

HOME COOKIN'

THE HEAT IS ON AS GRILLS, OUTDOOR HEATERS AND ACCESSORIES
JOIN THE DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING RACE



R.H. Peterson remains committed to its Made in the USA philosophy. Sales of its high-end grills, like this one from the Echelon Diamond series, continue to grow.

WHETHER MAKING GRILLS, OUTDOOR furnishings, patio heaters, firepits, campfire products or drinkware, domestic manufacturers say their sales are growing along with consumers' increased interest in American-made products.

Some began seeing this trend develop within the past two years. Others recognized it earlier.

The increased interest showed up in research conducted by Weber Grill manufacturer Weber-Stephen Products,

which has been surveying consumers on the importance of Made in the USA since the 1970s. "Recent research indicated that consumers are very concerned about the economy and the unemployment rate," said Michael Kempster Sr., executive VP and CMO of Weber-Stephen Products. "A higher percentage of consumers than we have seen in decades have indicated that they are seeking out products Made in the USA as their way of supporting the economy and trying to reduce U.S. unemployment."

Tervis Tumbler CEO Barry Wolfson said he started noticing this trend three to five years ago, right around the time the economy started to turn. "In the financial market, it's often called a 'flight-to-quality,' when investors sell what they perceive to be high-risk investments and instead purchase safer investments," Wolfson said. "Consumers, in turn, do the same with products. They buy higher quality products in a down economy. They spend their hard-earned money on things that will last."

The Robert H. Peterson Company is seeing sales growth not just for its American Outdoor Grill but its Fire Magic line, which has been made in Southern California since 1934, and its gas logs, made in Southern California since 1949. "We have been committed to the Made in USA philosophy since the founding of the company," Vice President Jerry Scott said. "Our products tend to be high-end so our customers usually can afford – even during this recession – to buy the more expensive



Pocasset, Mass.-based Paine's Patio features the Oriflamme Fire Table in this vignette inside the family-owned store.

products, looking for better quality and U.S. engineering. So even during the recession, we've seen growth in all our product lines."

Meadowcraft General Manager Gene Crouch noted Built in America hangtags on each of his company's outdoor furniture products. "There are a lot of people who are coming in and saying 'I didn't realize you made that in America. That's great.' We have seen the interest grow within the last year, and we're certainly hyping it more and more. I really think quality is the No. 1 reason. And the biggest thing is we've got to put Americans to work. We need jobs; we don't need tax incentives. We need to create jobs so people can work and go out and spend money."

Consumers are asking where products are made more than ever, said Eric Stanton, VP of sales for 192-year-old Jacob Bromwell, America's oldest cookware company and the nation's 34th continuously owned and operated company. "When we tell them it's Ameri-

can-made, a lot of times they'll just say, 'You're kidding me,' They are blown away and it totally opens up the conversation.

"They're much more likely to talk to you and listen to you," Stanton said. "People really do value it a lot more. I don't know exactly what the cause is, but we have definitely noticed that. It could be because it's just been snowballing after 9/11. It could be because of the economy crashing and everyone saying we've got to support the American jobs. I think there was a lot of lead-up to it with the war and with terrorism. It brought it up to where people really are becoming more and more proud of being made in America and supporting the country."

When Jacob Bromwell opened in 1819 as a wire-weaving goods business, the product was being made in Cincinnati. Around 1900, it moved to Michigan City, Ind., and continued to make handcrafted and historically authentic cookware. After about 110

years of being in the same location, the factory building was just too old to meet code and the company moved its offices, equipment and dyes to Phoenix. In addition to being the oldest U.S. manufacturer of tin and stainless steel products, it is also North America's oldest housewares company and the world's oldest manufacturer of campfire popcorn poppers, roasters and flour sifters, Jacob Bromwell President Sean Bandawat said.

Although outdoor heaters were virtually unheard of prior to the 1970s, Infratech President John A. Mazzotta said residential outdoor room applications now represent the fastest growing segment of its electric comfort heater customers. A heated quartz element emits a wavelength of light that is absorbed by a body, table or floor and can distribute heat evenly in restaurants, hotels, workshops, smoking areas, stables, garages and anywhere spot heating is needed.

