

GEAR & GADGETS

Stuck in The Past

New refrigerator designs don't welcome magnets. How a magnet lover can cope.

By DORIE CHEVLEN

WHEN RYAN Bradley, a freelance editor in Los Angeles, went shopping for a new refrigerator five years ago, he immediately ran into issues. Bradley, 40 years old, didn't need Bluetooth connectivity or smudge-proof finishes—he just wanted something to stick his magnets to. But not only were most salespeople unsure if floor models were magnet-friendly, they were surprised he cared. “I felt like a crazy person,” he said.

Some consider covering fridges ‘a little lowbrow.’

Few fridge buyers still covet ferromagnetic surfaces, those to which magnets stick, says Mattia Sala, product manager at appliance manufacturer Smeg. That his brand's retro-style, candy-colored refrigerators are not magnetic “almost never comes up” among customers, he said. Marc Hottenroth, executive director of industrial design at GE Appliances, says most people view magnetism as a bonus, not a required feature. Try telling that to Kathy Flann, 54, a writing lecturer

at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. When she bought her house about a decade ago, she assumed the included fridge would welcome her magnets. Instead, she recalled, when she went to put them up, “they just fell to the floor.” Her collection now lives in a drawer.

Many renters can still freely explore a love of magnets: Cheaper fridges, like the ubiquitous white coolers from Frigidaire often found in rental units, largely remain magnetic. But the higher-end models that parent company, Electrolux, makes often aren't, says Lisa King, the company's senior manager of marketing operations. Electrolux designs its pricier fridges as aesthetic objects in and of themselves. “Magnets on the fridge [would] take away from the premium look,” she said. More bluntly, Hottenroth considers covering fridges “a little lowbrow.”

Perhaps there is something ragtag about a cluttered fridge face—the chaos on view at the house of our parents or grandparents. And even if Jerry Seinfeld's “normcore” outfits have made him a latent style icon, today's design-minded wouldn't likely covet his cooler. For example, though his coming book “Old Brand New” celebrates maximalism, Los Angeles interior designer Dabito firmly opposes cluttered fridge fronts, especially since food can eas-



CHILLY GALLERY New, nonmagnetic fridge fronts make displays like this impossible.

ily splatter on them. “[It's] very disgusting.... There are other ways of collecting and curating,” he said.

According to Thomas Mellins, an architectural historian at Columbia University in New York, growing dis-

taste for covered fridges reflects changes in American lives over the last half-century. At one point, refrigerator doors served as a “repository of memory,” Mellins said. A place for dentist-appointment reminders, snap-

shots and so on. Today, though, “you are constantly bombarded, from the minute you get up to the minute you go to sleep, with the kind of things that you used to see on refrigerators.” A bare fridge, then, might look chic,

Keep It Coolly Los Angeles interior designer Dabito on how to maintain a chic-looking fridge even if you love mementos

Edit! | Not every coupon, thank-you card and Realtor magnet deserves display. Focus on a few meaningful items—a favorite photograph, a recent postcard—and swap them out regularly.

Be a gallerist | Make the fridge feel like a real exhibit space by treating it that way. “Think of it like a grid, like a gallery wall,” Dabito said. Frame your paper items, either using magnetic frames or self-adhesive ones, ideally all the same size. These can make everything look neater and protect it from getting stained by wet hands.

Forget the fridge | Invest instead in a corkboard to display relics. Depending on how private you want it to be, hang your board in a hallway, mudroom, utility room—or the kitchen. Make it fun by spray-painting it an unexpected shade.

but it also coldly keeps the fabric of your life hidden from your loved ones. The most stubborn sentimentalists among us can still find ways to adorn new fridges with tchotchkes. Bradley and his wife ultimately bought a handsome Liebherr fridge, then affixed a custom ferromagnetic panel from Industrial Metal Supply, a metal shop in Burbank, Calif., to its front. Right now, among wedding invitations and thank-you cards, it features the finger paint art from their toddler son.

Fit for a...King With Peculiar Feet

If you've tried and failed to find sneakers that fit you well, consider these techy, customizable kicks



STOMP OUTSIDE THE BOX Clockwise from top left: GS:PGH (\$275, RunSpeedland.com), Model T (\$550, lambic.co), The Fit One (\$159, JoinHilma.com)

IT USED TO BE that a local sneaker store would have eight or 12 shoes you could try. Now the selection might run to 150. And yet, finding one that feels just right on your foot can prove daunting. The problem lies in how most sneaker brands handle sizing. A single number size corresponds to a shoe's length, but the construction of a sneaker involves other factors, none of which are standardized across the industry. Shoes are built around a foot-shaped form called a last. Each brand uses its

own. So if the shape of your arch, your toes, your heel isn't an exact match to the last—whether it is from Nike, Asics or Hoka—the fit may feel off. Standardized sizing isn't particularly consumer friendly. In a 2023 survey of over 2,000 Americans who had returned at least one consumer product in the previous six months, retail tech company Narvar found that footwear and apparel constituted 62.5% of returns. For most of those returns, respondents cited “fit and size” issues.

Wearing improperly fitted shoes can be dangerous, said Dr. Suzanne Fuchs, a Palm Beach, Fla., podiatrist specializing in sports medicine. “Ill-fitting shoes may lead to excessive foot movement or restrict the natural movement of the foot,” which, she said, can cause plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendinitis, shin splints or even stress fractures. A salve: Upstart footwear companies have reimagined how to size and sell shoes, employing online “consultations” as well as interchangeable and adjustable compo-

nents that let customers more closely accommodate their exact podiatric needs. Take Speedland's trail running shoes. Each of the company's three models features two dials along the side that let you independently tighten different parts of your shoe. The promise: No part of your foot will ever feel pinched or unsupported. You can further customize shoes like the GS:PGH model after you've worn them. For example, the lugs on the bottom are designed so that they can easily be trimmed. If you tend to run on dry or rocky surfaces, this can get you more traction. Other companies, like Hilma, employ fit-prediction models that prompt you to answer questions about your foot before you buy their shoes. You are asked to identify brands that tend to fit best and how certain parts of those shoes—say, the heel or toe box—fit, so that Hilma can suggest which of its three models it thinks will work best for you. Some companies don't even ask you for your size. To buy the Model T from lambic, you first share details about your personal fit preferences, then scan your foot with your phone using the company's app. Using that information, lambic makes you a custom last.

—Ashley Mateo

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