

## When a Burp Is Not a Belch

The word burp is layered with meaning in English. There is the nurturing burp one encourages from a baby to help digestion. There is the vulgar burp an ill-mannered boor expels after guzzling a gaseous beverage. Then there is the satisfying burp, the pleasing pffft heard when a Tupperware container...

By Nina Korman | November 26, 1998

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The utilitarian plastic containers created by Earl Tupper back in the Forties and guaranteed to last a lifetime are still sold exclusively through homestyle "parties" in more than 100 countries. Nevertheless, the company has made strides to keep up with the times. Eight years ago it hired renowned industrial designer Morison S. Cousins to revamp its staid image. He created new products in stark geometric shapes softened with sculptural elements, but one aspect remained the same. "It's still possible to burp," assures Cousins, the second industrial designer ever awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome.

On Wednesday the Wolfsonian-FIU will host a Totally Tupperware! party featuring Cousins, who will deliver a lecture titled "Extraordinary Designs for Ordinary Living." He'll discuss why museums collect mass-produced consumer products as art (several museums have recently added Tupperware to their collections), and show slides of his present and past work, such as the famous wall-mounted plastic dispenser he created for Dixie Cups. The event also includes an exhibition of Tupperware products, the opportunity to buy items not usually available in the United States (the company makes a tortilla

keeper for Mexico and a kim chee keeper for Korea), and a reception courtesy of Smith & Wollensky restaurant. If that's not enough, Miami Beach Mayor Neisen Kasdin will declare the day Tupperware Day.

Whoever said good design is strictly for the rich never considered Tupperware. "I like the idea of designing for everyone. I like the idea that people can have useful everyday tools at home that have a certain gracefulness to them," says Cousins, who remembers telling his friends during his school days at New York's Pratt Institute that his future would be spent creating beautiful inexpensive items for the average person. They scoffed, called him idealistic, and said it couldn't be done. Following the advice given to Benjamin Braddock, the character Dustin Hoffman portrayed in *The Graduate*, Cousins entered the field of plastics and has proven otherwise, even in a world rife with competition from Ziploc bags and, horror of all horrors, Gladware disposable plastic containers.

Tupperware -- reasonable, functional, and now really attractive -- lives on. The brand name has become the generic term for plastic containers in general, a fact that Cousins is heartened to admit. Of course, he insists there is a difference. "Obviously we would like people to make the distinction," he laughs. "There's Tupperware and there's everything else."

In a world of Martha Stewart wannabes throwing parties to peddle housewares that will outlive us all, that "everything else" is of little consequence. What matters is building a better universe, one plastic container at a time. Good design "makes you feel better, and if you feel better, you will act better," Cousins proffers. "This is a view that comes out of those of us who were educated in the Fifties. We believe that lovely things will change the world. If you're in an environment that is filled with harshness, it reflects on your nature and your dealings with people. In today's world, you have to search for loveliness. If you're going to do something, why not do something that's lovely, whatever it is."

-- Nina Korman

Totally Tupperware! takes place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 2, at the Wolfsonian-FIU, 1001 Washington Ave., Miami Beach. Admission is \$10. Call 305-535-2631.