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By William C. Altreuter and Catherine Berlin



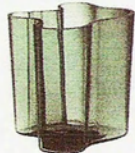
iTouchless Fresh Sealer



We employ a two-track system for fruit and vegetable storage at our house. Delicate leafy greens go in the ironically named "crisper" drawer of the refrigerator, where they decay into unrecognizable mush; harder things like apples, lemons, or green peppers sit in a bowl on the counter and gradually desiccate until they approximate Fiji Island shrunken heads. This appliance, which resembles Lenin's crypt, actually serves sort of the same purpose for the latter and is said to be useful for bread, too. Sadly, although it did prevent my leftover baguette from becoming stale overnight, it did so at the cost of the bread's crust, which sogged out. Further study is needed in the field of baguette preservation, or perhaps I need a Frenchman on a *bicyclette* to deliver bread and pastries every morning. For fruit my problems are now solved. This thing really does keep fruit fresher longer, great news for my daughters, who were tired of apple head dolls every birthday, especially after they turned eighteen. \$69.95.

Flower Vases

Flower arranging is hard. Anyone who has ever entered the Creative Arts Building at the Erie County Fair to see the area garden clubbers' flower arrangement competitions soon learns that color burst and floral spontaneity demands a studied and steady hand. Mom's advice of using odd numbers of parts and remembering to rotate the vase pretty much only got me good at vase spinning. Being purposefully loose was impossible, until this year, apparently, when I suddenly created a table-worthy arrangement in a traditional vase. My theory? A few years ago I gave up and switched to asymmetrical vases where it seemed that the only thing I could do was drop in the flowers and, like a game of pick-up-sticks, see how they fell. All this falling must have loosened me up and got me seeing in three dimensions. Featured here is the Aalto vase, by Finnish designer Alvo Aalto. For over seventy years, the vase shape has been reminding people of other things, like parts of the inner ear or a potter's wheel cave-in, but it helps one make art



with flowers of any size and any length. Visit aalto.com to see all the varieties, many available locally. From \$100 to \$350. A steady stream of fresh cut flowers isn't always available, practical, or in one's budget. Working with silk flowers (we're told that Michaels is the place to go for the artificial) opens up more options with vase ware, such as this Portuguese piece from Chochkey's. The vase doesn't hold water, but its dual openings and bar across the top are exactly the kind of design that lends itself to experimentation. From \$110. 798 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo, 882-0052.

Fire Extinguishers

"Whoa," our seven-year-old tester said, a full octave lower and lasting several seconds longer than her usual vocalization, after she figured out how to squeeze the lever and release a burst of halotron from the HalGuard fire extinguisher. The force from the initial burst pushed her back just enough to add to her excitement. We weren't so sure that teaching a youngster how to use one of these things was the right thing to do—it seems hugely counter to the smarter, "See fire and run," but we used and abused her in the name of science. We wanted to see if she could follow the instructions on the side of the canister and whether she had the hand strength to work the lever.

Why the focus on fire extinguishers? True, we don't get much trouble from Santa Ana winds, but given our use of fireplace inserts, habit of barbecuing in the garage, the street-salt-induced need for DIY auto-body repair, and love of chicken wings and deep fryers, fire happens. Peter Arnell, designer of the HomeHero extinguisher, tells us that people don't have fire extinguishers because they are ugly. But that doesn't quite fly, given the abundance of Rubbermaid waste receptacles and oversized 1990s-era refrigerators. Maybe people don't have fire extinguishers because they reckon they'll never use one, but then explain all the kitchen space devoted to untouched espresso machines and cookbooks. Whatever the reason, it's ridiculous not to have plenty of fire-fighting units, so we explored three super-performers that just happen to be good looking enough to overcome any excuse.

YOR Custom Fire Extinguishers

The days of "Any color you want, as long



as it is red," are over, but only just. YOR is the sole Underwriters Laboratory-listed company that can produce a custom fire extinguisher with any type of artwork applied

to the exterior. YOR's goal is to bring extinguishers out from behind cupboard doors so that they are there when needed, faster, and its canisters can boast a family photo, a company logo, an artistic design, heck, even leopard skin if that's what it will take. Our favorites are those patterned after stone and wood grain to blend in with counter tops and furniture.

YOR's extinguishers are multiclass, which means that they take on different types of fires. Specifically, YOR extinguishes A (wood and paper), B (liquids such as gasoline and grease), and C (electrical equipment) type fires, smothering flames with powdery ammonium phosphate. The user pulls the pin, points the canister nozzle at the base of the fire, and squeezes the handle. It's about as uncomplicated as a garden hose pistol-style nozzle and needs only that amount of squeeze effort. Having never used an extinguisher before, we were expecting it to come out like hair styling mousse. Instead, the unit with the sophisticated marble-design exterior released a cloud-stream that instantly looked like a hard-working fog machine at a hair-band concert. The user is directed to stand eight feet back from the

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fire, which is a good thing because the chemical shoots out far and wide. Units retail at about \$150 to \$200; www.yorextinguisher.com for info.

