

THE APPLIANCE QUESTION

Are high-end machines worth the price? It depends on what you're looking for

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By: Bryan Miller, excerpted: June 2005



Prestige appliances from Sub-Zero, Bosch, and the like come at a premium, sometimes more than 50% above their workaday cousins. Worth it? Not if you just want a utilitarian machine. But if you see an appliance as an investment that could pay for itself when you sell, it may be worth the extra cash now.

"When I see a Sub-Zero or a Viking in a house at the top of the market, it usually justifies the money the owners put in," says Tom Yorke of Realty Appraisal Services in Raleigh, N.C.

The key is, the appliance should be as posh as the house and neighborhood. "In today's market, if you invest \$15,000 in top-of-the-line appliances in a high-end house, you'll get that money back--definitely," says Dawn Tsien of Coldwell Banker Hunt Kennedy in New York City. Buyers of homes priced in the lower range of a market tend not to be brand-obsessed, she says, but looks still count.

It's good to know, then, that the sleek look pioneered by brands like Sub-Zero has trickled down. End result: There are options for any budget. Most appliances have a few dominant

brands, but lower-rung names often perform just as well for a fraction of the cost. Virtually all fridges, for example, are made by four manufacturers, (Electrolux, GE, Maytag and Whirlpool), under various brand names. Their innards are basically identical, yet you can pay anywhere from \$600 for a Frigidaire to \$2,600 for a flashy brand.

We talked to appliance dealers, chefs, home cooks, and real estate pros to guide three types of kitchen user: the gourmand, whose top interest is quality; the frantic family, which just needs a workhorse; and the aesthete, who wants, above all, a great-looking kitchen. Bottom Line: Status brands add value in markets that appreciate that sort of thing, but if you can't stomach the prices, explore options.

REFRIGERATORS

THE GOURMAND

YOU NEED: A top-of-the-line box with good looks and great quality

CONSIDER: The Sub-Zero 650 (about \$6,000) has separate compressors for the freezer and fridge, plus humidity control. The company (one of the few that makes its own models) says grapes will stay juicy for at least six months and frozen bread won't develop those little ice crystals.

THE FRANTIC FAMILY

YOU NEED: Something big, cold and affordable

CONSIDER: The KitchenAid KSCS25 (\$2,799) is 36 inches wide and packs 24.5 cubic feet of volume. The Sub-Zero 661 (about \$5,950) has only 21.3.

THE AESTHETE

YOU NEED: A stainless-steel look and the appearance of a built-in

CONSIDER: The Whirlpool GS6SHAXLS with Satina finish (\$1,899) delivers Sub-Zero looks for less. "Satina looks very similar to stainless steel," says Michael Ciok, whose Chicago store sells both brands.

30-INCH RANGES

THE GOURMAND

YOU NEED: A unit with a gas stove and electric oven for more even cooking **CONSIDER:** Convection ovens like the KitchenAid KDRP407HSS (\$3,599) cook more evenly and faster. "I have a KitchenAid, and I love it," says Emily Luchetti, executive pastry chef at Farallon in San Francisco.

THE FRANTIC FAMILY

YOU NEED: A high-powered unit that can boil water faster for mac-and-cheese lunches and cook dinners on the go

CONSIDER: A Maytag MGR5765Q (\$829) with one 16,000-BTU burner will do the trick. With flames that are 68% more powerful than those on a standard stove, it cuts the time required to boil water by a fifth.

THE AESTHETE

YOU NEED: A heavy-duty look and a good oven when you need it

CONSIDER: The Bosch HDS25 (\$1,849 to \$2,099) offers dual-fuel (gas stove, electric oven), available from other brands for as much as \$4,000.



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DISHWASHERS

THE GOURMAND

YOU NEED: A machine that won't trash the nice china after dinner parties

CONSIDER: Bosch's Integra Vision (\$1,749) is so quiet it has to shine a red light on the floor so you know it's on. (Check out the photo.) It also has a Party Wash cycle, which cleans six place settings in half an hour.

THE FRANTIC FAMILY

YOU NEED: Capacity (you have lots of dirty dishes) and silence (you have enough noise in the house as it is)

CONSIDER: The Maytag Jetclean II (\$679 to \$929) has three racks, with space for oddly-shaped equipment, and holds 14 place settings at once.

THE AESTHETE

THE AESTHETE

YOU NEED: Stainless steel, baby

CONSIDER: The KitchenAid KUDI01FLSS (\$949) is stainless steel inside and out for a clean look. It's also--bonus--a dependable dishwasher that, at barely more than half the price of the Bosch, offers good value.