

Milan Report | The Wrap-Up, Part I

DESIGN | By PILAR VILADAS | APRIL 24, 2012, 11:57 AM



The Zabuton sofa, by Nendo for Moroso.

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Another year, another Milan Furniture Fair. The crowds at the fairgrounds outside the city, as well as those attending the numerous exhibitions in town, seemed as enthusiastic as ever. But the furniture on display looked a bit more subdued than in recent years, and there seemed to be less of it, as if manufacturers were being cautious about the near future — which is understandable given the current mood of economic uncertainty. Still, there were plenty of bright spots.

At **Vitra**, which showed, among other things, **Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's** Corniche pedestal shelves, the space was divided by floor-to-ceiling stacks of translucent white plastic storage boxes: a clever, economical move that seemed just right for the temporary space of a trade-show stand. **Porro's** Gentle chair, designed by the Swedish collective **Front**, looked like an elegant line drawing of a chair — that is, not exactly promising comfort — but its leather-covered back turned out to be surprisingly flexible. At **Established & Sons**, **Ingo Maurer**, who is known for his innovative, poetic **lighting designs**, realized an idea that had been brewing for 30 years with his engaging Floating Table, a tabletop that rests, free of legs or a base, on the arms of four bentwood chairs, which pull out from the table by an extension mechanism underneath it. **Ligne Roset** showed pieces by a number of young designers, but it also brought out upholstered seating that Pierre Paulin originally designed in the early 1970s for the smoking room of the Élysée Palace when Georges Pompidou was president.

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At **Kartell**, one of the most distinctive pieces was **Rodolfo Dordoni's** O/K lounge, perfect for poolside with its shapely blue plastic legs. The German company **E15** presented furniture by the early Modernist architect Ferdinand Kramer. Karnak, a linear side chair that Kramer designed in 1925, looked startlingly fresh, reminding you that there really is not much new under the sun. And at **Arco**, the Deskbox, a tidy, wall-mounted desk by **Raw-Edges**, was just the thing for a small space.

While much of the furniture on view this year emphasized the useful, **Moroso** bucked the trend, showing furniture that made more of a statement, from **Werner Aisslinger's** environmentally friendly Hemp chair to **Nendo's** more conceptual Zabuton seating, which is based on the idea of a futon draped over a wire frame. The actual design is far more sophisticated technically, and its form is graceful.

The most unexpected twist to Milan's design week, however, was the abundance of compelling tabletop objects by well-known designers. At **Spazio Rossana Orlandi**, the Japanese company **1616 Arita** showed the Colour Porcelain collection by **Scholten & Baijings**, a seductive array of plates, bowls and cups that employs the Dutch duo's luscious but modern palette of blues, reds and yellows. In the Ventura Lambrate district, **Jaime Hayon** also showed delicate designs in Japanese porcelain (with a dash of his usual whimsy), for the manufacturer **Kutani Choemon**. And color provided a fresh accent in **Patricia Urquiola's** crystal stemware and vases for **Baccarat**. At **10 Corso Como**, **Georg Jensen**, the Danish silversmith, unveiled a group of sensual bowls and vases by **Ilse Crawford**, in more affordable metals like stainless steel, copper and brass (although one of the vases is available in a hammered silver version).

But one of the most satisfying tabletop collections was also the most utilitarian. **Sowden**, named for its designer, **George Sowden** — a veteran designer of everything from watches to chairs to pay phones, and one of the original members of Memphis — includes dinnerware, coffee and tea pots, accessories and even small appliances (a toaster, an electric kettle, a juicer), all of which are made of porcelain. Sowden started two years ago with the coffee pots, called **SoftBrew**, which use a cylindrical stainless steel filter that is photo-engraved with almost invisible holes. (He developed a similar filter for the teapots.) These were so successful that he decided to branch out. Sowden showed the entire line in a single group in his studio, and its simplicity and common sense made you want to buy every piece in it.

Later this week, T reports from some of the many exhibitions that were on view in Milan.