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Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America

Alison J. Clarke

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Alison J. Clarke : Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I haven't finished reading all of the book but what ...By NamelessI haven't finished reading all of the book but what I have read is very informative and I am enjoying it. I was a Tupperware dealer and manager for many years so it especially interesting to me.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Melissa MathenyVery interesting book! A must have for Tupperware collectors and sales reps!!!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Tupperware BookBy Anna Marie WendtThis is a very

interesting story about how Mr. Tupper built his Tupperware empire. I love seeing all the old advertisements for Tupperware, too.

From Wonder Bowls to Ice-Tup molds to Party Susans, Tupperware has become an icon of suburban living. Tracing the fortunes of Earl Tupper's polyethylene containers from early design to global distribution, Alison J. Clarke explains how Tupperware tapped into potent commercial and social forces, becoming a prevailing symbol of late twentieth-century consumer culture. Invented by Earl Tupper in the 1940s to promote thrift and cleanliness, the pastel plasticwares were touted as essential to a postwar lifestyle that emphasized casual entertaining and celebrated America's material abundance. By the mid-1950s the Tupperware party, which gathered women in a hostess's home for lively product demonstrations and sales, was the foundation of a multimillion-dollar business that proved as innovative as the containers themselves. Clarke shows how the "party plan" direct sales system, by creating a corporate culture based on women's domestic lives, played a greater role than patented seals and streamlined design in the success of Tupperware.

From Publishers Weekly Tupperware: The product line of brightly colored, polyethylene containers for leftover foods has toppled from its iconic role as the hallmark of the modern kitchen to fodder for jokes on *Seinfeld*. Yet since the late 1940s, when it was invented by Earl Tupper (who envisioned the product as both an emblem and agent of postwar household cleanliness and thrift), Tupperware has changed the lives of millions of women who not only used it but found personal and economic freedom as Tupperware salespeople. Clarke's lucid and fascinating social history explicates a host of complex ideas: the ethical and moral meanings of "modern" design in postwar America; the economic and social conflicts that women faced in the 1950s; how suburban living affected consumer culture; the history of door-to-door sales; and the corporate and gender politics of marketing. At the heart of her wonderfully detailed narrative is the story of Brownie Wise, a divorced single parent from Detroit who originated the "Tupperware party," eventually becoming a vice-president of the corporation. Along the way, Wise made herself and the Tupper Corporation a fortune by selling women the dichotomized ideal of the perfect housewife who runs a perfect business. Clarke writes entertainingly even while delivering enormous amounts of information. Using Tupperware as both a symbol and artifact, she provides a provocative cultural and feminist history of the second half of the 20th century. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus: A dense, meticulously researched cultural history of Tupperware that attempts to understand the process by which objects of mass consumption are appropriated as meaningful artifacts of everyday life. Clarke begins with the premise that Tupperware has indeed become a cultural symbol for the American way of life (circa 1950) and that worldwide sales of \$1.2 billion in 1997 are a strong indicator of the appeal of that symbol. She explores how one object of mass consumption can come to matter for our cultural identities more than others. In the case of Tupperware, the product itself is less important than the method by which it was marketed. When Earl Silas Tupper invented the process for making the product in 1942, he was able to get his wares distributed to department stores nationally, but sales were quite low. Then he adopted the method of Brownie Wise, a middle-aged housewife who had churned out impressive sales of products door-to-door to pay her young sons medical bills and the company began to turn a serious profit. With Wise at the head of his newly created "party-sales" department, Tupper was freed to tinker with an endlessly more complicated and decorative product line. In 1954 Wise became the first woman ever to appear on the cover of *Business Week*. Tupperware and the Tupperware party are often cited as indications of the homogeneity and conspicuous consumption typical of middle-class suburbia in the 1950s, but Clarke seeks to counter the notion of the suburban housewife as a passive consumer by emphasizing the business skills of Wise and many of her sales force. While signifying domesticity, Tupperware simultaneously situated women in the economic sphere. This impressive foray into the material culture of the 1950s complicates many of the truisms concerning American consumerism and suburban living during the period. -- Copyright copy; 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Alison Clarke tells [Tupperware's story] with wit and erudition." -- *Newsweek* "This detailed and entertaining book explores how the plastic storage containers known as Tupperware rose to prominence in 1950s America. . . . Tupperware was more than just a clever use of plastic and an equally clever marketing tool, it was a symbol of its time and a perfect product for a consumerist age." -- *American History* " [Tupperware] explores that domestic icon of suburbia and its role in feminist history." -- *Washington Post* " Clarke's cultural analysis contributes to our growing appreciation of women's agency in the 1950s USA, as well as in the larger culture of consumption." -- *Women's* of Books