

2009/04: Milan Design Week 2009 Preview

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Each April, the world's biggest design fair – the Salone Internazionale del Mobile – attracts industry insiders and just about everyone else to Milan. Showcasing work by some of the most important and influential figures in the world of design, the fair attracts a wide array of exhibitors and visitors. Despite the tough economic period, more than 2,500 exhibitors are expected to show some 12,000 products, and the organizers believe that the Milan Furniture Fair will be as big and glamorous as ever. From 22nd to 27th April 2009, the 200,000+ square metres of exhibition space at Rho will play host to the 48th edition of the Salone Internazionale del Mobile, the 25th edition of EuroLuce, the 23rd of the International Furnishing Accessories Exhibition, and the 12th of SaloneSatellite.

Milan's Salone Internazionale del Mobile event is considered by many to be the most important international design event of the year. Why? Hundreds of new products are to be launched there and lots of new ventures. The fair provides in-person meetings with international buyers, distributors, salespeople, and designers. It is important venue where…

- • manufacturers, distributors, and buyers see prototypes and other new objects;
- • manufacturers sign deals with hip designers and architects to create commercial, mass-produced chairs and tables;
- • and retail buyers to decide what products they might sell in the coming year.

Design strategists, for example, gain insight into the current and future trends of the design and furniture industry and thus can analyze broad trends that will soon hit the market. The fair also attracts those who aren't in the furniture business at all.

Saloni Internazionale del Mobile 2009 is not immune to the larger forces affecting the global economy. There are reports that three big Italian manufacturers - Cassina, Cappellini, and Poltrona Frau - had pulled out of the fair. But what exactly the real influence the economic crisis on the fair will be is going to become clear just in a few weeks. The fact is that for this edition of the Design Week one can find abundant information on-line. Many designers have already released previews of the furniture that they will be showing in Milan this year, which is what I’m bringing you here.

I will start with my favourite female designer: Patricia Urquiola, who has created furniture for Boffi, B&B, and Moroso; porcelain teapots for Rosenthal; watches and bowls for Alessi; and interiors for Knoll and Marks & Spencer. At this fair she will participate with Déchirer, her debut line of tiles. Produced by Ceramiche Mutina the large-scale ceramic pieces, whose name translates from French as “to shred,” have surfaces imprinted with snatches of different patterns and are available in four sizes and five understated colors. Here again, Urquiola applied her elegant feminine style to a product so familiar in so inventive way - it looks like stone embroidery!

Other new products of Urquiola that are to be launched in Milan are the Fergana collection for the Italian Moroso. Here, antique Uzbek techniques are blended with a European industrial approach. Fergana is a system of components that can form a large island of relaxation that incorporates a table at its centre. The wooden base is accessorized with a series of richly coloured cushions. As always, Urquiola has the most clever, practical approach. In hard times we return to classical, established values, and what better values than the century old folk art? A revival of interest in eastern European folk art began last year, and I expect that her Fergana collection will be a great success. Rift is another new collection by Urquiola, comprised of two sofas and two chairs that sport a layered look.

British designer Tom Dixon is showing a collection of furniture and lighting on the theme of “Utility.” Tube, Bowl and Lens are the three styles in the Pressed Glass series, a collection inspired by heavyweight industrial components. The heavy lamps are surprisingly honest in form and bear imperfections along with sinuous marks that reflect their industrial nature. His Block table has a granite top and legs made of electroplated copper, while the Screw table comprises a cast iron base and marble top.

Regarding his new Kouch & Ouch sofa, Karim Rashid says: “I have taken a great interest in organic form for the last 20 years. I feel a desirous need to soften the commodity landscape as our lives become more casual and relaxed. I want to be enveloped by my Kouch - Ouch! This Kasualism of shape, form, material and behavior are definitely a movement. The technology that affords us to morph, undulate, twist, torque, and blend our world is so ever inspiring to me. KOUCH and OUCH are my voluptuous organic and ergonomic blobs to continue my pursuit for this New ‘Soft World’ language.”

Other notables:

• Richard Hutten Studio has created the limited edition Cloud Chair for Gallery Ormond Editions.

• Foscarini will launch a new lamp by Milan-based designer Marc Sadler. Trees is made from interwoven threads that have been soaked in resin and cast in a long cylinder. The texture of the material is reminiscent of traditional woven fibres like baskets and high tech materials like carbon fibre.

• 5.5 designers' Coincasa collection Milan Design Week preview "includes a table with two legs that can be supported by either a light stand, book stand or birdcage, as well as a branch-like light stand."

• Arik Levy will present his Hoop Sofa that he designed for Italian company Living Divani. Its coloured, tubular metal structure is a geometric pattern of hoops that join together and intersect. He explains: "I wanted to create a light, outdoor seat, that seems to float in the air and conveys an aura of conviviality. a sculpture for the garden, comfortable and easy to maintain."

• Very interesting is the concept of the More furniture system by the Italian designer Giorgio Caporaso. The modular unit can easily be joined without the use of specific tools, to make a bookshelf, a table, a chair or a separating unit.

• Together with Eugeni Quitllet, Philippe Starck has designed for Driade a collection of furniture: chairs and couch Ring and Out/In made with various plastics suitable for both indoors and outdoors.

• Some of the most stunning objects drew on centuries-old craftsmanship rather than technology. Antoine & Manuel designers' studio new cabinet for Bd Barcelona is my favorite. It tells stories through its carved doors and unusual legs. I expected it to be a great success.

There will be numerous other interesting new products and events that are worth visiting during Design Week in Milan. For example, the Royal Academy of Art The Hague [KABK], Design The Hague 2010-2028 and Creative City The Hague [CSDH] will present Design Why?, a four-day platform about design in a chaotic world. Together with national and international magazines such as Abitare and Items, the makers of Design Why? will offer an interdisciplinary platform filled with exhibitions, lectures, interviews and debates.

The Design Why? discussion platform: For whom do we design? Where does design stand today and how will it look tomorrow? How do you, as a designer, keep up with an ever-changing world? Can creativity provide impulses to offer new opportunities for the consumer market? These questions and others will be carefully considered and debated throughout four-day-event.

As the on-line design magazine Dexigner writes: "Milan is going to be designers' paradise and sanctuary to believers in beauty again in just a few weeks. It is at Milan Design Week each April that all the new trends that may have begun to form during Koeln Furniture Fair and Paris Maison et Objet in January, are confirmed."