

“Salon Del Mobile Internazionale 2006”

Written by Sean Scott

Edited by Helen Maria Nugent

This year’s excursion to the largest furniture fair in the world (really it is) proved to be worth the trip to the industrial grit / glam city of Milan. The fair this year was held in a brand new facility which was an architectural orgasm of vortexing glass, steel, and concrete mixed with some nice green areas. Many people in their reviews of this show have tended to gravitate towards the architecture, proposing the actual building as the highlight of the event. This space is a much welcomed change to the fairgrounds of the last 60 or so years. The mile long outdoor promenade which was two tiers, and is completely shielded under an amazing transparent veil of glass was truly breathtaking—particularly when taking into consideration its massive size and the aspect of human scale. It was one of my favorite things of this year’s fair. As a side note the fairgrounds cost over \$750 million to build, and was designed by the Italian architect [Massimiliano Fuksas](#)..



Fuksas-designed fairgrounds



Aside from the obvious, this year's fair in my opinion was somewhat lackluster in innovation. My first experience in Milan was last year, and I do not know if it was the jet lag, coupled with the fact that I had a 24hr layover in Dublin, but being a salon virgin I was blown away with the exhibition. Last year proved to be a major trend setting year for European furniture design. There were some truly innovative things happening: modular systems that start as one thing with one function, and then transform to another form with a different function. This was evident throughout the fair in the booths of all of the big name manufacturers ie: Cappellini, Minnoti, and B&B Italia, and in the Salon Satellite which is a space comprised of younger up & comers as well as accredited design academia. One thing to note here is that there were no American companies represented last year, and I saw none this year (except for an exhibit by design students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago). For a young up & comer like me this event is the perfect venue to get noticed on the grand international scale and get picked up by a large house. I hope to show there in the next few years. Of course, I will have to be somewhat independently wealthy at some point to pull it off.

As far as how I felt about what I saw this year??? Well...I would have to say it was about fashion. Go get yourself a copy of Vogue, or W, and take a look at the prints and colors for spring sashaying down the runway. At the Fair I saw a variety of purples, and pinks w/ dreamsicle oranges splashed on upholstery, and cast into composites and plastics. Also there was a common print reoccurring in this line up as well. The print of topic is that of a baroque floral motif, boldly stated in contrasting colors--often as bold as black & white. I saw this throughout the entire fair...everyone in the larger house category had some sort of representation of this in their exhibit. I suppose the innovative aspect of this was seeing how this motif was interpreted through a wide range of materials and production methods. Laser cutting was by far the most pervasive production method used to cut patterns into materials such as acrylic, and steel. Otherwise I did not get a sense of any other rumblings of future trends. From my perspective this floral pattern trend will, like fashion, be out by next season.



It will be interesting to see what next year's show will bring. The one thing to note about the European designers and manufacturers is that they are a couple of years ahead of us here in the states. They are fearless and not afraid to raise the eyebrows of their critics. Their business acumen and methods of manufacturing are also quite avant garde as well. The modular, transformative furniture that I saw last year in Milan has only started seeping through the cracks on the other side of the pond, first by way of the Brits, and

then on to us. Do not get me wrong, American design can be just as gutsy, but I think we are still rooted in a more traditional mind set, and just starting to understand what design is, and how it can be an effective element of the American lifestyle. We are getting there but we are not there yet, and with the impending prospect of Chinese manufacturing it will be interesting to see how American designers and manufacturers evolve and roll with these changing times.