providing flexible and affordable home solutions. Just make sure you highlight how products work and be sure to call out modular features and benefits as they aren't always obvious at first glance.

*Continued...*



ALL IMAGES ON THIS PAGE: MUJI, SINGAPORE

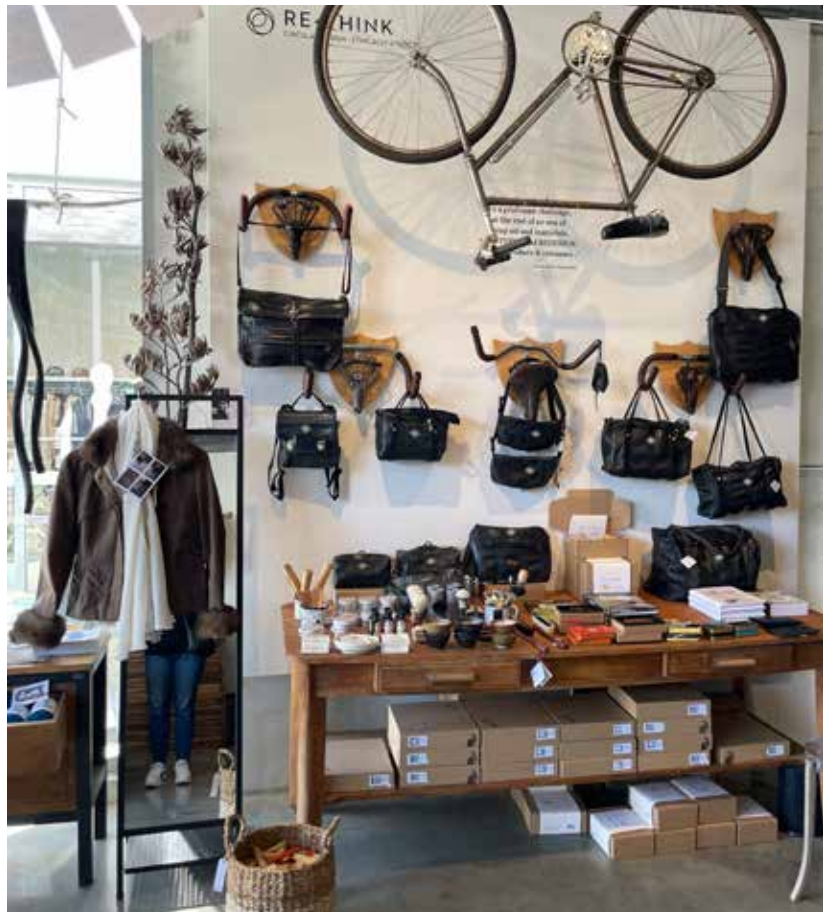
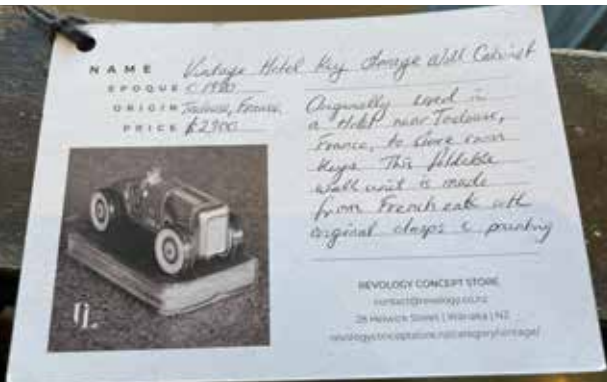
## Support Thrifty and Resourceful Consumers

The "Owning It" trend has both literal and figurative elements. On a practical level, economic conditions have prompted many consumers to embrace thriftiness, opting to repair or repurpose existing household items rather than replace them. This has fueled demand for products that extend the lifespan of existing possessions, such as sofa covers and storage containers for portioning and freezing food.

On a deeper level, "Owning It" represents a desire for control and self-empowerment, as consumers seek to reclaim agency over aspects of their lives they can influence. Revology Concept Store in Wanaka, New Zealand is exemplar in curating reimagined product and resourcefulness. Their pictures may just offer all the inspiration you need!

### TOP TIP

Homewares retailers can connect with thrifty and resourceful consumers by offering DIY solutions, repair kits and educational resources that empower them to take ownership of – and pride in – their living spaces.



ALL IMAGES ON THIS PAGE: REVOLGY CONCEPT STORE, WANAKA, NEW ZEALAND



WESTWING BRASIL, BRAZIL

## Embrace Dopamine Décor

Looking ahead to 2025, it appears consumers are ready to turn dopamine dressing into dopamine décor. What's that all about? The concept of selecting clothing that bring us joy (or a shot of the feel-good hormone dopamine) often involves bright colors and expressive patterns. And that's exactly where many home design motifs are going.

Dopamine décor is reflected in the "Estudio Futuro" design trend that global forecasting agency TrendBible has identified for Spring Summer 2025. Influenced by contemporary Latin American culture, this narrative features an abundance of color, texture, and pattern. (See page 34 for more.)

