



Advertising for an array of Moulinex kitchen devices, printed in November, 1963.



Moulinex founder Jean Mantelet, pictured at his desk in 1962.



Food for thought. The French brand rendered daily chores effortless with its affordable, time-saving gadgets.

# Moulinex



The history of the famous French kitchen and home appliances brand Moulinex dates to early 1930s Paris. There, a young businessman and inventor named Jean Mantelet—inspired, legend has it, by his wife's lumpy, hand-mashed potato purée—had the idea for a food mill that would transform cooked vegetables into a smooth mash at the crank of a handle.

Mantelet introduced his device, the Moulin-Légumes ("vegetable shredder"), at the Lyon Fair in 1932, where it retailed for 36 francs but garnered little interest. Two months later, he brought the design to the Paris Fair, reducing the price to 20 francs, and achieving instant success. By the end of the year, his company, then known as Manufacture d'Emboutissage de Bagnolet, was producing around 2,000 mills a day. Mantelet had found his business model: small, mass-produced domestic appliances that were affordable, yet invaluable in their time-saving potential.

Between 1929 and 1953, Mantelet applied for 93 patents, producing everything from nutcrackers (the Mouli-Noix) to salt mills (the Mouli-Sel), and his best-seller, the Légumex: a rotating vegetable peeler and scraper. But it was 1956 that spawned Mantelet's biggest hit, a neat electric coffee grinder, dubbed the Moulinex. Retailing at less than half the market price of other coffee grinders, the Moulinex was a testament to Mantelet's theory that "a new price is a new market." By the end of the year, some 1.5 million units had sold. Capitalizing on the product's success, in 1957 Mantelet changed the company name to Moulinex, and swiftly entered the realm of electronic appliances.

The 1960s marked the arrival of Jean Louis Barrault at Moulinex, who joined as a freelance designer in 1963, fresh from Raymond Loewy's Compagnie d'Esthétique Industrielle (CEI) in Paris. Arguably the brand's most influential designer, Barrault prioritized simple efficiency—"a juicer must squeeze citrus fruits, that's all," he told *Les Echos* in 1996—and innovation ("innovation must be permanent otherwise you are dead").

This approach is evidenced in his multifarious designs for the company over the subsequent 25 years.

The 1960s also saw Moulinex launch its famous slogan "Moulinex libère la femme!" ("Moulinex liberates women!"), targeting a new generation of housewives keen to free themselves from the daily drudgery of household chores. New releases spanned food processors of all kinds, including choppers, mixers, and blenders, which swiftly revolutionized home cooking, through vacuum cleaners and hair dryers.

By the 1970s, it was estimated that every household in France had, on average, four Moulinex products, while around 50 percent of the company's sales were now overseas. And the company's creativity, it seems, knew no bounds. Over the course of the decade, Moulinex introduced a stream of new products, from its 1972 electric coffee maker—a resounding success—to its first microwave oven in 1978, as well as more whimsical offerings, like brightly hued salad spinners and electric egg boilers.

The first half of the 1980s was also a time of prolific innovation, resulting in programmable coffee machines, nifty pasta makers, and a whole host of refined cooking appliances. Think: the modern, radically compact Vertical Grill (1981), featuring a motorized attachment for rotating chicken while it roasted, or the Cuitout, a progressive, multi-tasking Slow Cooker (1981), which could cook, stew, fry, steam, and boil.

In 1985, overwhelmed by competition, Moulinex found itself in serious financial difficulty for the first time. In 1991, following the death of its founder, the company purchased German home-appliance brand Krups, resulting in further financial turmoil. 10 year later, Moulinex declared bankruptcy and was subsequently acquired by longtime French rival, Groupe SEB.

Under this new umbrella, the brand has been able to continue its founding mission of making kitchen appliances available to all, while instilling the cooking process with an effortless *joie de vivre*.