

What Exactly Is--and Isn't--Made in America? One Lobby Shop Finds Out

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Want a microwave made in America? Even a thorough web search reveals just two options - one costs \$550 (<http://www.dacor.com/Our-Products/Microwaves/Distinctive-24-Inch-Microwave.aspx>), the other starts at \$600 (<http://bigchill.com/products-page/stoves-hoods/retro-microwave/?gclid=COF53MLBz7QCFUQw4AodLkoA1A>). Build it in to your cabinetry, and you're looking at more than \$1,000 to reheat those tantalizing slices of leftover pizza with a machine born in the U.S.A. Of course, if you're willing to go with a model made in Asia, the local Wal-Mart has one for just \$55.

The search for a budget-friendly, American-made microwave wasn't even the toughest challenge for the Alliance for American Manufacturing, in their latest effort to practice what they preach. A lobby shop that touts the advantages of American-made goods couldn't go around purchasing the cheapest Chinese- or Malaysian-made appliances and office furniture for its D.C. headquarters, they thought. So the firm set out to accomplish the nearly impossible: sourcing all of their construction materials, office supplies and furniture from U.S.-based manufacturers.

Some pieces were relatively easy to find, according to the group's executive director, Scott Paul. Trash cans, light switches, and even furniture were all

readily available from well-known domestic companies. But if you want a U.S. dishwasher compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, you've got one choice: a single model from a line that German-based Bosch manufactures in North Carolina. It cost AAM \$1190.

Need computers, televisions or phones for your home or office? A coffee maker or a compact fluorescent light bulb? No such luck. Those products simply aren't manufactured stateside, Paul said. (They did settle on buying a Keurig.)

"If you look hard enough, you can find clothes. If you shop at Brooks Brothers, you can find some American made clothes, for instance. It's not easy to do, and you're not going to find them at Wal-mart," Paul said. "What you're not going to find is a lot of electronics. No matter where you look."

The products in their new office come from 23 states and 40 companies. Some are small mom-and-pops, but many major manufacturers still have plants in the United States. The office's energy star refrigerator was made in by Whirlpool in Iowa. The Benjamin Moore paint on the walls comes from New Jersey. The Pella windows are from Ohio, and Insinkerator produced the garbage disposal in Wisconsin. The map at the top of the page shows where AAM sourced their purchases.

Still, the job was tougher and took longer than most in architect Bill London's career. Though he was up for the challenge, London was worried from the start. "I was a little nervous, thinking, 'Oh, this is going to cost you an arm and a leg,' or 'We're only going to be able to get really ugly things,'" he said.

The final result didn't exceed their budget -- or sacrifice the design aesthetic -- though Paul granted that they were willing to pay more than the typical bare-bones non-profit. "If you're in a smaller office and you have a tiny budget, candidly, it's not going to be the easiest thing to do," he said.

Their final result harkens back to the exposed beams, brick, and hardware of industrial warehouses while maintaining the sleek lines and open spaces of contemporary design. Paul calls the style "hipster industrial." And despite London's initial reservations, the architect loves the result. He plans to submit the design to several local and national award contests this year.

As they enjoy their new offices, AAM has not missed the slight irony of their location. The group spends much of its time on the Hill working to combat what they see as unfair trade policies and practices in China. Now, however,

they sit in the heart of D.C.'s historic, if touristy, Chinatown neighborhood, just blocks from the Friendship Arch.

Erin Mershon

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