### TOP TIP

While the concept of dopamine dressing or décor typically involves bold or bright colors, it's really about self-expression and whatever brings an individual joy. Any way you can inspire shoppers to make their homes their own personal sanctuaries will likely be appreciated. This could include providing suggestions for mixing and matching or ways to customize product offerings. |●

## About Juanita Neville-Te Rito

**Managing Director, RX  
(New Zealand and Australia)**

With more than 30 years of retail and CX experience, Juanita is founder and managing director of RX—a retail innovation and strategic growth practice. Drawing on her many years as a C-suite retailer and with unerring energy and enthusiasm, Juanita is passionate about raising the bar by creating experiences that connect with shoppers' hearts, minds and wallets. Juanita and her RX team make it their job to go out, explore and interpret innovative and evolving retail strategies, creating an atmosphere that will attract customers to cross the lease-line and convert shoppers into buyers.

**Learn more at [rxgroup.co.nz](https://rxgroup.co.nz)**

“People are seeking value propositions, so you need to offer them something different or exciting in a retail experience.”

Scott Kohno

Scott Kohno is an entrepreneur and an expert in retail marketing and the creation of unique, identifiable retail environments that build corporate brands.



# Experiential Retailing and Creating Community

by Michelle Hespe

SCOTT KOHNO

We talk to *gia* expert juror and entrepreneur Scott Kohno, about some of the big trends that have shaped retail, including some that can be easily and inexpensively implemented.

Ultimately, people shop for things that they need, or things that they want, because they believe that their purchases serve a purpose or will improve their lives in some way. And so, at a time when the cost of living is soaring and many countries are experiencing conflict and economic uncertainty, retailers have to work that much harder to entice customers to spend their hard-earned money.

## Value propositions and experiential shopping

"It's understandable that in times like this, when the cost of living is increasing and there is global uncertainty around the economy, that value is at the top of everyone's minds," says *gia* expert juror Scott Kohno. "People are seeking value propositions, so you need to offer them something different or exciting in a retail experience."

A value proposition is more than just the description of a product or a service that you are offering your customers. It's also the solution that your business provides, and the promise of value that customers can expect from your company.

**Scott uses American grocery store Trader Joe's as an example. "Trader Joe's is great at offering value propositions. They have products at affordable prices, but they are also creative and fun," he says.**

The value propositions at Trader Joe's are many and varied: They've built a reputation upon offering customers a fun shopping experience, the staff are chatty and happy, there are handwritten signs and explainers on how to pick, use or cook foods. They have experiential, short-run products that make shopping for groceries a treasure hunt, and they have Trader Joe's branded products from quality brands, at cheaper prices.

*Continued...*



TRADER JOES, SHUTTERSTOCK



NIKE STORE CHICAGO



"Trader Joe's offers customers a fun, better shopping experience, that does not cost them more," Scott says. "People shop there for the nice experience and welcoming atmosphere."

**Scott notes that experiential shopping is trending again. "The first Nike Town launched 30 years ago, and today this kind of experiential shopping is back big time," he says.**

The new Nike Chicago is making waves with its interactive design and digital experiences, and its focus on community. Customers can enjoy cutting-edge technology and immersive storytelling with things such as augmented reality displays of iconic Chicago landmarks and institutions, and the store has introduced an array of community-based initiatives with the goal of encouraging human connection and a sense of community. There are regular events, workshops and classes, with everything from yoga and meditation classes to basketball skills training and even sports memorabilia collecting.

On a trip to Japan recently, Scott also noticed this trend in Shibuya, Tokyo, where customers could become a part of the famous anime Slam Dunk (a Japanese manga series themed around basketball) by using virtual reality glasses at the country's first pop-up "Slam Dunk" store.

"It's all about engaging the customer in the experience, and then they might buy something," he says. "Either way, they've enjoyed themselves and will talk about your store."

### Creating community

Scott notes that there has been a swing back to customers wanting a sense of community. "Even millennials are now wanting to meet in person," he says. "Gen Z has returned to catching up with friends and hanging out at malls. And malls in general, are cool again."

Scott's family business and store in Los Angeles – Yama Sushi Marketplace – is all about creating a sense of community while offering fresh fish and many other products associated with Japanese food. Yama Seafood was established in 1980 by local legend Kenzo Yamada as a unique Japanese sashimi and sushi store. When Scott and his team joined forces with the company it was already an institution, but it has since become a remarkable example of not just a multi-faceted, multiplatform retail business but also a solid, welcoming community.

"We did not want to alienate the existing customers, but also wanted the customers who had stopped coming to return, and entice new ones," he explains. "We slowly and methodically changed each and every part of the store, making it brighter, adding new merchandise such as sauces and Japanese beers, improving the ordering and processing of sushi and more."



"It's all about engaging the customer in the experience, and then they might buy something. Either way, they've enjoyed themselves and will talk about your store."

Scott Kohno

Scott's wife Wendy headed up the "Iranai Mono" ("that's not necessary" in Japanese language) part of the business, stocking the most unusual, interesting products that are hard to find anywhere else; his daughter Remi, who works in marketing for TikTok, spearheaded the marketing, creating highly engaging social media and marketing campaigns.

Gradually Yama Sushi Marketplace became a community of like-minded people, and today Scott is proud to say that some people come back every day and many consider it their favorite place. "We even call ourselves the home team, because we are like a home to so many people, to the community."