"Infrared or radiant energy is the most practical way to add

warmth to spaces like patios, terraces or any indoor or outdoor setting where heated air cannot be easily contained or re-circulated," Mazzotta said. "Infratech units are completely made in the USA, and we have the best support staff to assist you with your layout and design. Infratech has been fortunate to continue to grow in these recent turbulent times by increasing our brand awareness, continuous education of our customer base and a global expansion of our distribution channels."

"All of the components of the Oriflamme Fire Table are manufactured in the United States," said Heikke Nielsen, director of sales and marketing, Designing Fire Inc. The company will continue to expand its marketing of Made in the USA, as well as research and exhaust the resources of raw materials that are manufactured in the United States, Nielson said.

Garrett Davis promotes his Tejas Original firepits, fire tables and arbor products as handmade in Austin, Texas. "I'm a serial entrepreneur," he said. "I love small business; I think it's the driving force of the U.S. economy. I want to do my part and do everything I can to keep everything here and to support other local businesses and small businesses. I'm a big proponent of buying local. If we have to go outside of Austin, we try to keep it within Texas. It helps us, too, from a cost standpoint of shipping products, certainly within the state is a lot less expensive. Anything we can buy local or regional, we do. The only thing that really does not come from the U.S. that we use is the stone veneer. It's Turkish travertine, and that's just because there's no travertine quarried in the U.S. We buy the travertine from a regional supplier out of Houston, we're not the importer."

Most of the synthetic wood items Poly-Wood makes in Syracuse, Ind., are sourced

in America and have high recycled content. “We do all our own extrusion and our powder-coat suppliers are local, but it’s impossible to claim our products are 100% domestic,” said Chad Yordy, Poly-Wood, director of sales and marketing.

Importing parts is a reality for most domestic manufacturers interviewed for this series. While they are bringing in materials that are unavailable in the United States or components to help keep production more cost effective, the products are made in America.

When Southern Patio bought Meadowcraft after former owners declared bankruptcy, it “absolutely cut down that little town of Wadley, Alabama,” Crouch said. “We thought we ought to be here doing something to help bring this company back,” he said. “We might have a screw that comes out of Mexico or China, but we’re building that furniture in Wadley, Ala., using Wadley employees.”

Meadowcraft goes to the marketplace in three distribution channels. Crouch expects to see sentiment for American-made product continue to grow in the specialty retail and commercial channels. “That’s people spending money visit-

ing hotels or going out to eat,” he said. “They want to see it made in America. Every one of our new sets is big, bulky, oversized and comfortable. Americans like comfort.”

Selling to the mass market through the Arlington House brand or to the home improvement sector, Crouch sees no

interest in its Built in America promotion. “On the mass side, it’s dollars and cents. It’s tough to compete with the Chinese when they have low labor costs and low overhead cost. It’s a communist country that has currency managed by government and not floating like our currency is. In some of these

third world countries, companies are supported by their government. They subsidize the steel industry or the shipping or they give them rebates on what they ship. What people don’t realize is we can get pretty close price-wise. In some cases, it’s a very small percentage of difference because of freight costs.”

Dealers and distributors the Peterson Company does business with tend to be individual retail shops. “Those are the folks who have joined with us in maintaining the belief that Made in the USA does have value,” Scott said. “A lot of the larger retailers, the ‘big box stores’ as they’re called, have yielded to the temptation to get the cheaper items from overseas. Peterson has, philosophically and historically, gone into business with the specialty retail shops and I think that has also been part of the secret of our success during this recession period. Although a lot of these shops have been hurting economically and some have closed down, the specialty shop still seems to be, as it has historically been, a very strong retail segment in this country.”

With approximately 1,300 employees in America, Weber-Stephen uses public relations

CROUCH EXPECTS TO SEE SENTIMENT FOR AMERICAN-MADE PRODUCT CONTINUE TO GROW IN SPECIALTY RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL CHANNELS



Tervis tumblers, available with more than 20,000 designs and customizable options, are shown here with American Pride.

