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March 31, 2008

## What's new in small appliances: 2008 Housewares Show wrap-up

The 2008 International Home & Housewares Show (IHHS) recently took place in Chicago. Michael DiLauro, a product-information specialist for Consumer Reports, describes some interesting products and trends.



Smaller appliances are taking on multiple personalities, as manufacturers are incorporating multiple functions into their products. Makers are also adding enhanced programmability to their wares, allowing you to fine-tune the process, say setting the brew strength on a coffeemakers. Some of these countertop devices are also getting bigger screens and brighter displays with backlit LCDs.

Technology continues to reign, as appliances add electronic controls that prevent temperature spikes, keeping the heat consistent over the cooking process. (Learn [what's behind this technology](#).)

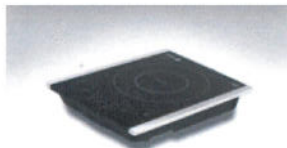
Manufacturers are also trying to blend some of their smaller appliances seamless into home décor. Consumers don't want their room air purifiers and cordless handheld vacuums, for example, to stand out when they're plugged in.

With consumers expected to spend less this year, small-appliance makers were touting the cost-saving aspects of their products. Slow cookers, claimed one company, use about 3 cents per hour compared with 25 cents per hour for a wall oven. Vacuum sealers were also being pitched as way to lower food costs.

Pod-style coffeemakers continue to grow in popularity with Nespresso and Tassimo poised to take the lion's share of both the coffee-pod and -maker market. Learn more about [espresso makers](#).

Speaking of coffee, I knew the IHHS was trendy when I found myself drinking an espresso alongside celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck at the booth hosted by Illy, known for its espresso machines and coffee. The Italian company's booth (shown) was actually the coolest part of all, since it's a fully functional sustainable home built within a shipping container. Called the [Push Button House](#) (shown), it takes about 90 seconds to fully open and transform into a home with a kitchen, dining room, bedroom, bathroom, living room, and library.

Induction burners are becoming more common, though you might not need or want to buy a new cooktop just to take advantage of this emerging technology, which has performed highly in our tests, excelling at cooking speed and energy efficiency. The new portable induction cooktop from European appliance maker Fagor might make sense for you as a complement to an existing range or standard gas or electric cooktop. (Note that induction cooktops require cookware made of cast iron or enameled steel. Some stainless-steel cookware will work but aluminum or copper products will not.)



The \$200 unit (shown), which measures 12x14 inches and weighs 8 pounds, includes many of the standard features found in a built-in induction cooktop at a fraction of the cost, around \$1,700 for a four-burner model. [Michael DiLauro, Product-Information Specialist](#)

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