### Sustainability and leveraging AI

Scott also mentions the need to work on sustainability, with new laws and regulations regularly arising to ensure that businesses are doing the right thing for their customers, as well as the environment.

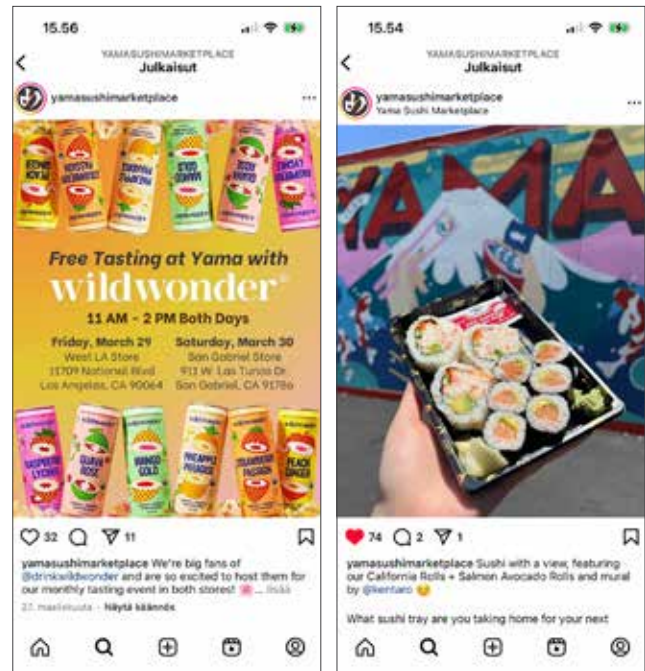
"Retailers now are forced to participate in particular sustainability programs and initiatives and as everyone knows it adds costs; there are huge logistical challenges that come with complying with everything," Scott explains.

"However, I know that by doing these things it means we are respecting our community and showing that we're actively involved in making things better for everyone. And then people in the community also have respect for you, and this creates a harmony between retailers and customers, and the environment."

The final trend that Scott has noticed is the adoption of AI, but he laughs at the notion that AI will take over the world. "What AI does for us is help with menial tasks, much like a computer does," Scott says.

**"It can help us to work out how much sushi we need to get through until we close for instance, as it's great with data and variables, such as how many people usually come and what is bought on which day. It will be a huge asset for manufacturers."**

He does warn that relying too heavily on AI will be bad for business because whatever AI can abstract from the Internet is already out there. "It comes down to competition," he says. "If you rely on AI for everything and your competitors don't, then they will be more innovative than you." | •



YAMA SUSHI MARKETPLACE, INSTAGRAM



KUREMO, SHUTTERSTOCK

“In our rapidly evolving digital world, there's a strong desire for more 'real' experiences.”

Anne Kong

Anne Kong is an educator and designer specializing in Visual Merchandising, Exhibition Design and Special Events.



SQUISHABLE@FIT EXHIBIT

# New Trends to Inspire and Intrigue

by Michelle Hespe

ANNE KONG

We speak to *gia* expert juror and design educator Anne Kong about some exciting new trends that might inspire or at least intrigue retailers – some of them born from the lifestyles of brash, bold Gen Zs, who seem intent on disrupting every industry out there.

## Kidult novelties, newstalgia & sustainability

If you haven't yet heard of "Kidult" novelties, they're a genre of television programs, films or games intended to appeal to both children and adults. The products are based upon nostalgia, which has always been a good tactic for pulling on someone's emotions and enticing a purchase.

"It's a thrilling blend of food fads, iconic TV shows and the comeback of beloved characters, all mixed with gaming, comics and legendary storybook heroes that are trending," says Anne, also pointing out that a spin-off from this trend is Newstalgia, which is all about making what's old new again.

"A generation that once carefully curated their environment has matured, shifting toward valuing keepsakes and meaningful decor over trends," she says. "Gen Z leads this movement – using bold, unconventional décor for self-expression."

Anne also notes that TikTok "thriftfluencers" and design studios are playfully blending vintage and modern elements, creating a vibrant sense of newstalgia that mixes past and present.

**"Sustainability is key here, with repair culture gaining mainstream appeal as people embrace timeless, eclectic styles and prioritize comfort through cherished, long-lasting items," says Anne. "Hence the popularity of thrift nostalgia – which can be utilized by retailers in the form of props to complement displays in-store and online."**

## Brand takeovers, collaborations & breaking out

Anne noted that recently brand takeovers and collaborative retail spaces have become a dynamic trend. "I'm seeing multiple brands join forces to create immersive, multi-dimensional shopping experiences," she says. "These collaborations go beyond traditional partnerships, blending the identities, products and cultures of different brands into a unified, interactive space that resonates with consumers."

A great example of this is a collaboration between Louis Vuitton and Arabica Coffee in a pop-up offering in the 798 Art District in Beijing. Visitors were invited to "Experience the fusion of travel and coffee at Louis Vuitton's Beijing Fun limited-time space." The collaboration followed the philosophies for both brands: "The journey is life itself" for Louis Vuitton and "See the world through coffee" for Arabica.

