
MAKE SURE YOU AREN'T THE ONLY
ONE WHO THINKS IT'S A GOOD IDEA

GEORGE DAVISON'S P O P C O R N V O L C A N O



1963-

*This concept illustration depicts the Volcano
Glowing Microwave Popcorn Bowl on display on
a retail store shelf.*

see a failure as a mirror. For me, in inventing, this is especially important. You've taken an idea and built it into a well-constructed, fingerprint-free reflection of yourself. Then it fails. It smashes into hundreds of shards of mirror. To some it's a mess, a disappointment. To me, I see hundreds of new ideas staring back at me. I just choose a new path and go on from there."

However, failure for a product to sell or be accepted by the public is another matter. His Tree House Swing Set only failed because the bank funding the manufacturing company pulled the plug. The Screaming Bug Zapper bombed when the buyers at the major retail chains refused to see its potential, despite its 10 anthropomorphic Looney Tunes—esque death songs. But Davison is still scratching his head over this one — his Popcorn Volcano. The public should have loved it. It was a Walmart natural; it should have sold. It didn't. All because of what Davison calls the "human factor."

The Volcano Glowing Microwave Popcorn Bowl promised its owner "fun watching volcano erupt for 3 to 5 minutes." As the corn inside the volcano heated up, the volcano glowed red, until the heat caused the kernels to explode out of their shells. The cooked, fluffy insides expanded in volume, and the whole thing erupted out the top of the volcano's crater. The stuff of family movie nights? The buyers at American's retail giants didn't think so.

The volcano's glow came from a small tube filled with neon. Microwaves excited the gas causing it to glow brightly, and immediately. The idea came from the use of florescent bulbs in testing for leaks in microwaves. The volcano's neon lightbulb was encased in transparent silicone to make it safe to touch. The microwave heated a stainless-steel plate at the base of the volcano, which caused the corn to pop. So far, so good. So what made this invention a total flop? Davison's "human factor" in this case was the buyers and decision makers from the retail giants, which largely control what shoppers see on the shelves. Davison thinks that the "gatekeepers," as he calls them, may not always be the best people to judge whether an idea is a good one or not — or even whether the public would buy it.