



## [Old Dog, New Tricks In Chicago](#)

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**By Duke Ratliff**

Despite my rapidly graying hair, I don't usually think of myself as particularly old.

The annual trek to Chicago for the International Home + Housewares Show, however, makes me acutely aware of the passage of time.

I attended my first housewares show nearly 20 years ago, and the annual event brings back a slew of memories of Chicago in January, long-gone executives and long-defunct companies.

I was thinking about all of those things on the always long drive from O'Hare to my hotel downtown. Another year, another Housewares Show.

But the 2011 Housewares Show was different. Maybe it was all of the innovative new products, or possibly the new marketing programs, or maybe it was the sights and sounds of business almost getting back to normal. It was probably all of these things that combined to make this year's show feel fresh and new.

A good example of the positive energy in McCormick Place—and the housewares category—could be found at the packed booth for SodaStream, the maker of home carbonation kits. The public company ("soda" on Nasdaq) sported a new booth approximately six times the size of its previous booth—nicely reflecting the company's rapid growth rate, according to CEO Daniel Birnbaum.

Show goers lined the SodaStream booth for free soda samples and couldn't help but hear the company's earth-friendly message about using fewer plastic bottles. The company even got a boost with an appearance from actress Susan Sarandon.

Forward-thinking housewares companies at the show unveiled new ways to market their products. Vendors of all types and sizes introduced packaging that featured Quick Response (QR) codes that can be scanned by smart phones to access information about the features and benefits of products. For instance, Lifetime Brands created a QR code loaded with info about its historic Pfaltzgraff brand, which is celebrating its 200th anniversary.

Cookware manufacturer Meyer unveiled marketing campaigns to target younger consumers. The company has released an app called Circulon Cooks, featuring cooking technique videos for preparing a variety of dishes.

Meyer also showed a unique i-Pad marketing campaign for its Anolon cookware which features a moving ad that will be seen in i-Pad issues of Vanity Fair, GQ and The New Yorker food issue.

Brabantia, best known for its steel trash cans, surprised the industry by entering the tabletop category. The European company's new assortment includes porcelain dinnerware, brushed cutlery and entertainment items such as napkin rings and candleholders.

New to the Housewares Show was Twin-Star Products, best known for its electric fireplaces. The company exhibited at McCormick Place mostly to show off its portable, Durafume-branded heaters.

Robert Welch Signature Knives was another first-time exhibitor. The Gloucestershire, England-based company is looking to expand into the U.S. market.

The International Housewares Association, the organizers of the show, said 21,000 buyers attended the event. That's a five percent increase over last year.

So thanks to the IHA and the housewares industry for an invigorating show. Like a shot of Grecian Formula, it touched up the gray a little.