

“Why Change Now?”

Ah, the Good Old Days! But would we really want to go back to the Good Old Days? We've gotten use to our Microwave Ovens, our Air Conditioned Cars with Satellite Radio, IPOD Players, DVD Players on Plasma Screens. Things have come a long way since. Just look at the Vacuum Cleaner. The first vacuum clear was constructed of odd parts. The vacuum effect was accomplished by the attachment of an old pillowcase as its bag. A few hundred refinements later, the Hoover family popularized and sold door-to-door the motorized sucking machine dubbed the vacuum cleaner. It doesn't take a degree in interior design to notice how the humble vacuum cleaner has ably reflected the styles and dreams of popular culture. In the 1930s Hoover incorporated a round headlight into the front of their cleaning machines causing countless children to turn off the lights, plug in the vacuum, and play train with the noisy machines. In the 40's the grill-work on vacuums was redesigned, making the machines used to clean carpets resemble the huge, chrome-plated Chryslers and Oldsmobiles sitting in driveways. As the 1950's space-race started, designers again transformed vacuums into cosmic cleaners, round brightly-colored canisters vacs-on-wheels that sped across the floor like rocket-powered capsules. Today our vacuum cleaners are as high-tech as the rest of our lives. They are light-weight, self-propelled, and cordless. While some homes are now constructed with a built-in vacuum system (just hook up in each room), other home owners have purchased robotic vacuums. Loaded with computer intelligence chips these flat, oval, nimble little cleaning units quietly glide over our dirty carpets and floors all on their own. You come home to find a clean house.

But long before motorized, mechanized, computerized machines cleaned our homes for us, we had to sweep for ourselves. Brooms - bound collections of stiff straws or rushes, fastened to some sort of handle served as the primary housekeeping tool for thousands of years. Egyptians swept the sand from their pyramids with brooms, nuns cleaned their cloisters with brooms, medieval merchants swept out their shops with brooms. Anywhere you found people living in permanent structures, you found brooms. In spite of the grime and grunge we associate with pre-modern living conditions, human beings have always had this need to clean up after ourselves. In earliest days of our nation, brooms were just a bundle of twigs tied to a handle. They weren't called brooms but "besoms" (pronounced "bee-zums"), and they were a far cry from the masterpiece brooms the Shakers created in the 19th century which you can find only in museums today. Benjamin Franklin brought the first broom from Hungary (which they got from Africa) and made the first as-we-know-them-today brooms. In colonial America, one of the home's most prized possessions was the broom.