How we set out to create a piece of practical philosophy and won an **international design award**

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winner 2017

CHURNCRAFT

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At Churncraft, we are interested in products that revive cherished cultural traditions in a contemporary American context. The modern butter churn is our flagship product: a highly efficient, hand-powered mechanical device that allows you to make fresh, authentic butter with ease.

To our great delight, our patented design has now received the coveted Red Dot Award, the most prestigious international recognition for product design.

We think of our churn as a piece of practical philosophy at a special moment in American culture. Along with accelerating technological change and globalization, we are witnessing a revival of classical crafts and tools. Cooking is a huge part of this cultural phenomenon.

From the experimenting farmer to the creative chef, the culinary world is discovering the thrill of making butter by hand. Our award-winning design is integral to this delightful experience.

Kristin and Hannes Frey

Origins of the design

The shape of the churn came to us one Sunday morning in the kitchen. We were admiring the elegant simplicity of of a traditional Japanese tea kettle. Its handle was strikingly similar to the graceful curve of our old milk bucket. When we saw the connection, we knew we had found our design.

The origins of the design are rooted in personal biography. As a teenager growing up in the Hudson Valley, Kristin owned a Holstein cow that she milked by hand twice a day.

She used a vintage glass churn from the 1920s to turn the cream into the freshest butter one could imagine.

This old churn became the starting point for our new design.

We wanted to create an icon that would feel both familiar and excitingly forward-looking.

The arc handle is the defining visual element. In addition to being graphically compelling, it provides a rigid frame for the power train and a range of comfortable handholds.

When you grip the churn, you are in control, like the driver behind the wheel, or the skipper at the helm.

The visual and tactile immediacy translates into a superior functionality. You see, hear and feel what you are doing, which allows you to churn the butter to a perfect consistency. This is a fundamental advantage of hand-powered churns over electrical devices.

The point is illustrated in an anecdote told by Dan Barber, the celebrated chef who makes butter from the milk of individual cows. When the great Alain Ducasse visited Barber's restaurant, he could taste the difference between butter churned by hand and butter whipped up in an electrical blender.

Built to last

When you are making your own butter, you create something exquisite. This deserves a well-made tool.

Kristin wanted to build a classic that could be enjoyed by generations, so the design had to be durable.

We decided to use simple, industrial shapes that would not look dated after a few years.

We also paid close attention to the materials: stainless steel, aluminum, technical alloys suitable for the kitchen, glass, hardwood, and premium food-compliant plastic resins.

These materials defined our options for manufacturing. Starting in our home state, Connecticut, we engaged U.S. and international partners to produce the parts to our specifications in small production runs.

For reasons of practical philosophy, we wanted our product to express the tangible qualities of traditional American engineering. Nothing is hidden; everything is visible. The shape, weight and texture of each part indicate how it is manufactured and what purpose it serves.

The power train under the transparent dome is built around a set of industrial precision gears from Germany. For effective power transmission, the gears and shafts are carefully aligned, and the bearings permit just the right amount of play. The bronze bushings are impregnated with food-grade oil for reliable lubrication.

Using our custom-made parts and premium industrial hardware, we assemble the churn by hand in our workshop in Connecticut.

The churn can be field-stripped and rebuilt with simple tools, which makes it easy to maintain.

Our design philosophy is embodied in the construction of the churn. The result is a highly efficient machine that is pleasing to the eye and hand.

Designed to make better butter

We set out to design an entire experience, not just an object. Making butter by hand is a delightful activity that we love to share with family and friends.

Picture yourself in your kitchen.
You pour two quarts of heavy cream into the glass jar and begin to crank the handle, applying some power.
The paddle spins through the cream, creating swirling patterns.
Before you expect it, the jar is filled with whipped cream.
Ask your children and friends to join you. It is a good time to be together, to talk, and to share a task.
Churn vigorously. Watch the gears whirring along.
The cream thickens and expands, filling the entire jar. Resistance is building up, and you need to churn a bit harder. Soon you begin to see bits of butter forming.

After a few more minutes of churning, the miraculous moment arrives:
The volume inside the jar collapses, and the butter separates from the buttermilk.
It is a practical demonstration of culinary magic. Your reward is the freshest butter you have ever tasted. And the buttermilk is divine.
This is the experience we sought to capture when we decided to update the traditional American glass churn for the contemporary kitchen.
The churn's tangible quality is meant to encourage self-reliance and practical ingenuity, reaching back to a simpler time in America. It is a thoroughly modern and efficient device yet it revives an age-old tradition.
We were guided by our conviction that making your own butter is worth a bit of effort. The design is an integral part of the experience—a functional yet visually intriguing appearance, straightforward engineering and solid materials. When you pick up the churn, you feel how substantial it is. And that's exactly the point.

Consider the cow

When we make butter by hand, we realize that it matters where the cream comes from.

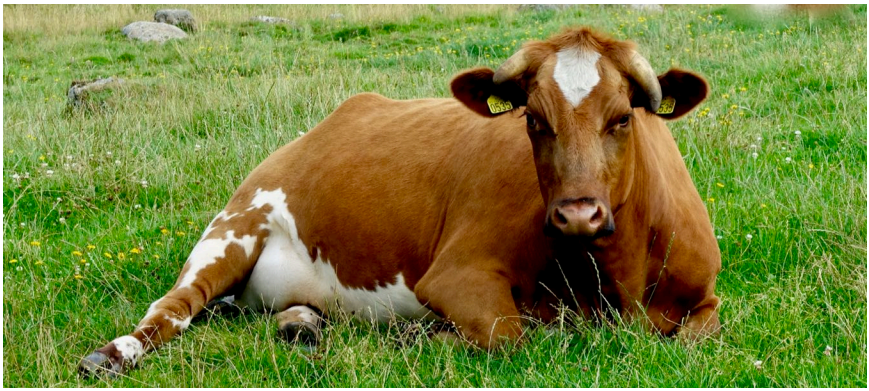
When we care about what we eat, we reconnect with the land.

The future of food is shaped by our attitudes towards farm animals.

Consider the cow!

For traditional peoples around the world, raising cattle was a way of life. Cows were a source of sustenance and wealth. Cattle-based cultures emerged after some bronze-age populations developed the ability to digest milk. Think about the relationship of early people with their cattle. Imagine how they must have marveled at the miracle of a cow converting grass to milk, and milk being turned into butter.

The churn is meant to be a time machine. It connects us to our cultural heritage and encourages us to think about the future of food in America.



From ancient Egypt, Greece and India, all the way north to the mist-shrouded sagas of Iceland, the image of the divine, nurturing cow is deeply embedded in human mythology. In Ireland, archeologists have discovered offerings of butter buried in bogs.

Our own family's roots are in Switzerland, Scandinavia and the British Isles. Cattle enabled our ancestors to live on land that was too harsh for intensive agriculture.

In a similar pattern, early European settlers in North America survived on countless small family farms, often with a single cow that produced just enough milk to support the family. Making butter was a means to store the nutritional value of milk.

In the early 20th century, the hand-powered glass churn became an icon of self-sufficiency around the country while hundreds of inventors worked to make it more perfect.

The design of our new churn revives this heritage. It invites us to address the future of food by honoring an ancient way of life.

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"The design of the Churncraft Butter Churn successfully achieves a thoughtful modernization of the traditional butter churn."

(From the official statement of the jury of the Red Dot Award 2017)