However, the space was designed in mainly red, which is out of character for Arabica – it normally adopts white-based aesthetics – and it also diverged from LV's signature pairings of brown and gold. The use of red successfully united the two brands, Beijing-style.

Another trend that Anne has seen is companies breaking out of their usual product categories and offering something special to their followers.

*Continued...*



ARABICA COFFEE & LOUIS VUITTON COLLABORATION



AUNTIE ANNE'S FRAGRANCE, KNEAD

For instance, Auntie Anne's is a famous American chain of pretzel shops. The company is known for its pretzels, dips and beverages, and yet in August it released a limited-edition, pretzel-scented fragrance called Knead. Created by popular perfume house Demeter, the scent ensures that wearers smell like a freshly baked Auntie Anne's pretzel. Interestingly, the company gave away bottles to guests at a New York event, and now they are selling online for hundreds of dollars.

### Creative chaos is trending

Gen Z is at it again, causing chaos wherever they go. But seriously, chaos is trending.

According to the Worth Global Style Network (WGSN) – "Chaos is emerging within youth culture and across our social media feeds. WGSN Insight explores its role in marketing and branding across industries from fashion to food and drink, which is energizing a numb, nihilistic global group of young consumers."

"You can see the trend in cooking too," says Anne. "Unlike Millennial comfort content creators who tend to showcase orderly and organized cooking with curated recipes, Gen Z is embracing the opposite approach."

Anne points out that chaos cooking actually emerged as a new genre of content in 2023, but is now gaining momentum. "Creators such as Canadian based @flora\_chaos and @emilydubious from the UK started showcasing abstract fusion recipes, with disorderly cooking methods," Anne says. "This type of cooking has amassed more than 114.3 million views on TikTok and is ripe for brand integration."

Australia got in on the chaotic action too. "Iconic Australian snack brand Twisties leaned on chaos cooking to showcase how it made a Twisties cheese sandwich, with fans showing off their own creations," she says. One fan said: "I put Twisties, mozzarella, herbs and salami in a bowl and then put it in the microwave."

Delish. Chaotic cooking at its finest.

Anne notes that restaurants are jumping on the trend too, with U.S. Indian fusion restaurant Chauhan Ale & Masala House in Tennessee combining Indian and Mexican flavors in its Desi Walking Taco. The dish is a mix of Kurkure chips topped with vindaloo pork keema, queso fresco, kachumbar and tamarind chutney, served in Kurkure chip packaging, which draws on comfort food and content.

**"It's basically shock value being used under a new name," Anne says.**

### Color & maximalism

A trend that Anne noticed at The Inspired Home Show last March was exhibitors adopting displays saturated in solid colors – thus maximizing the impact. This goes against the usual approach of having complementary hues blending into one another, or blocks of colors to segment areas and products.

"Color maximization is definitely a trend," Anne says. "We know color has a profound psychological impact on consumers, and by maximizing the method in which we use color in a display of products or the design of a space, you can establish an 'identity color' that goes beyond the abilities of brand logos and assets," she says. "I see it as brands weaponizing color to amplify their visual messaging."



ANNE KONG

"Luxury brands laid the groundwork for this striking trend by inviting shoppers into tinted spaces flooded with various shades of color – pop-up shops, store windows and brand experiences. The concept aims to shock viewers with heavily saturated environments that contrast merchandise. Products magically pop in these spaces and take on a surreal, theatrical presence. It certainly promotes a double take."

### Collaborating with AI, and top tips for retailers

"Our natural talents come with a depth of emotion and personal experience that is hard for AI to replicate," says Anne. "Rather than replacing human talent, AI can serve as a powerful tool that enhances creativity."

**"AI can handle repetitive tasks, generate new ideas based on vast amounts of aggregated data and even inspire us by offering unexpected combinations or solutions. In this way, AI acts as a collaborator, expanding the possibilities for those who embrace it."**

As they say, where there are challenges, there are opportunities.

"In our rapidly evolving digital world, there's a strong desire for more 'real' experiences," Anne says.

"As we have been deeply influenced by the digital realm, our appetite for these experiences (and our expectations) has only grown. In fact, 70% of global consumers want to feel part of something bigger than themselves. This means we need to continue immersing shoppers in awe-inspiring experiences."

## Anne Kong's Top Tips on Collaborating with AI

### 1. AI-DRIVEN DESIGN TOOLS

AI can assist visual merchandisers in creating innovative and visually striking displays by generating design suggestions, color schemes and layout options based on trends, customer preferences and brand identity.

### 2. ACTIVE CONTENT

In digital displays, AI can adjust content in real-time based on who is viewing it, ensuring that the right products and messages are shown to the right audience at the right time.

### 3. SMART DISPLAYS

AI-powered displays can interact with customers, providing personalized recommendations, answering questions and even assisting with the checkout process. These smart displays create a more engaging and seamless shopping experience, and can include the use of robots.

### 4. VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY

AI can power VR and AR experiences that allow customers to visualize products in different settings or see how they fit within their own space, adding an interactive layer to traditional displays. | •



AI GENERATED STORE, ADOBESTOCK



AI GENERATED STORE, ADOBESTOCK

“It’s important to stress that the biggest loyalty drive in retail is – and has always been – service.”

