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TIMES

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PLUMBING - PVF - HYDRONICS - HVAC

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PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Continued from page 10.

Kohler Co., promoted Walter Kuzan, formerly senior national builder account executive for Kohler's Americas plumbing sector, to director of sales for Roborn.

Victoria + Albert, a manufacturer of freestanding baths, appointed Eric Phelps to national specification & training manager.



Walsh

ECR appointed David Walsh director of sales for its wholesale distribution businesses. Many of his 25-plus years in the hydronic/HVAC business were spent with Weil-McLain, where he was vice president of sales and marketing. Most recently he owned and operated a rep firm.

Texas Plumbing Supply Co. (Houston, TX), a 3-branch wholesaler and member of Affiliated Distributors, announced changes in ownership. Terry Snyder will remain as CEO/owner. J. Lance Snyder, former president/owner, has retired after 34 years of service. Ethan Flowers and Nathan Jarmon will remain as vice-presidents/directors. Glenn Fuller joins the company as president/owner. He has 31 years of experience in the Houston wholesale plumbing supply industry. As a member of WIT, he served on the plumbing manufacturers vendor committee. His twin sons, Jeremy and Joey Fuller, join as directors. Jeremy Fuller will be branch manager of the headquarters location and Joey Fuller will serve in outside sales.

Coming in June: Dan Holohan

Dan Holohan is returning to BNP Media and its plumbing group magazines. His popular "Hydronics Talk" column will appear in the June issue of *Supply House Times*.

BITS AND PIECES PVF

Continued from page 8.

Marmon/Keystone appointed Damon Harris branch manager of its Salt Lake City location, replacing the retiring Glen Henderson. Most recently he was the Salt Lake City operations manager.

> THIS 'N THAT...

Raritan Pipe & Supply Co. was a start/finish sponsor for the March for Babies Walk held May 1 at the Rutgers Athletic Center (Middlesex County, NJ). Raritan's goal was to surpass last year's contribution of \$10,000 from walkers and contributors. Raritan hosted a "tailgate party" at its facility, inviting customers, vendors and friends to stop by for free homecooked food and make a donation. Two office pools and a March Madness pool also helped raise a significant amount.

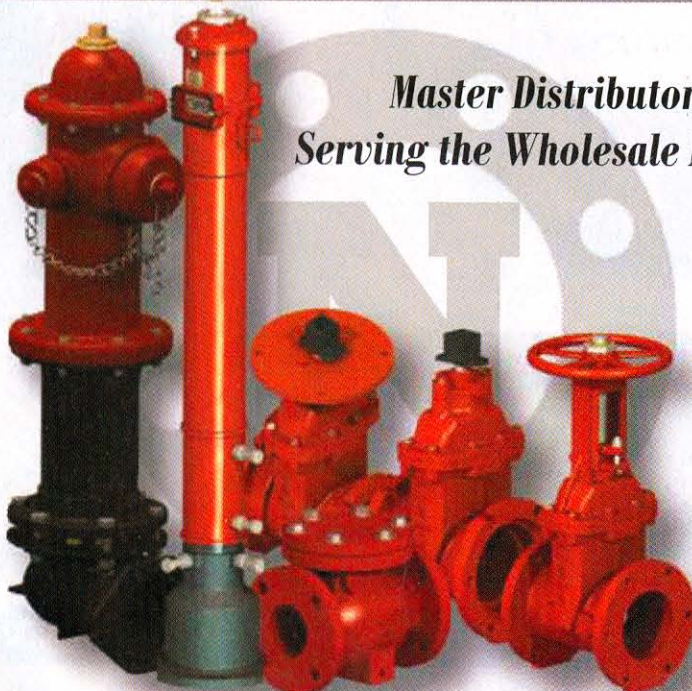
Milliken Valve Co. employees and management in Bethlehem, PA, were recognized by OSHA for excellence in the company's employee safety and health program. The Milliken Valve facility has been designated as a "star" site, the highest honor in OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs.



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Notes From ISH 2011

Mob scenes like this were a common sight throughout the exhibition halls.
photo by Jim Olsztynski

Eye poppers and mind bogglers from the world's largest plumbing-heating exhibition.

