



# Kohler Co.

Kohler Co. was co-founded in 1873 by Austrian immigrant John Michael Kohler and Charles Silberzahn with the purchase of the Sheboygan Union Iron and Steel Foundry from Kohler's father-in-law, Jacob Vollrath, for \$5000.

Early products included cast iron and steel farm implements, castings for furniture factories, and ornamental iron pieces including cemetery crosses and settees. A breakthrough came in 1883 when John Michael applied enamel to a cast-iron horse trough to create the company's first bathtub. The company has been primarily in the plumbing business ever since, and is known for its plumbing fixtures.

In the early 20th century, Kohler made drinking fountains with a "bubbling valve", from which water shot vertically. Eventually the entire fountain came to be known as a "bubbler" in the area in which Kohler products were sold. The term bubbler is still used in a few areas of Wisconsin and some other areas of the United States.

Kohler's bath and kitchen fixtures are available in American hardware and home improvement stores and from Kohler Kitchen and Bath distributors. Kohler still makes traditional cast iron bathtubs, one of the few United States manufacturers to do so. Besides residential products, Kohler manufactures a commercial line of bathroom fixtures. The company also does artistic custom work, such as hand-painted sinks and toilets. Kohler was named by "The Builder Magazine" as the "most used" and "best quality" in the "Bath Accessories" category as well as the top spot for "brand familiarity", "most used" and "quality rating" in the "Bath Fixtures" and "Whirlpool Baths" categories.

Kohler also makes a wide range of small industrial engines. Traditionally, the company manufactured gasoline engines; however, after purchasing the Italian company Lombardini, it extended its range and now offers diesel engines up to 134 HP. Kohler engines power a range of devices from water pumps to off-road vehicles. The Global Power group manufactures generators of varying sizes. Kohler was the first company to offer residential back-up generators, starting in 1920.

In 2007, Kohler created a joint venture in China called Kohler-YinXiang Ltd., based in Chongqing, China, to manufacture small gasoline engines, and intends to begin importing more of their engines, rather than building them in the US. Kohler's UK subsidiary is the Cheltenham-based Kohler Mira Ltd, best known for manufacturing Mira Showers.