Henrik Peter Reisby Nielsen

Henrik Peter Reisby Nielsen is an entrepreneur, former award-winning retailer of *gia* and the CEO of Reisby Consult.



THIS IMAGE WAS CREATED BY HENRIK PETER REISBY NIELSEN WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF DALL-E 2

# Trending in Retail: Culture, Technology and Regulation

by Michelle Hespe

HENRIK PETER REISBY NIELSEN

From blending culture and retail to utilizing new tech and AI, we speak to *gia* expert juror Henrik Peter Reisby Nielsen about some of the biggest retail trends.

## Blending culture and retail

Culture is defined as the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular group of people or society, and so it makes sense that most people find the exploration of someone else's culture interesting, and even exciting.

Henrik has noticed that today many retailers are injecting culture into their retail offerings, as it gives the shopping experience a deeper dimension, stirring interest and emotions in customers.

"The understanding of what drives local markets, and understanding local culture, are big advantages for small town retailers," says Henrik. "Small retailers have the ability to customize their portfolio of services and product ranges better than the one-size fits-all store concepts that some of the bigger operators apply. The culture of the place where your store is, or your own culture, can be easily mixed into your offerings."

Henrik noted that some of the 2024 *gia* winners mix culture and retail.

"The French *gia* winner – Maison Empereur – offers customers a heartfelt, cultural journey through their museum-like store," he says. "They not only share their own family history and French culture in the store, but also the culture of the many artisans whose products are on display."

Henrik also says that including cultural elements and events into a shopping experience can be executed far better in old downtown precincts or interesting shopping strips, rather than in shopping malls, which tend to be more bland.

"Posting your activities and offerings online are much more authentic and likable at a coffee shop or cafe in a historical downtown, rather than at a large chain shopping mall," he points out. "On a larger town level, creating a cluster of retailers with a range of cultural offerings in an interesting area paves the way for a lot of traffic to your store."



MAISON EMPEREUR, FRANCE

*Continued...*



MAISON EMPEREUR, FRANCE

"Then you need to entice the customers into your store, and you can do that with merchandise, music, scent, etc. that captures your brand and your culture. Your facade is the image that you send out on to the street, causing people to stop up and giving them a strong reason to enter your store."

### Service is always king, but tech has power

"It's important to stress that the biggest loyalty drive in retail is – and has always been – service," Henrik says. "The service offered around a purchase is key to ensuring that your customers turn into ambassadors and spread the reasons as to why others should go to your store."

This is not a new trend, but what is new, is the ability to utilize AI and other automated actions with new technology, to handle issues that may arise during a retail experience.

**"Handling situations well, where things did not go as planned for a customer, is a huge trigger in creating customer loyalty," says Henrik. "Because if you solve a problem and thus make someone's life easier, the customer doesn't blame you, but rather – the product. If you handle a problem for a customer well, they will prefer to buy products in your store, because they feel safe."**

Henrik explains that new technology and AI can assist retailers with processes needed to help their customers. "It is also getting easier and cheaper to access and embed new technology into your daily business operations," he says.

Henrik mentions another *gia* winner who successfully integrated new technology into their offerings. "F.S. Kustermann of Germany used a drone to fly through the store, and created a short film showing off the thousands of products there," he says. "That video gives viewers thousands of reasons to visit the store."

Henrik recommends that retailers learn how to tell the stories behind their store and the products using fairly cheap and simple technology. "Let technology bring product stories to life in your store and in your customers' homes," he says.

### Metauniverses and a brave new world

When Henrik was in Chicago for The Inspired Home Show, he visited Google's headquarters and the Apple store, where he played with Apple Vision Pro.

"Both of those companies create solutions that will define the way we interact with each other, retailers and brands in a near future," he says.

"They will create usable metaverses (aka virtual worlds) that will allow us to shop and experience things together, regardless of the distance between us. So, it's now that you need to decide how you want to meet, greet and interact with your customers in a digital universe that will most likely be part of your physical store design soon, regardless of your size."

Henrik believes it will allow big concepts to be presented in small, high-end places.

"I expect we'll see companies such as IKEA, Best Buy etc. launching concepts with in-store interactive solutions," he says. "You will see, feel, touch, customize things in person, with the help of a skilled employee (in or out of the metaverse), and then you can have the product shipped or you will collect it a few days later."





THIS IMAGE WAS CREATED BY HENRIK PETER REISBY NIELSEN WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF DALL·E 2

### Quality over quantity, and the thrift movement

Around 2020, “cancel culture” started trending. Basically, if a well-known person or celebrity did something unethical or wrong in the eyes of fans, they were metaphorically dumped. Henrik has noticed that this trend is now emerging in retail but is more formally called reputation and risk management, falling under ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance).

**“Soon there will be a demand to prove the social and environmental burden your services and products generate and how they are produced,” he says. “Hotels and restaurants will experience the impact first, but I have no doubt that this will be crucial for retailers and manufacturers as well.”**

Henrik also strongly feels that companies such as the giant Chinese retailer Temu need to be more heavily regulated. “We need to stop our reliance on China and supporting companies with unacceptable working conditions,” he says.

Henrik points out that younger generations of shoppers are appreciating and seeking quality products that have longevity, and this has led to another growing trend of buying second-hand products, or having your favorite products repaired rather than replaced.