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ISH 2011, taking place every other year in Frankfurt, Germany, is the world's largest plumbing-heating trade fair. This year's version was held March 15-19 and marked my sixth trip to the extravaganza, but the first one since 2003. It was a déjà vu experience for the most part, especially the crowds (204,000), the lavish and seemingly endless exhibits (2,355 exhibitors spanning 10 halls, plus outside displays spread out over 1.5 million square feet), and the inevitable sore feet from covering all that ground each day.

Attendance was down a bit from the record-setting days of the booming late '90s and early 2000s when up to 230,000 people showed up. However, it's a welcome sign of global economic recovery that visitation increased a bit from 2009 when "only" 201,000 visitors made their way to ISH. Show organizer Messe Frankfurt noted that foreign visitation from outside of Germany jumped six percentage points in 2011 to around 71,000 visitors, about 35% of the total. This indicates travel budgets are on the upswing.

Here are excerpts from my notebook about some of the products and other phenomena that made this reporter's eyes pop and mind boggle visiting the plumbing-related exhibits. Hydronics Editor John Siegenthaler

has written a companion piece assessing heating technology coming out of ISH 2011, which begins on page 28.

- **Knocking off the knockoffs.** One of the interesting developments at this year's event was a movement by show organizers Messe Frankfurt and various companies to tackle the problem of knockoffs — mainly from China — that are plaguing manufacturers worldwide. Read more about this in my "In Closing" column on page 79.

- **Forests & trees.** Trade show displays have become an art form unto themselves. The products on display were the trees but it was fun to back off and take in a panoramic view of a forest featuring exhibits of various shapes, sizes, color schemes, maze-like walk-throughs, multiple tiers, flashing lights, music, gorgeous models and other entertainment. Speaking of which, Uponor's exhibit featured an acrobatic performance that was a show stopper for everyone passing by.

- **It's a big world.** For someone who's been around the industry as long as I have, it's a humbling experience to enter exhibit halls and realize you haven't heard of 90% of the companies exhibiting, because they go to market only in Europe or other far-flung parts of the world. Not small companies, either.

Continued on page 42.

Continued from page 39.



photo courtesy Messe Frankfurt

Tools on display in a hall dedicated to nothing except tools of the trade.

• **Roca's innovations.** One of those companies I was only dimly aware of is a European bathroom giant. The Spanish firm, Roca, had an elegant exhibit that included some of the most innovative bathroom technology I observed at the show. One eye-popper is their In-Tank Meridian WC, created in collaboration with Fluidmaster, which integrates a tank in the bowl interior, thereby making installation easier and optimizing the flow of water. It utilizes hydraulic action for flushing and features wall-free installation. Visit Roca's website at www.roca.com for more information.

• **American minimalism.** Speaking of Fluidmaster, they were one of the few American companies exhibiting at ISH. Acorn Engineering and Neoperl were others whose booths I visited, along with Kohler, which had never been there during my previous visits. I was told it's their second time exhibiting at ISH, though with a modest display in conjunction with Kohler's European subsidiary, Rada. Other American companies I spied were Victaulic, Ridge and Irwin Tools. There may have been a handful of other U.S. companies exhibiting that I missed, yet it's clear that this trade fair is a much bigger deal to the rest of the world than to us. Nonetheless, it's worth a visit just to see how everyone else goes to the bathroom!

• **European vs. American ways.** At ISH I obtained an interview with Hansgrohe Deputy Chairman Richard Grohe, who last year returned from a stint managing his company's U.S. operations. Our conversation dealt mostly with the knockoff issue and is captured in my "In Closing" column on page 79. I also chatted with Grohe about the difference in marketing between Europe and America. "America is a very attractive market because of one product standard and one language, so you can touch many consumers," he observed. "It's more difficult in Europe where you have different languages and different code approvals." Grohe shared that due to the U.S. financial and housing crises, the American market has dropped from No. 2 in Hansgrohe's sales volume to No. 4 or 5, although he expects it to pick up again with economic recovery. Styling presents a challenge, due to what he called America's penchant for "nostalgic designs," while Hansgrohe is more European with modern styling. "There's also the problem of finishes," Grohe said. "In the U.S. only 37% of (brass) finishes are chrome while Europe is 97% chrome. Special finishes are a style question and difficult for me to understand."

