

BEST IN SHOW

KEY TRENDS EMERGE FROM THE DESIGN FISHBOWL OF THE SALONE INTERNAZIONALE DEL MOBILE.

NOTICEABLY FEWER AMERICANS attended this year's Milan Furniture Fair: Blame the plummeting dollar and sluggish Western economy for keeping them away. But with the luxury sector going strong and building still booming in the Middle East and Asia, there were a slew of product introductions, particularly from high-end manufacturers like Poggenpohl, which, as part of the biennial Eurocucina section, unveiled the P'7340 kitchen it created with the elite Porsche Design Group. Big names were also present in force. Axor, for instance, debuted bathroom collections by Philippe Starck, Antonio Citterio, and Jean-Marie Massaud.

If, at first glance, everything at the fair was business as usual, there was also a strong back-to-basics vein. This was visible in a resurgence of unpretentious, hard-working materials and straightforward forms, including a plethora of wooden chairs. Additionally, perforated and woven metal were featured in a variety of product types, from Tord Boontje's Rain series of tubular outdoor furniture to Heath Nash's Anemone hanging pendant lamp. And keeping the event from seeming too puritan, there was much sensual exploration of skins—upholstery with folds, crevices, and layers that serve as both structure and enclosure.

Text Julie Taraska

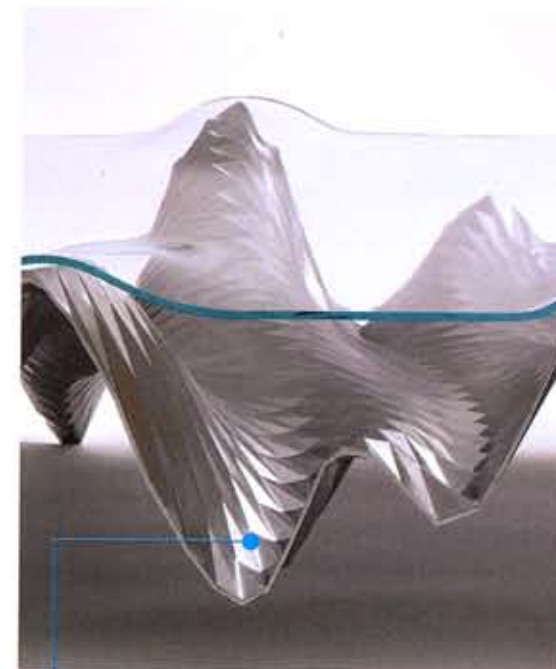
product Cirkel area rug
 manufacturer Cappellini
 website cappellini.it

Cirkel is part of the Magic Carpet Collection, which marks Cappellini's first foray into the carpet market (in collaboration with Hong Kong manufacturer Tai Ping).

product Spindle chair
 manufacturer Porro
 website www.porro.com
 Designed by Piero Lissoni, this chair features microperforations on the seat, which is made from woven chromium-plated wire.



product Open Chair 080
 manufacturer Alias
 website aliasdesign.it
 Milan-based designer James Irvine designed the perforated Open chair (and accompanying table) to be used outdoors.

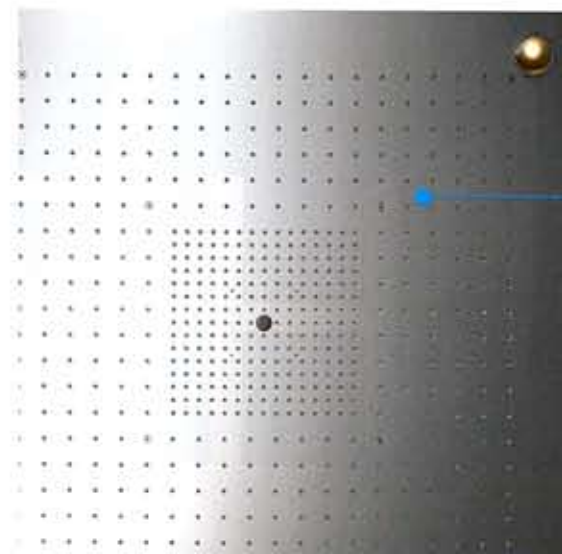


product Asymptote's Ivo table
 manufacturer Meta
 website madebymeta.com
 Asymptote's topographical table combines a steel-alloy base and slumped glass top.