“Thrift stores are now popping up in popular shopping precincts on the main streets rather than being hidden away,” Henrik says. “They are cool again, because more and more people want to buy products that will last.” | •



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“People still want to be social, and need positivity and good feelings in their lives, this is something that I think will never change.”

Wolfgang Gruschwitz

Wolfgang Gruschwitz is the owner and managing director of the Gruschwitz Corporation, which offers full-service retail store design and visual merchandising expertise to retailers.



# Retail with Purpose

by Michelle Hespe

WOLFGANG GRUSCHWITZ

Despite so many of us now spending so much of our lives online, *gia* expert juror Wolfgang Gruschwitz believes that emotions, real-world experiences and creating a sense of happiness for customers remain paramount to success.

## Let's get phygital

One of the biggest trends that Wolfgang has seen is based upon a term now being used regularly in the marketing world: phygital. Soon it will also be a common term in retail.

Phygital is much like it sounds – the seamless merging of the physical and digital world, with the aim of uniting the best parts of a physical/bricks and mortar customer experience with the instant gratification that comes with digital reality.

If retailers want to develop a successful phygital strategy, they need to understand that the new generation of shoppers has a “right-here-right-now” mentality. They want things instantly. Post-Covid, older gens are also now accustomed to expecting things quickly, as they're programmed to making things happen at the click of a button.

For retailers, a first step into being phygital is ensuring that your website reflects your store, and that it's just as easy to shop in both.

**“Other methods of going phygital can be introducing virtual reality shopping, or more simply, offering customers a personalized shopping experience with a staff member over video,” Wolfgang explains. “Customers should feel as though they are right there in your store, being served in person. The main thing is – the customer wants and needs to feel connected. It's still about emotions and being human.”**

*Continued...*



PHOTOS:  
KAERLY STUDIOS, MUNICH, GERMANY  
CONCEPTION, PLANNING AND REALIZATION: GRUSCHWITZ GMBH  
PHOTOS: BCM INTERIOR DESIGN GMBH



“We are still human beings living in a real world, in a social society, and we still need touch, scent and interaction with others. So, retailers still need to offer that warm welcome and fun, interesting experiences to engage customers.”

Wolfgang also notes that with Apple Vision Pro glasses set to launch in 2027, the phygital trend will gain more momentum. It's Apple's first spatial computer that seamlessly blends digital content with your physical space, using revolutionary technology.

#### **Modular environments and enticing the locals**

As Wolfgang works with many of his clients on the physical build of stores, one trend he has noted that he thinks is here to stay is modular spaces.

“Retailers don't necessarily want a big store these days, but they do want a space that lasts. By implementing a modular system, they can still evolve and change things without having to move on to another space,” he says, adding that it's also a more sustainable approach, as you're not knocking everything down and starting again when you want a new look or a different approach.

Many retailers across Europe and beyond also want to be able to create spaces within their store for food and drink offerings, to ensure that they are creating a welcoming space for locals to gather and enjoy.

“Localism and creating a sense of community are also trends, and many retailers want to offer food and beverage experiences that draw people in and make them feel a part of a community,” Wolfgang says.

#### **Health, wellbeing, accessibility and inclusivity**

No matter what sector you work in, health, wellbeing and accessibility are now crucial parts of a business rather than trends, but recently Gen Z, in particular, has really pushed the wellbeing/mental health movement and the right to a work/life balance.

“The trend is pushing the wellbeing approach further, with businesses having things such as places to meditate, somewhere to pause and take a break. Some places are now introducing animals such as cats for example, for people to pet, to make them feel good.”

With new laws being introduced across the world around work/life balance, retailers will also have to adapt to not being able to call staff out of hours.

#### **Personalization of low-priced products**

Another trend that Wolfgang has noticed that's related to the rapid rise of AI is personalization of low-priced, easy-to-make products. Recently he came across a pop-up studio where customers could ask AI to design a flowerpot.

“They might then try 50 different versions of this flowerpot – adjusting it as they go, making it fresher, different colors, adding polka dots or another design,” he explains. “When they are happy, they press print, the computer sends the design to the 3D printer, and they can go and have a coffee while their



personalized flowerpot is made. In this way, people can get personalized low-priced, easy-to-make homewares.”

This begs the question – does this kind of technology combined with AI mean the end of designers and artists as we know it? And will people then simply design their own pieces and make them in their own homes with their own 3D printing machines?

“There have always been reproductions, fakes if you like, but some people will still want originals,” says Wolfgang. “Some might want a flowerpot signed by a famous artist for instance, because that would make it more special to them.”

### Social responsibility, positivity and happiness

Another trend that Wolfgang has noticed globally, is companies aiming to be more socially responsible and giving back to those in need. He uses American shoe store Toms as an example, whose founder Blake Mycoskie pioneered the “One of One” retail model in 2006. Basically, the business gives away one pair of shoes for every pair sold to support larger health, education and community development programs through strategic partnerships.

“More and more retail companies are now giving back and spreading positivity,” says Wolfgang, pointing out another great trend is companies encouraging happiness and the spreading of kindness and support for others.

