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The top five deliciously retro kitchen gadgets

The best 3 weeks of amusement you ever got cooking

by Dan Sung published on 2 October 2009

There is a war going on in our kitchens. While the likes of the kettle, the toaster and, latterly, the microwave dominate our work surfaces, more specialised gadgets fight for space on our shelves else suffer the ignominy of the cupboard until they're finally tossed away as a regretted novelty purchase.

In these times, it's the turn of the coffee machine and bread maker, but what about the gadgets of days gone by? What about those long forgotten items just ripe for a little retro return? Here's our top five we'd love to see back in action again, if only for a giggle.



5) The Toasted Sandwich Maker

Heyday late 70s to early 80s

Popularised by Breville

Today's availability Alive, kicking, & around £20

It was invented by Charles Champion in the 20s - the same chap who came up with the first mass production pop corn machines - but it wasn't until Australian company Breville brought out the "Snack 'n' Sandwich toaster" in 1975 that this little beauty really kicked off. It sold 400,000 units in its first year with the key to the success the snip and seal hot plates which mean you can pretty much put anything you like inside them, so long as you can force the lid closed. All the best companies still use the same design today, which gives them all that natural retro 70s look we can all enjoy moments before the searing pain of 3rd degree burns from super-heated cheese. Not as many around as there used to be since the diversification into panini presses, waffle irons and such, but not quite an endangered species as yet.

4) The Teasmade

Heyday 1960s & 70s

...cont.

Popularised byGoblin

Today's availabilitySwann STM100 - £59.95

Noted as a classic example of English eccentricity, the Teasmade has just made a comeback after years in the wilderness. The idea was patented as an automatic tea-making machine in the Victorian days, but it was the advent of electricity that really got the nation hooked on the idea - if only for a brief time. It's a pretty simple device, attach a kettle to a bedside clock to get the water to boil and then add to the teapot at the specified time such that when your alarm goes off, there's a perfectly blended steaming hot cup of tea waiting next to you. All well and good, so long as you don't knock it over in the night. The model that struck gold was the 'Goblin Teasmade', Model D25B in 1966 but the few you'll find in the UK today are made by Swan.

3) Mister FrostyBirthdaythe 80s

Heydayas above

Popularised byHasbro

Today's availabilityIn e-stores but out of stock

A classic case of something that looks far better in the adverts than it ever did at home, Mr Frosty and his pal, Percy Penguin, was the novelty kids kitchen ice crusher that your parents were far too sensible to ever get you. While Slush Puppy machines were the preserve of certain hallowed petrol stations, these temperamental units were pretty much as close as you could get to the real thing. They were terribly prone to jamming and breaking and although claimed to be an excellent idea for a hangover cure, it's unlikely to spawn mass production a second time around.

2) The Electric Meat CarverBirthdayEarly 70s

HeydayEarly 70s

Popularised byKenwood

Today's availabilityA few models for around £15

The electric meat carver is a fantastic example of creating a gadget where there isn't a problem. It's essentially taking a small chain saw to a perfectly good roast and hacking it to bits, and, in fact, the only time you might need one, is if you've cooked the food in such a way that it really shouldn't be

eaten. It was brought out on the wave created by the toasted sandwich maker as much more of a technological statement rather than a good culinary idea. A few families had them to look gadgety and posh but there weren't many to be seen by the late 80s. Excellent kitsch value in this day and age but the novelty would wear off in a flash.

1) The Soda StreamBirthday1979

Heyday80s

Popularised bySodaStream

Today's availabilityReinvented plastic bottle version

The idea of a machine to compress CO2 into still liquid to make it fizzy was invented by W & A Gilbey Ltd in 1903 for the upper classes and affluent to drink sarsaparilla, but it was the same company who perfected it in 1970s as the SodaStream before it was eventually bought by Cadbury's Schweppes in 1985. Massively nostalgic for all those who were children at the time, there were hundreds of different syrups - ranging from brand names like Tizer to electric looking concoctions with names like Witch's Brew - and a certain taste that they all had in common. Nevertheless, every child wanted one, or to go round to the house of someone who did, and press the magic button over and over until it made that slightly disturbing groan. Once the novelty wore off at the end of the 80s, it became clear that the drinks didn't quite taste the same as the one's they imitated off the shelves in cans, and that the larger bubbles that SodaStream made meant that the liquid lost its fizz all the quicker. Production finally ceased in 1996 and has relaunched since under different ownership and with a plastic bottle system that simply just isn't the same.