product Log Collection
 manufacturer Artelano
 website artelano.com
 Designed by Patricia Urquiola, this simple collection of turned wood features a chair, table, sofa, and ottoman.

product Pregnant chair
 manufacturer Moooi
 website moooi.com
 This prototype wooden chair by Australian designer Trent Jansen hides another, smaller version underneath the seat, which can be removed and replaced with ease.



product Starck Shower Collection
 manufacturer Axor
 website axor-design.com
 Philippe Starck designed his latest bathroom collection for Axor (a division of Hansgrohe) using 12-centimeter-square metal plates.

ARCHETYPAL SEATING

In the 20th century, chairs underwent a sea change, thanks to materials like plastic and technologies like injection molding. This year, designers returned to the archetype: the simple wooden chair. Take 29-year-old Dutch designer Wouter Scheublin's Frame chair for Established & Sons, its angular lines reminiscent of seats by his countryman Gerrit Rietveld. Artek dug into its archives to revive the Hallway Chair 403, a stackable birch model designed by Alvar Aalto in 1931-32. And Patricia Urquiola unveiled her Log Collection for Artelano, an airy yet substantial set of wooden furniture. Jasper Morrison created a hybrid that fused past and present: His Basel chair for Vitra boasted a beech frame with a seat and back made of super-thin, batch-dyed plastic. The most unusual offering was the prototype Pregnant chair from Moooi, which features a smaller chair nestled beneath its seat.

WEAVES AND PERFORATIONS

Steel and aluminum are popular structural materials, prized for their strength, beauty, and durability. This fair, furniture manufacturers punched holes in the metal's surface or daisy-chained thin strands of it to lessen items' visual bulk and add a decorative edge. Small perforations were also prevalent: Porro's stackable Spindle seat, which Piero Lissoni fashioned from sections of chromium-plated wire; Moroso's Net chair, by Polish designer Tomek Rygalik, is fashioned to resemble chain mail. Elsewhere, a striking texture of beveled holes dotted James Irvine's Open System for Alias, while Emu's Ivy Collection of pregalvanized, painted-steel sofas, tables, and a chair was so porous that the pieces looked like they could float on air.

EXCEPTIONAL SKINS

Architecture's obsession with textured surfaces has been migrating to soft goods for some time, with 3-D textures appearing on products like Anna Kyyro Quinn's felt wall panels. Furniture proved the trend's next frontier, with exhibitors disrupting flat surfaces with creases, folds, and layered fabrics. The wrinkled and bunched upholstery on Cappellini's Sharpei chair was inspired by the dog of the same name, while the corrugated effect of the leather on Peter Traag's Sponge armchair for Edra is generated by the cooling of polyurethane foam injected directly into the upholstery. Asymptote's Ivo table for Meta moves the trend to metal, with captivating topography.

AND THEN SOME

As for other fair developments, designers were creating super-thin profiles, working with wool, and experimenting with string theory. Konstantin Grcic fashioned his Myto cantilever chair for Plank from BASF's Ultradur, allowing a centimeters-thick seat to hold 1,500 pounds. Using wool fiber, Cappellini collaborated with manufacturer Tai Ping on its first rug effort, the Magic Carpet Collection. And a resurgence of spaghetti furnishings was epitomized by Patricia Urquiola's Tropicalia Collection for Moroso, which featured wefts of colored thread arranged around angular chair frames.

Julie Taraska's work has appeared in over two dozen publications, including Metropolis, British GQ, and Icon.

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