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60s icon coming back

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60s icon coming back

Psychedelic lava lamps hipper than ever

By Hillary Chura

Associated Press

CHICAGO - With their psychedelic colors and funky insides, lava lamps conjure up visions of love beads and hippies.

But sales are growing faster today than in the summer of love.

Fans of the 1960s icon range from adolescents to grandmothers, although it's mostly teens or baby boomers who pay \$40 to \$300 for a conical bottle filled with top-secret, colored oozing waxy goop, said Christopher Baldovin, vice president of lamp manufacturer Haggerty Enterprises Inc.

"You either look at it and say 'Hey, that's COOL,' or 'That's the ugliest damn thing I've ever seen.' There's no gray area," Baldovin said.

The lamps are also emblazoned on T-shirts, baseball hats and key chains.

And they've spawned a new squeeze-and-eat candy that comes in watermelon, cherry and blue raspberry flavors.

Haggerty's sales are strong. Receipts for the just-ended fiscal year were better than any four years in the 1960s and notably better than in 1981 or 1982, when the 200-person company dropped to eight employees and almost closed for lack of customers, company chairman John Mundy said.

He declined to release sales figures because the company is privately owned.

Mundy said he couldn't explain the resurgence in the 31-year-old product except that lava lamps are "hip, cool and fun."

Elizabeth Sisco, 60, of Chicago, got a purple lava lamp for Valentine's Day. She said she wanted one because it is soothing and reminds her of the lamp she had years ago.

Sisco said the lava lamp she keeps on her dining room table appeals to all ages.

"I can't wait for my grandson to come and say 'What is that, Grandma?'" she said.

Derek Paul, 23, of Clemson, S.C., got his sixth lava **lamp** last month and keeps them lined up on the desk in his bedroom.

Paul says they are relaxing and are never the same twice.

"They're all plugged into a power strip so I don't have to turn them on one at a time," he said.

Lava **lamp** lore says the invention was a fluke. An English chemist trying to devise something - probably an egg timer, according to the company - ended up with the lava **lamp**.

And how do they get the lava **lamp** goop to move like that?

As the wax is warmed by the light bulb in the base of the **lamp**, it rises to the top of the bottle and then cools and floats down to begin the cycle again.

"We think we know how to do it, but every batch is an adventure," Mundy said. "It still comes down - when all this scientific mumbo jumbo is done - we put one on, and we look at it. Every batch."

Each mixture is prepared the same way, with a formula only four or five people know.

And when a batch is bottled, Haggerty's workers check to see if the wax floats too quickly or too slowly or if adjustments are necessary.

"It's like Chicago weather. If you don't like it, wait 10 minutes, and it will change," Baldwin said. "That's part of its coolness."

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