A great example of this is Coca-Cola’s marketing campaign launched during the Paris Olympics last August, that included a global multi-channel advertising campaign celebrating the power of hugs, with an Olympic anthem performed by Gwen Stefani and Anderson Paak.

“People still want to be social, and need positivity and good feelings in their lives,” says Wolfgang. “This is something that I think will never change.” | •



# The Do and Don'ts of Social Media Marketing with AI

by Michelle Hespe



We speak to Clean My Space founder and content creator Melissa Maker about savvy ways you can utilize and implement AI, some great associated tools and some things to avoid while you learn the ropes.

**Artificial Intelligence research actually began in 1956 at a workshop in Dartmouth College, Germany, but it wasn't until the early 2000s that data collection truly boomed. Fast forward to 2023 with 250 million people using AI.**

It is expected that by 2030 there will be 700 million AI users, and by the end of 2024, more than 8 billion digital voice assistants.

Clean My Space YouTuber and content creator Melissa Maker has more than 2.1 million followers on YouTube and across social media; one thing she knows is that like it or not, the time to start leaning into AI is now not later.

"It is moving at such breakneck speed that if you don't become an early adopter, you will be left behind because your competitors will be using it. And it can offer extraordinary levels of efficiency," Melissa says.

Here are some dos and don'ts from Melissa to help you take your first steps on the journey of incorporating AI into your business.

## MAKE ROOM FOR AI IN YOUR LIFE

Melissa admits that she has not completely thrown herself into AI yet, as she, like most retailers out there, has a full-time job running a business.

"I'm adopting and experimenting with AI – seeing what works for my business," she says. "For those who are not social media and marketing experts, you just need to make space for AI in your life. The good news is there are so many tools out there to assist you, that you can gradually integrate elements of AI into your work-flows."

Melissa recommends choosing a few basic AI programs to begin with, such as Fireflies.ai. "This program helps you to transcribe, summarize and analyze meetings," she says.

"You simply take the notes from the meeting and feed them into Chat GPT. Then you can ask Chat GPT to pull out some great points from the transcription for social media posts, and then feed them into social media scheduling programs such as Hoot Suite or Later."

Melissa also uses AI for making research more efficient. "Use it for trend forecasting," she says. "For instance, upload a whitepaper to Chat GPT, and ask it to summarize the top five most salient trends in your sector right now. By feeding it the whitepaper, you're uploading information into a brain [AI being the brain], and then asking it to do things with the information. It can summarize, analyze, cull and truncate. It's a wonderful way to interact with information in ways we have not been able to before, and in record time."

Melissa warns that you must prompt AI correctly. "This cannot be under-valued," she says. "The responses you get are equal to your input. Don't be vague or broad, or you won't get good output. Do be precise in the information you feed AI."

## TRAIN AI TO UNDERSTAND YOUR BUSINESS FOR GREAT CONTENT IDEAS

Melissa says that one of the first steps you should take is teaching AI to understand your business. "You need to feed Chat GPT everything you have about your business so that it knows your company. Basically, you are training AI to reflect you," she says.

"You can feed AI your mission statement, white papers that relate to your industry, your biography and your style guide. Remember, AI only has what you give it, and the more you teach it about your business, the more it knows what kind of content it should be creating."

Melissa also explains that before you ask Chat GPT for something, you should explain who you are. For instance, you can start by telling it something like: "You are a 35-year-old retailer specializing in Tupperware. You are a mother of three and you have a quirky sense of style. You live in New York and your store is all about community."



IMAGES CREATED BY MELISSA MAKER WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF DALL-E

Once you have done this, you can then prompt Chat GPT to produce ideas for you.

"For instance, I might say 'Give me 50 ideas for social posts that would be good for my cleaning company, Clean My Space. I create funny, relatable posts to help people clean,'" Melissa says.

"Chat GPT will give you 50 ideas, and most of them might be bad to start with. Ten of them might be okay, so you can then play with those and refine them. A few might be brilliant, and you can use them. Then you can tell Chat GPT what the good ones were, and ask for another 50 more like them and so on."

**Even if you don't use the ideas as they are, the results will all be great thought starters. "AI can help you to get a fresh perspective on anything," Melissa says.**

#### USE PROGRAMS IN CONJUNCTION WITH AI

Once you have your 50 ideas or concepts for great posts, Melissa explains that you can then use other programs and tools such as one that focuses on colors, photos or illustrations, and you can use popular programs such as Canva.

"Canva has a Bulk Create tool so you can take your Chat GPT generated one-liners, put them into a Google sheet, import them into Canva, choose a few backgrounds, use the Bulk Create tool and then insert your imagery," she says. "Then schedule posts for a month or more. It's so quick it's crazy!"

As anyone who has used AI for producing photography has seen, it tends to come across as tacky, weird or just not quite right.

"I don't like AI imagery as it is now, so don't use it if you want realistic photography," Melissa says. "It has a long way to go before it looks like professional photography."

Melissa is amazed by how many tools are out there to help people master AI-generated or AI-assisted content. For those working in video, she recommends CapCut, which is a video editor that incorporates some AI features that are fun to experiment with, such as script creation and can even create a video and script from the video clips and images you provide.

