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Design news

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IN MILAN

IT'S HATS OFF TO THE BRITISH FOR BEING A LITTLE BARMY AT THE MILAN FURNITURE FAIR

FOR the past three weeks, 100 per cent British Design – with bowler-hat lights, Fair Isle knitted pouffes and insect-strewn bone china – has been on sale at La Rinascente, Milan's

seven-storey department store, in the shadow of the city's cathedral, as part of this year's Milan Furniture Fair, the largest interiors show in the world.

Billed as a UK design supermarket, the La Rinascente sale is idiosyncratic to say the least. Our image in Milan is for being a little barmy, while revamping old faithfuls such as **Anglepoise**, **Wedgwood** and **Globe Trotter**, and launching new designs: hand-shaped hooks, a dog light made from reclaimed wood, and plates with faces. Bravely bringing on the British is **Vittorio Radice**, who knows London from his successful time at Selfridges. Now he's CEO at La Rinascente. "I love British design, it is so imaginative and original," he says.

Milan's main event is the Salone Internazionale del Mobile, in giant new exhibition halls, but there are also hundreds of smaller shows, installations and happenings all over town, featuring furniture, kitchen/bath accessories, china and glass and lots of lighting.

THE LONDON LOOK

London's **Established & Sons** has been going for six years. Its attitude can be sniffy and its merchandise iffy but its lighting is superb. A jumper chair was wrapped in a striped, knitted one-piece cover, and a cabinet was printed inside with Dutch etchings. A



Armchair and stool by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso



Jeeves bowler (£189.02) and Wooster top hat (£199.24) lights for Innermost by Jake Phipps hidden artshop.com

Moroso's chair, which crumples up like foil when you sit on it, was a big talking point

workmanlike take on a bentwood chair was by Londoner **Martino Gamper** (but you could buy the real thing for £99 at **The Conran Shop**).

Elsewhere, Tom Dixon (tomdixon.net) did classy metal lighting. A bulbous new shape called Void is spun with "double walls" in solid copper, brass or stainless steel (£250). This will be a classic. At Salone Satellite, the hall for new talent, London's **Hidden Art** designers were markedly professional. These makers, such as Louis and Sophie, sell direct but hope to find manufacturers (hiddenartlondon.co.uk/milan).

The Salone is above all for the big Italian brands. One of the weirder talking points was a chair that crumples up like kitchen foil when you sit on it. It's by Moroso and should soon be in its Clerkenwell showroom in Rosebery Avenue, ECI (020 3328 3560; moroso.it).

English rose plastic chair (below) by Nika Zupanc for Moooi



Hand hooks by Thelermont Hupton (£90;thelermont-hupton.com)

Albie puppy light, (£575) and similar Sampson dog light (£705), from James Plumb.co.uk



STARCK CONTRASTS

Kartell, the plastics king, did out its stand in black – more safe than stylish – with a new **Philippe Starck** outdoor sofa that was glam and glossy, but the white version would suit a garden better. Starck's neat new cupboards, good for small bedrooms, are prettier in colours such as violet, available now from **Lifestylebazaar** in Kingsland Road, E2 (lifestylebazaar.com).

Across the city, **Designersblock** was showing **Bodging**, Milano, definitely the best installation. This covetable

collection of silky-smooth stick-backed chairs was hand-made from unseasoned wood in Herefordshire. This exercise in anti-tech was by nine top British designers, including Matthew Hilton and Gareth Neal (verydesignersblock.com).

Also, there was Londoner **Valentina Gonzalez** (valentinagw.com) with her ethereal **Ghost chair** – a poetic piece of rigid translucent plastic that appears as "fabric". I predict a rocketing value from £1,500.

The large **Poltrona Frau** group is also now in Clerkenwell at 150 St John Street (020 7600 0600; poltronafrau.it). Its cluster of brands includes Cassina and Cappellini. Here Londoners Yael Mer and Shay Alkalay inject foam into bench shapes of ultra-thin ash veneer – a radical new technique.

Pattern creeps ever onwards,

infiltrating even furniture. Dutch brand **Moooi** (moooi.com) prints blowy roses on to plastic chairs and tables – more dinette than divine decor. Even less likely are Moroso's stitches printed on to recycled rubber for its **Beth chair**.

Computer-generated shapes and patterns have a weird beauty, particularly for lights. Witness **Belgian Materialise.MGX** (available through within4walls.co.uk), **Ross Lovegrove's** "cosmic landscape" for Artemide (artemide.com) and **Lazerian laser-cut ply** (lazerian.co.uk).

Philips's (philips.com) dramatic new **OLED** bulbs stole the technology stakes. They are slivers of glowing, energy-saving panels rather than a bright spot – more like a back-lit screen. **Amanda Levete's** dynamic **Z-like Edge** (establisheddandsons.com) will be the best item in production and will be in shops shortly. **Tom Dixon's** (tomdixon.net) **Flat Lamps** with **OLEDs** are wafer-thin in square, round and strip shapes.



Flip chair and stepping stool by brother-and-sister team Louis and Sophie Ralli for Ralli Design at Hidden Art

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A NEW SPIN ON FURNITURE



Thomas Heatherwick's spinning-top seat (£340)

NEW trends, ideas, materials and even technologies flourished in Milan. Not all the pieces seen will be immediately for sale but some should shortly be in London or on the internet.

The **Aram Store** in Kean Street, WC2 (aram.co.uk) will be selling **Spun**, which is Thomas Heatherwick's spinning-top seat (about £340). Also visit **Chaplins in Pinner** (chaplins.co.uk) and

Viaduct in Clerkenwell (viaduct.co.uk).

Twentytwentyone in Upper Street, Islington, will host Milan highlights with a strong British theme, says director Simon Alderson. Provisional dates are 19 to 26 May (check on 020 7837 1900 or twentytwentyone.com). Expect work by Tom Dixon, Sam Hecht, David Chipperfield, Jasper Morrison, Sebastian Wrong and Modus.