

the furniture

Craft with a conscience

Two brands, both making their Milan debut this year, are trailblazers in this area. Mater, from Denmark, creates home accessories based on an ethical business strategy, with production in China, India and Vietnam that supports people, traditional crafts and the environment. Mater works with designers such as Todd Bracher, whose Marblewood candelabra are made by artisans operating from small co-operatives in the Jaipur province of India. Artecnic, already aware of their products' global impact, have a programme called Design with Conscience, where artisan communities of developing countries handcraft objects designed by internationally recognised designers such as Hella Jongerius, Estudio Campana and Tord Boontje.

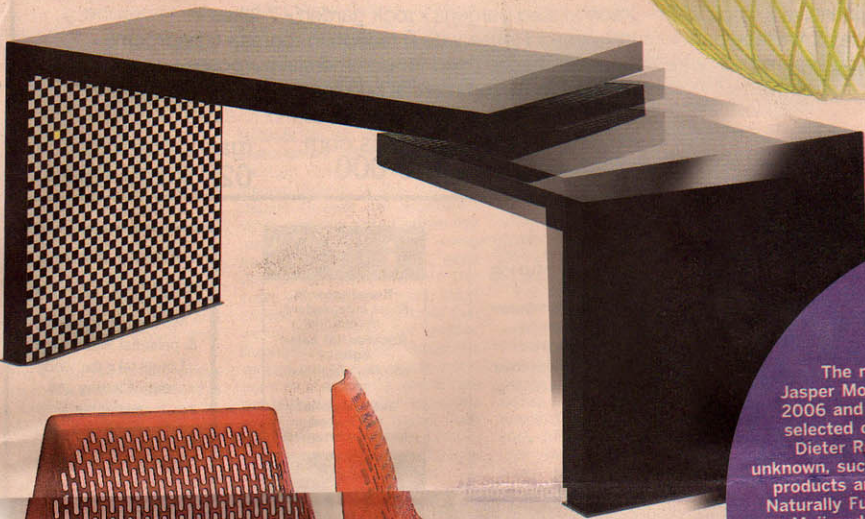
TransNeomatic, by Estudio Campana, is made from a reused scooter tyre and natural wicker handcrafted by Hai Tai rattan weavers from rural Vietnam.

Nick Vinson picks the highlights from this year's Salone Internazionale del Mobile



Super normal

The name comes from Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison's exhibition shown first in Tokyo in 2006 and then in Milan in 2007. The two designers selected objects including both the known, such as Dieter Rams' Universal Shelving System, and the unknown, such as a humble rubber vegetable peeler. These products are designed to blend in and be harmonious. Naturally Fukasawa takes the lead with his products for Muji and his own brand, Plus Minus Zero. His new functionally elegant Hiroshima chair for Next Maruni is getting lots of attention for something so low key. Finn Harri Koskinen, who also designs for Next Maruni, has recently come out with Oma tableware for Finland's Arabia. Maddalena De Padova, of the Milan store with the same name, has a knack for spotting design with this quiet longevity. These perfect and simple pieces are for life, not just for Salone.



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Design Decade will be published next week

Serious business

Scholten and Baijings for Thomas Eyck



Last year Eyck, who describes himself as a "publisher and distributor of characteristic and exclusive contemporary design products", opened his collection during the Salone. His résumé includes eight years with Royal Tichelaar Makkum, where he developed the contemporary collections alongside Jan Tichelaar.

In his second year Eyck focuses on the traditional Dutch craft of weaving in wicker, popular in the 17th century. He commissioned designers Stefan Scholten and Carole Baijings, who designed a collection of eight objects including three bowls, a set of napkin rings and a tray. They call the items "conversation pieces for the table", based on the hope that they will stimulate "a nice conversation" when used. The willow wicker has been cleaved and planed into very fine pieces and used almost as a textile. Scholten and Baijings worked with Esmé Hofman, a traditionally trained weaver, yet, in place of traditional wood, worked with plastic strips that were woven into the wicker, adding strength. Scholten, who trained at Design Academy Eindhoven, wanted "to combine the handweaving with something more industrial", hence the plastic. Scholten and Baijings have painted the willow with two layers of yellow ink, one matt and one fluorescent, starkly contrasting with the flat hues of traditional weaving, such as black and beige.

www.thomaseyck.com

'Correspondance' desk

Andrée Putman for Bisazza



One of the highlights of last year's fair was Andrée Putman's collection for Poltrona Frau, a match of her restrained and refined finesse with the company's artisan skills with leather.