• **Whatever happened to color fixtures?** I'm puzzled by the almost complete disappearance of color in bathroom fixtures. With rare exceptions, almost all of the thousands of toilets and tubs on display at ISH were white – and it's pretty much the same in U.S. showrooms. Kohler rode the color horse to glory in the 1970s and '80s, and it just seems weird that the market has turned around so completely. I'm not a fashion buff so it doesn't bother me, but it does make me muse about what causes fashions to come and go so quickly.

• **Why didn't I think of that?** It's frustrating that so many innovations stem from simple ideas that make me slap my head wondering why I didn't think of them. Case in point: Hansgrohe drew a lot of oohs and aahs and hands-on tryouts from the crowd with a showerhead mounted on a vertical platform that can be moved up and down with a light tug (see photo on adjacent page). It's a brilliant yet simple concept. I hate it when people steal my ideas even before I have a chance to conceive them.

• **Viega's ingenuity.** Viega had two of the 33 products given the show's Design Plus awards for ingenuity, called Trio E+ and Advantix Vario. (I'm not sure if they are available in the U.S.) In any case, they weren't even the most dazzling products I saw at Viega's exhibit. Most impressive was a display set up showing the dramatic decrease in pressure drop from press fittings with a rounded bend rather than 90-degree elbows. Water gushed through an opening about a third farther.

• **Psst, here come the wall mounts.** Europeans favor wall-mounted toilets, even in residential applications. It came up in more than one conversation that U.S.-favored floor mounts will give way more and more to wall-mounted toilets. This trend will be hard to verify until we get a robust home building recovery, however.

• **Magic mirror.** Villeroy & Boch came out with a product called "Plus Sound." It's a bathroom mirror with built-in speakers that can play owners' preferred music programmed into it by a smart phone. No electronics are visible from the outside. Way cool.

• **Victoria & Albert** is a global brand with high-style baths individually hand-finished. I didn't know much about them but learned while visiting their booth that they boast a unique marketing story in producing products made from something called ENGLISHCAST™, a blend of volcanic



photo courtesy Messe Frankfurt

BDH General Manager Andreas Lücke (hand upraised) shows visitors around his organization's exhibit.



photo courtesy Messe Frankfurt

An eye-catching display of, uh, Hansgrohe showerheads.

limestone and high performance resins. Their products are much lighter than cast iron yet durable and easily fabricated.

- **Heating powerhouse.** I had an interesting conversation with Andreas Lücke, general manager of the German Federation of Environmental Technologies (BDH is its German acronym), which represents some 90% of German heating manufacturers and 60% of those throughout Europe. BDH members make everything from boilers to solar panels and various other components. It's an extremely influential group with a track record of success in lobbying both the German government and the European Parliament in Brussels for tax incentives, subsidies and other support for energy efficiency improvements. The group has been in existence for about a decade, having consolidated a bunch of product trade associations. "We are a lobby and the government doesn't like to listen to 15 or 20 separate associations," Lucke explained.

- **(No) signs of the times.** On previous visits to ISH I was struck by all the advertising signage for ISH exhibitors throughout town and especially on the main thoroughfare outside the Messe Frankfurt complex. Logos of Europe's big three boiler companies — Buderus, Vaillant and Viessmann — in particular could be seen everywhere, even on taxi cabs. This year, there was little exhibitor signage outside show grounds, a sign of spending cutbacks during what has been a sluggish global market.

- **Teetotalers gain ground.** A real mind boggler for first-time U.S. visitors to ISH is the number of exhibitors serving food and drink, including beer and other alcoholic beverages, at their booths. Although alcohol is still prevalent, more companies than I remember from previous visits now limit beverage choices to water, juice and soda, with a few offering smoothies as well. One convert explained to me that the show simply has gotten so big it's hard to police all the visitors, and tipsy barflies pollute the business atmosphere.

- **ISH becomes photo-friendly.** It used to be part of ISH protocol not to take photos of displays without first asking permission, which wasn't always granted. I got chewed out more than once in the past for violating this rule. Ostensibly this was to protect trade secrets, although that always struck me like a woman in a string bikini complaining about being ogled. What's the point of putting all that product on display! No matter. This tradition seems to have gone by the wayside since my last visit. Cameras blazed away left and right in 2011.


- **Opulence knows no limits when it comes to bathrooms.** That's my final thought after spending three days looking at bathrooms that look like they cost more than the gross national income of certain countries. 



photo by Jim Olsztyński

This vertically adjustable shower by Hansgrohe drew a lot of oohs and aahs from the crowd.