Melissa also mentions Opus.ai, which is a program into which you can feed one long video, and then ask it to create 10 clips that you can use in Reels or on TikTok.

"You won't get Hollywood-style editing right now, but you'll get something visually appealing that you can use as smaller clips for social posts," she says.

"With some of these AI programs, you can do script-to-video or video-to-script," she explains. "For example, you can film yourself showing off a new baking pan and explain its features, and then ask AI to turn that into script. Or you can write the script and ask AI to turn the script into video."

Munch is another program that Melissa recommends experimenting with, which is an AI video repurposing platform that helps users to extract the most engaging and impactful clips from their long-form video.

Melissa explains how AI can help you to generate captions, long form stories or even choose art to go with your content.

Melissa recommends not using the free platforms of programs if you are going to invest your time and energy in them, but to use better versions where you pay a small subscription. "You will not get the same results if you use the free versions of programs or platforms," she says.

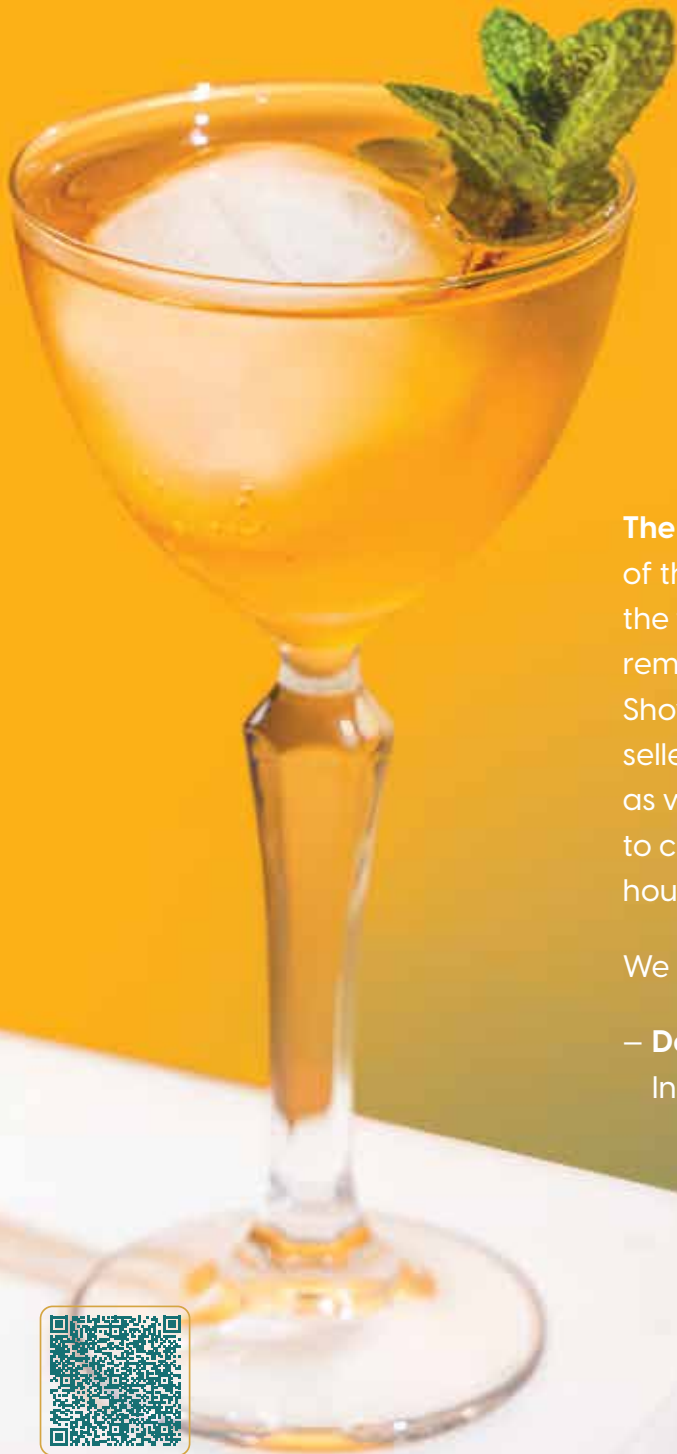
**As with any marketing on any platforms, follow the rules.**

"Don't post anything created with AI without first researching and understanding the regulations for your region and the platforms that you are posting on," she warns. "Do your research, as more regulations are being put in place around AI."

**Melissa stresses that it's best to start experimenting now.**

"Do get out there and educate yourself," she says. "There are plenty of ways to get some experience and education such as local colleges and online tutorials. Look into what courses are available in your community, or hire someone to show you. AI is here to stay, so it's best to rip the plaster off now and get started." | •

# WHERE THE INDUSTRY CONNECTS AROUND **INNOVATION** AND **INSPIRATION**



**The Inspired Home Show 2025** will be the 125th edition of the trade show. Although much has changed since the first event was held in 1939, one quality that has remained consistent throughout the decades is the Show's dedication to bringing high-quality buyers and sellers together. In March, we will celebrate our past as well as our future as we continue to evolve in order to create the most productive and vibrant home + housewares marketplace possible.

We look forward to seeing you in Chicago, 2-4 March!

– **Derek Miller**, President & CEO,  
International Housewares Association



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