

**PUTTING SCIENCE INTO DESIGN**

Mr de Groot (below) explaining the features of the VentSmart range (right), which has a venting system that allows for the regulation of air

**FOR THE MODERN KITCHEN**

Below: The NanoNature Water Filtration System, a water purifying system that uses nano technology; Blossom Microwaveable Serveware range that comes with an inner aluminium layer to shield food from the microwave; and Steam It, a plastic steamer that has a steaming surface that is ridged to prevent food from sticking

## Thinking out of the box

Tupperware is not just about plastic storage boxes. The company has come up with many other innovative products as well. **By Tay Suan Chiang**

**S**AY Tupperware, and the super handy, plastic storage boxes come to mind. But the American brand has been producing a lot more than that to keep up with the needs of a modern kitchen.

According to Jan-Hendrik de Groot, vice president of global design at Tupperware, a new product is launched each week worldwide.

Some of its new products include the Steam It, a plastic steamer that is inspired by its bamboo cousin, but with added benefits such as a steaming surface that is ridged to prevent food from sticking and an optimum number of holes for more efficient cooking and slower evaporation. It retails for \$24.90.

Another product that is making its way into homes is the NanoNature Water Filtration System, a \$1,228 water purifying system that uses nano technology, and also contains bakuhuan, a mineral-rich volcanic rock found in Japan, which adds beneficial minerals to the water.

To find out what consumers want, the design team does house visits, "to see the potential areas of growth and to learn about lifestyle trends and needs", says Mr de Groot.

It also relies on research and development to build on its range of products. "Often we use new technology to come up with more innovative items," he says.

He cites the example of the VentSmart system, a collection of storage boxes, priced from \$92, that come with a unique venting system that allows for the regulation of air in the container.

"We found out that different vegetables need different levels of oxygen, so the VentSmart comes with a vent which you can slide to increase or decrease air flow," says Mr de Groot. "With this, we are

putting science into design." Its Blossom Microwaveable Serveware range, which retails for \$139.90, is another example. The serving containers come with an inner aluminium layer that is covered by a layer of plastic. The aluminium shields food from the microwave, while the plastic handles remain cool to touch.

"They say you can't put metal in a microwave, but we have shown that it is possible," says Mr de Groot, who holds a diploma in industrial design from the University of Applied Sciences in Darmstadt, Germany. He is part of the group that was named the Red Dot Design Team of the Year in 2009. Tupperware Brands has won 39 Red Dot design awards for its products to date.

Mr de Groot declines to reveal what products he is working on now, but says that they will be in the food preparation and "on the go" category. The latter includes lunch boxes and water bottles, which incidentally are one of its worldwide best-sellers. The team is also involved in creating kids' products, one of which is a baby bottle that can be transformed into a drinking glass for when the child is older.

Ideas for Tupperware's products start in one of its three global design centres, the latest of which to open is in Singapore. Its two other global design centres are in Orlando and Brussels.

Mr de Groot, who was in Singapore recently for the centre opening, says that having a design centre in Asia means that the brand can be closer to the Asian market and its consumer.

"There are differences in culture and lifestyle in Asian countries, and we want

to be able to better understand that," he says. But he is quick to clarify that the design team does not create products specifically for the Asian market. "Instead our products have a design language that can be integrated into the other markets too," he says.

The Asian market is important to Tupperware Brands. Last year, its Asia Pacific sales made up 31 per cent of the company's overall business, with Indonesia ranking number one in revenue globally. The largest homework unit in Asia Pacific, it generated more than \$200 million in sales last year.

Tupperware Brands' executive vice president Christian Skroeder says the focus is now on the Asian middle-class. "These are the consumers who are driven to acquire good brands, which is about getting good quality products and also to satisfy their aspiration."

While the brand's products have gone more modern, Tupperware is still sticking with its tried and tested way of selling, through Tupperware parties.

"Others sell on price or exposure, but we sell on demonstrating our products," says Mr Skroeder. "With direct selling, we are able to show you features on the products that you would not otherwise be able to see in a shop."

Women continue to make up the majority of Tupperware's salesforce. Asha Gupta, group president for Asia Pacific, notes that its brand representatives are getting younger as more university students are getting in on the act.

"The Gen Y representatives enjoy the flexibility that comes with the job, and the association with a brand that is about do-



ing good," says Ms Gupta.

In a recent survey done by the company, 99 per cent of women who worked with the company for at least three years experienced a positive change in their lives, due to increased financial status and self-confidence.

While there are other brands that sell similar items, Mr Skroeder says it is the brand's lifetime warranty, and quality of its products that make it so successful, since the brand began in 1948.

But Tupperware is not resting on its laurels. The goal for the company, says Mr Skroeder, is "for Tupperware to be in every home".

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