



Time can be on your side with trendy time-saving appliances

By BARBARA MAYER
The Associated Press

Busy, busy, busy. This is the mantra of the world of two-career families with over-scheduled kids. Anything that saves time at home — chores, remodeling or decorating — has a ready market from these families.

“With two parents working, Americans are so time-crunched there’s a demand for anything that saves time — morning time, dinner time, any time,” said Jill Notini, spokeswoman for the American Home Appliance Manufacturers Association.

Ever helpful, the appliance industry has responded with timers and sensors that can cut minutes off cycles and improve convenience. For example, some new refrigerators have a speed-chill feature that can chill a bottle of white wine in three minutes and speed-set gelatin desserts.

High BTU burners on stoves boil water faster. Some washing machines extract more water from clothes so they dry faster. Some dishwashers automatically shorten the wash cycle when sensors reveal the dishes aren’t very dirty.

Having exhausted the simple ways to save time, the industry is digging deep for new ideas. Consider these:

■ Thermador markets a jet convection oven that roasts a four-pound chicken in 25 minutes and bakes a potato in 15 minutes.

■ KitchenAid’s “Briva” includes a small dishwasher in a two-basin kitchen sink, capable of washing about eight place settings.

“You can dishwash as you go, cleaning up as you prepare the meal,” said Stephen Duthie, spokesman for Whirlpool Corp., KitchenAid’s parent.

■ Whirlpool’s Polara range has a refrigeration feature so it can hold uncooked food at a safe temperature all day and cook it automatically so dinner is ready when everyone arrives home. The range stops cooking at a pre-arranged point so food doesn’t get overcooked if you’re held up in traffic.

How about remodeling the laundry room to include not only the usual washer and dryer, ironing board and deep sink but an appliance that deodorizes and dewrinkles clothes, saving the time needed to go to the dry cleaner?

Add appropriate decorating and a worktable and chairs for activities like homework and crafts, and you’ve created a so-called family studio where laundry chores can be done while passing quality time with the family. It’s a concept Whirlpool is promoting.

“Our market research shows consumers want to spend more quality time at home although

they have less time to be at home and just as many chores,” said Duthie. “So new appliances are focusing on satisfying the need for greater convenience and saving time.”

Just how fast can a remodeling project be completed? Try 48 hours. At least, that’s the premise of two surprise hits in the reality TV sweepstakes. Some 13 million viewers a week have been tuning in to “Trading Places” and “While You Were Out,” both shown on the TLC Network.

Both shows pair the element of surprise with speedy room or yard transformations that take place in the space of a weekend.

In “While You Were Out,” one householder has no idea of the project and arrives home to find something completely different. His or her amazement, pleasure or annoyance is captured for the entertainment of viewers.

“Besides the surprise, a huge appeal of the show is the rapidity with which the makeover is completed,” said Chayse Dacoda, one of five designers on the show. “People love the idea of an instant change and ratings are highest at the beginning and end of the shows because some people want to see how bad it is and then how great it can be.”

For “Trading Places,” two neighbors switch homes and surprise one another with a new look, doing the work themselves

with the help of a designer and handyman and a budget of \$2,000.

“It’s low budget design, something you can do quickly that makes a big impact,” said Douglas Wilson, one of eight designers on the show. “We can’t afford the time to put in a lot of detail, so it’s being creative with paint, stenciling patterns on walls, using ready-made items like crown moldings or wainscoting and using inexpensive fabric.”

Is this reality TV realistic? Up to a point, said Dacoda. “We designers get videotapes of the space and plan out every step beforehand.”

It’s the same at home, she said. “If you don’t want a decorating project to last months, you need a game plan. Go for things in stock rather than special orders, pick all your colors ahead and have all the materials on hand. The quickest fixes are painting and lighting, and it helps to be a decisive person.”

Retail chains such as Crate & Barrel, Restoration Hardware and Pottery Barn offer in-stock items that can be taken immediately or quickly delivered. Often stock items are similar to stylish special-order merchandise.

“By going to a particular store that carries things that reflect your taste, you can put together a room for yourself pretty quickly,” said decorating book author Mike

Strohl.

Not everyone who wants to save time also wants to do the work. Designer Previews has been matchmaking between clients and designers for almost two decades, maintaining a portfolio of about 500 designers around the country.

Now the service has a way to shave off even more time. Owner Karen Fisher interviews the client while the latter reviews designer portfolios on the Internet.

“We bring up the pictures onto their computer while talking to them on the telephone,” said Fisher. “It’s more focused and therefore more time-efficient and appeals especially to younger clients who are used to going to the Internet for their information.”

But there are some projects that just can’t be rushed.

“Everybody would like to have it done faster, but people who want to decorate at a certain level can’t get it any faster,” Fisher admitted. High-end decorating with the personal touch usually takes lots of time.

And convenience and speed do not necessarily mean saving money, which is the other thing that American consumers love to do. Those timesaving appliances usually are the most costly choices.

The Polara by Whirlpool, for example, is \$1,700, at the top of Whirlpool’s pricing for ranges. The Kitchen Aid Briva unit along with its double-basin sink is about \$2,200. The Thermador range described above is in the vicinity of \$5,000.

But maybe it’s worth it. “These days, the more money people have, the less time they have,” said Chayse Dacoda.



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