H3R Performance

H3R's HalGuard would make Tim the Tool Man proud and anyone else who finds comfort in chrome. The canisters are shiny and tough the way cars used to be and comes with a mounting bracket. Then there was the whole power-thing. It totally impressed us with a fast, far, and wide

kick-out, looking mist-like for a split second before turning into a fog machine.

But that's not even the best part of this extinguisher. The HalGuard is loaded up with a clean agent, something called Halotron 1 / HMS 1-0-1 (it's not like we really know what ammonium phosphate is, either) that doesn't leave a residue, is safe for paints and electronics, and easier to clean up than dry chemical agents.

H3R promises that the extinguisher "will not conduct electricity back to the operator." We never even thought of the Three Stooges imagery associated with putting a toaster fire out with water and having a wall-based lightning bolt blow us out the kitchen windows, although kids would probably like it. Actually, all three of these extinguishers protect the user from electric shock. The HalGuard is rated for B (liquids) and C (electrical) fires, and A fires in the larger sizes. The 1 and 2.5 pound units will extinguish small A-type fires, but not effectively enough to make the grade—a trade-off for going clean and protecting electrical components. Prices for the HalGuard range from \$105 to \$265; visit www.H3RPerformance.com for more information.

HomeHero

This is the extinguisher that got us experimenting, and its design raised many comments: What's to stop me from grabbing the coffee carafe by mistake in a frenzied panic? Does it contain anything that works? Are my kids going to know what to do besides think it is part of our wireless internet system and, for the love of Facebook, take it outside to save it from the fire? It's all fair comment. When we look at the HalGuard we think, "No matter what confronts

us, this baby's gonna help." When we look at the HomeHero we expect to push the discharge button down and hear nothing but that sound that comes from the nozzle of an empty shaving foam can. The HomeHero is a dry chemical unit, as is the YOR, but unlike the YOR, it is rated only for B and C-type fires. Unlike the YOR and the HalGuard, the HomeHero must be thrown away after the first discharge, so don't even think about testing it. The label also advises, "When the extinguishing agent comes in contact with the fire, the fire will flare and appear to grow larger." Sure, it might be a common and temporary reaction, as the label continues, but, um, who knew? Good thing we read the tiny label print.



Otherwise, one flare up and the canister goes down, and we dive out the door.

On the other hand, it sure looks like the future. It won the Gold 2007 International Design Excellence Awards in Consumer Products. And never mind the little faux pas in violating the contest rules by not actually being available on the market at the time. It now has an exclusive arrangement with Home Depot. We were also relieved when our sample extinguisher arrived, because unlike the models used in the ads, there is an actual instruction label on the unit, placed in a way that helps distinguish it from a Philippe Starck water pitcher. It comes with an attractive mounting bracket and is discharged by the mere touch of a button on the top. Although the release stream seemed more direct, it did not have the same push or spread power of the YOR and the HalGuard. In fact, of the three units, the individual is instructed to stand closest to the fire with the HomeHero. This makes us wonder if the unit works best when the user is more composed and a better aim. Visit www.homedepot.com for info.

Towel-Matic Automatic Paper Towel Dispenser

W.C.A. says: Just the thing for people who feel as though their homes need more of the ambiance of a Thruway rest room or for germaphobes in general. The Towel-Matic has a built-in optical scanner that automatically identifies the perforations on the towel and stops right at the perforated line every time. It represents the application of a formidable amount of technology to a problem I was unaware even existed, but unfortunately does so at the cost of a problem I am acutely aware of—it takes up



counter space. Why this is not a wall mounted device is a mystery to me. I can't imagine the reason is because cats would walk under it, causing it to endlessly dispense paper towels.

Surely the sort of people who are concerned about touching the unused sheets of paper towel—or the dispenser—are not the sort of people who have cats walking on their counters in the first place.

C.B. says: Two in our household think this is a modern marvel, a model of inspiration, innovation, and execution. "Is there more documentation to review?" they wonder. "Do we have enough back-up D batteries?" they ask. "Watch this," they command, waving their hands in front of the infrared eye, over and over again. Two others have nicknamed it the "Ohshit" machine because that's the spontaneous verbal response when they set it off by mistake on the way to the microwave or coffee cup cupboard, and then dispense many more sheets trying to fix the mistake. (Who needs cats?) Some people have a deep connection with paper towels, and for them this is one great gadget. The two klutzes have learned to turn the machine off between uses, much to the consternation of the other two, but it is a solid solution, really, for a device that both comforts and promises to entertain the family for years. Can it ever get any better than that? \$69.95.