MADE IN AMERICA PREVAILS AT CHICAGO PREVIEW SHOW

Made in the USA signage was evident in several showrooms, including Lloyd/Flanders, Crimson Casual, Homecrest, Lane Venture and Meadowcraft. Each of those companies reported good traffic and said customers were tuned into the domestically made furnishings.

“I would say Made in the USA became the theme in our showroom,” said Todd Wingrove, Homecrest, director of sales.

“It’s been better than expected, and our sales are still growing,” Crimson Casual President Jon Bennett said.

“Made in the USA is nothing new to us,” said Lane Venture President Gary McCray. “We’ve been doing it for the

inside for years, now we’re just taking it into outdoor. All of it is made in Conover, N.C.”

“We had excellent response and we got great feedback on all our new products,” Meadowcraft General Manager Gene Crouch said. “It’s been an awesome show. Most of the dealers are worried about pricing and delivery, and that has helped us.”

“We’ve had a phenomenal show,” said Linda Hogeland, national sales manager, Meadowcraft. “Most of the products we showed are new products, and we had good reception. We feel blessed we’re leaving the show on a positive note.”

Although it’s Made in the USA, Poly-Wood reported good reception to extensions made to its Euro Collection, including a bistro set in dining, counter and bar heights. “It’s a smaller footprint and is great for the contract market, but is also being sold through specialty dealers,” said Chad Yordy, director of sales and marketing. Showing in a new 17th-floor permanent showroom, Poly-Wood was able to display more of its plastic lumber products than it could in a temporary booth. **CL**

— Casual Living Staff

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to let consumers know most of its products are produced in the USA with a high percentage of raw materials, parts and labor sourced from the USA, Kempster said. Otherwise, the company does not label its products to show they are made here.

"We have removed Made in USA labels from our products because the state of California has passed a law requiring that products have to have 100% U.S. content to make the Made in USA designation legal," Kempster said. "Many of our products contain 80% or more U.S.-made content, but a single bolt or screw from Mexico or Asia makes it impossible to comply with the California law. We cannot guarantee that our products shipped to warehouse locations outside the state of California will not make it to stores located within the state.

"If a Weber product is entirely sourced in a foreign country, we will label it made in that country," Kempster added. "Our products may have a very high percentage of parts completely sourced and fabricated in the USA, but it's almost impossible to source all parts from U.S. suppliers. We would have to print a label with a long list describing what parts came from where. Since we ship our products all over the world, the contents label would require printing in over 25 languages. This is simply impractical to manage."

When the Robert H. Peterson Company "came up with the concept of the American Outdoor Grill, it was very tempting to have it built overseas because there certainly are some cost savings," Scott said. "But we felt the long-term expense of losing the control in the quality that we can maintain here, plus our commitment to the American workers and American-made products, made that discussion quite a bit shorter than you



Tejas Originals outdoor fire features, like the square fire pit with rust finish, are handcrafted in Austin, Texas.

might anticipate.

"We stuck by the commitment of building it here," Scott said. "A lot of manufacturers had gone overseas during that time in order to not just save manufacturing costs but on the retail costs. When we first introduced the line, a lot of folks assumed – like many other barbecue grills – that this was made overseas, and so we wanted to answer the question before it was asked. We felt that the American

consumer would pay more for a product that was built in the U.S., and we've found that to be true. This line has grown for us consistently since 2004."

Tervis Tumbler also stayed true to its

American roots and is enjoying growth. Made in America is clearly embossed on the bottom of each Tervis tumbler.

"We've proudly made our products in the USA since 1946," Wolfson said. "We not only hand-assemble every piece at our manufacturing facility in Venice, Fla., we also source nearly all of our product components from the United States. In fact, approximately 75% comes from our direct community in the Tampa Bay area."

Tervis employs 612 people in the United States and that number continues to grow. "In just the past two years, we've added over 300 employees, more than doubling our size," Wolfson said. "We expect to add another 200 by year's end. We are so proud to be creating and keeping jobs in America." 



Meadowcraft's hangtag keeps its message clear.



Meadowcraft's new Vinings Collection, shown with two loveseats and two swivel rockers, offers an oversized traditional wrought iron look with the ultimate in comfort.