This year Putman turns her attention to Bisazza, the leading producer of glass mosaics from Italy's Vicenza region, designing two new editions for the Bisazza Home collection, a range launched at Salone del Mobile in 2006. With Putman, it seems that less is most definitely more as, unlike some of her younger contemporaries, she does not spread herself too thin by designing for everyone. Her Bisazza project is comprised of just two pieces, the round Zenith table and this pivoted Correspondance desk. It is made of black lacquered wood and Putman has used mosaic tiles in black and white to create a checkerboard pattern on the underside. Within it she has set just one 24 carat gold tile.

Putman refers to the checkerboard, a recurring theme in her work, as "my favourite code". This collection is not about showing off but about details that are revealed to the owner. This might be her first furniture collection for Bisazza but it is far from her first collaboration with the brand. "We have been specifying Bisazza products for ever! I have used Bisazza in all the big projects". Putman, busy as ever, is working on a new hotel concept near the Champs Elysées in Paris, a tower in Qatar and a residential tower in Dubai.

www.bisazza.com

Myto chair

Konstantin Grcic for Plank



Myto is the result of an unprecedented collaboration between a designer, a furniture manufacturer and a plastics producer. So special is its development that, in addition to being

shown at the Plank stand at the furniture fair, Myto has its own exhibition focusing on the project's design and development process at La Triennale, Milan's Design Museum. Myto began when Grcic visited BASF's new Designfabrik centre in Ludwigshafen, Germany, for an informal workshop conceived to create ties between a select group of designers and the chemical company. Soon after, BASF proposed a project for Grcic: to work with their Ultradur material, initially developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s but still in constant development still. To both it was important to make a product that could be more than a showpiece - something for everyday use - so Plank, with which Grcic had already made the highly successful Miura stool, was brought onboard. A cantilever chair, for Grcic "the icon of modernism", offered the greatest challenge and was something he had previously regarded as "out of bounds" because of the respect he held for Marcel Breuer's 1928 cantilever chair. He felt that "with a new material, I can find a new language" and wanted to create a seat that was transparent, soft and flexible without being weak - hence Myto's open mesh seat and back.

www.plank.it

Bambi desk

Nendo for Cappellini



Oki Sato, along with Koichiro Oniki, Satoshi Yoshiizumi, Haruka Misawa and Akihiro Ito, formed Nendo in 2002 after the five friends had visited Milan's Salone del Mobile. Being both

shocked and impressed by seeing designers working so freely, they went back to Japan, opened an office and named it Nendo, which means "free-formed clay" in Japanese. Their aim was to design freely with flexible ideas. After presenting their wares initially at the Salone Satellite - Milan's young designer section and a springboard to successful alliances with major manufacturers - in 2003 and 2004, Nendo is now a regular on the Salone circuit.

At the Satellite in 2004, Giulio Cappellini spotted Nendo's potential and by 2006 was launching their Yuki screen, followed by the Ribbon stool last year. Bambi, the latest offering, is a small writing desk made of laser-cut metal sheet finished in colourful polyester gloss lacquer, or, as Nendo put it: "A desk in the form of a single plane, bent this way and that". Each of the four legs rests in a different direction, giving it a sense of unsteadiness at first glance, but you soon realise that it is actually a strong, well-balanced form (the structural strength is hidden from view below the surface). Its name refers to the somewhat shaky-looking legs of a young fawn. Nendo will also present Rokumaru, a wooden coat stand for De Padova and the Radial bookcase for Council.

www.cappellini.it

Stack

Shay Alkalay for Established & Sons



London-based Alkalay was born in Tel Aviv and is one half of Raw Edges, a design studio he founded last year with fellow Royal College of Art graduate Yael Mer. Two versions of

Stack were initially developed for the London Design Festival last September. For Gradual, a show of items from recent graduates of the RCA curated by Martino Gamper, Alkalay produced a 4.5-metre-high version, which was later purchased by the Johnson Trading Gallery in New York for New Stuff, its show of new talent, which opened in December.

What Alkalay calls "the domestic version" was first shown with Okaystudio at the shop Boxfresh, where it was spotted by Established & Sons design director Mark Holmes and has been in development since.

Stack is a chest of drawers with a difference, more a tower of drawers that can be pushed and pulled in two directions. Alkalay thinks "chests of drawers look more intriguing when the drawers are left partly open" and has done away with the limitations of the traditional exterior frame, back panel and handles. Instead, he has left just the individual floating drawers, which move freely in two directions, encouraging the user to leave them semi-open to create a random shape, enhanced by the multi coloured finish. Stack comes in two sizes, 1.8-metres-high with 13 drawers and 1.1 metres-high with eight, in green or red colour variations.

www.establishedandsons.com