

A WELL- CRAFTED DRAMA



MILAN HIGHLIGHTS BY
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Milan is a great place to take the temperature of the design world. It's ten years since my first trip, and a decade of going to this incredible fair has afforded me a good view of the importance it holds for our industry and what it tells us about ourselves.

This year seemed to me to be busier than last year with people packed onto the stands and Milan's streets in equal measure. The mood was positive, perhaps not overly optimistic about the run up to Brexit, but positive about how business feels right now.

I trained originally to be a film-maker, and I was struck by the similarity between the two industries this year. The best stands created individual and immersive worlds to escape into, more of a theatrical experience, less of a trade fair when done well. Moooi, Ceccotti, Stellarworks and Diesel were perfect examples of brands whose stands really told their stories well.

More and more furniture houses are turning to bankable design stars - the celebrities of our industry - highlighting the importance of these stellar brands in adding kudos to the some of the biggest manufacturers.

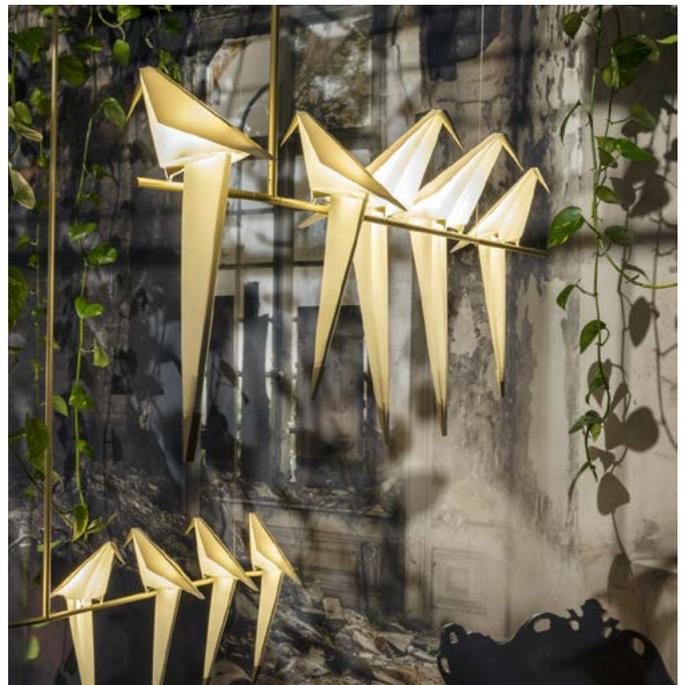
And the retelling of stories, or the repackaging of the most successful ones is another trend that Milan and Hollywood certainly share.

SHOW-STOPPERS

Dramatic single pieces that stole the show for me included the aptly named Rideau from Emmemobili. Technically complex and visually striking, this large cabinet effortlessly slides open to reveal its function.

The intriguing Galileo mirror from Living Divani spoke at once to the decorator and engineer in me. Its simple golden lines beckoned the viewer closer to find out just how it was supported and constructed.

The beautifully curved console from De Castelli softened their metal offering, showing a much more decorative side to their architectural collection.



Opposite page: The Valet collection, designed by David Rockwell for Stellarworks; This page clockwise from top: Rideau by Emmemobili; Perch Light by Moooi; Galileo mirror by Living Divani and Mosaico sideboard from De Castelli

WORKSHOP CHIC

Craftsmanship is still one of the strongest stories in the design world, and one of my personal favourites. This year saw craft interpreted across the continents; showing just how relevant traditional modes of furniture-making are in the right design hands.

KBH, from Copenhagen made a dramatic impact in Wallpaper's Handmade stand. Their back-story is the stuff of film: led by an ex-rocker who turned from guitar-making to furniture-making, they are a small collective of Danish furniture master craftsmen and designers with a shamelessly Nordic aesthetic and process. They even forage for their own wood.

This year they launch a classic collection of their best pieces at our Design Store, bringing their Nordic flavour to London and an international audience.



Craft at its most luxurious: Ceccotti's Peggy bench

Stellarworks produced a visually and functionally strong collection with Valet by David Rockwell. The cinematic 1970s staging further emphasised the strong American narrative of the collection with its ingredients of craftsmanship, full-grain saddle leather, American walnut, black steel and brushed brass.



Clockwise: KBH Chair; KBH leather hand stitched seating pads; The Valet bar cart from Stellarworks; KBH New Classics Collection

SEQUELS SPELL SUCCESS

Another parallel with show business is the challenge that our industry faces to find and tell truly new stories. They are few and far between in Hollywood, and the new stories are often not the commercial hits: it is the sequels that promise an instant hit of a tried-and-trusted formula with recognisable stars and an easy to digest experience.

Some of the strongest brands ensure success through their enduring narratives and design direction. Meridiani's long-standing design director Andrea Parisio; Living Divani and Porro's inimitable Piero Lissoni; Flexform's Roberto Lazzeroni; Moooi's Marcel Wanders: their firm hand was visible in each of the stands. Ceccotti created a world firmly based in the past, a Downton-esque stately home that reflected their pedigree.

At Porro I particularly enjoyed the architectural lines of Gallery, a cabinet that slides apart vertically to reveal a lit bar that can be dimmed down through the colour temperature spectrum. Though a new piece, it is unmistakably Porro.

Meridiani impressed through their strong stand that transported us to a villa somewhere in the Mediterranean. I loved their armchair and bed derived from the Keaton family.

Moooi's theatrical tendencies were displayed to full effect in their huge stand, complete with heavy velvet curtains and central sculptural configuration of Chesterfield sofas. But a closer look revealed more of the quirky but functional furniture that has made Moooi world-famous.



Clockwise: Moooi exhibition inspired by their dramatic character; Porro Gallery bar unit; Ceccotti displaying their exceptional finishes with deep rich tones; Meridiani stand featuring Plinto table and Kita dining chair;

RE-RELEASES: OLD IS THE NEW 'NEW'

And while everyone is searching for the new, I was dazzled by the old. Some of the best 'new' stories from Milan were anything but. Re-releases of classics from several world-famous designers were some of my favourites pieces from the fair.

Finn Juhl was the grandfather of the modern movement and his pieces should be available in today's design landscape - not only via the antique market. Danish furniture manufacturer Onecollection's relaunch of his France Chair helps tell the little-known story of how a British pioneer, C.W.France helped launch the world-wide phenomenon that is Danish modern.

Agapecasa exhibited the Angelo Mangiarotti collection, a selection of 'evergreen classics' from the great architect. One of the leading exponents of the Modern Movement, Mangiarotti's work seemingly defies the bounds of physics, taking design into the realms of sculpture and beyond.



LIMITED EDITIONS

One of the most modern of manufacturing houses, Molteni, showcased several pieces from design legends that have influenced and formed their own history.

Pieces by Gio Ponti sat alongside the newest creations from newly appointed Design Director Vincent van Duysen .

Milan 2016 proved to me that there is always a place for new design, but not at the expense of the best designs that have ever been.



Clockwise from top left: France armchair by Finn Juhl; Eccentrico Table by Angelo Mangiarotti for Agapecasa; Table/Bench by Finn Juhl; Glove Cabinet by Finn Juhl; Shelves by Yasuhiko Itoh for Molteni & C; Pelican Armchair by Finn Juhl; Sideboard by Finn Juhl