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In the living room

Salone del Mobile is the biggest event in Italy's furniture design calendar – and now the world. We explore the great innovations from this April's packed-out fair in Milan and look forward to its exciting Shanghai debut



Duresta by Matthew Williamson



Sofa in Sight display on the SCP stand

Milan is known for its sense of fashion and style – but this elegance is not limited to just sharp suits and figure-hugging dresses. Each year, the Salone del Mobile, which takes place in the Italian city, is the highlight of the furniture design calendar. Now in its 55th year, the show is where both new designers come to be discovered and established names showcase their latest achievements. This year's event in April was yet another whirlwind of launches, from the practical and sustainable to the outright flamboyant – and everything in between. The furniture fair demonstrates not only the best in design but the latest in technology and use of materials. Though there is certainly an element of 'wow factor', the event gives a view to the future of interior design and furnishings.

"The Salone del Mobile," says the president of the fair, Roberto Snaidero, "is a showcase that has always mixed business with culture, shaping the history of design and furnishing. Through the years it has become the must-see sectoral appointment with the very latest products and solutions, reaffirming Milan's role as the capital of design." Snaidero says the fair is a 'great business opportunity' that – last year alone – generated revenue worth 221 million Euros.

Snaidero has been involved with the Italian furniture industry for much of his career. From 2002 to 2008, he was president of the FederlegnoArredo, which is part of the Confindustria confederation, itself at the heart of the Italian wood and furniture sector. He then joined the board of directors of Cosmit Spa, the then-organisers of the Salone. In 2014, Cosmit Spa merged with FederlegnoArredo to form Federlegno Arredo Eventi Spa, which now runs the show.

A history of success

The Salone del Mobile was established in 1961 as a way to promote Italian furniture and furnishings for export

around the world. Now, the Milan show, held each April, acts as a mouthpiece for the majority of international furniture design, with additional events held in Moscow and Shanghai later this year. "In its 55-year history," says Snaidero, "the Salone has always had a particularity. It combines a showcase of innovative design and new materials with the ability to present unmissable events."

But, naturally, there have been changes in the show's content – and not just following the changing fashions of the eras. "I would say there is now more attention to sustainability, ergonomics and details," says Snaidero. "A lot of changes have occurred in the kitchens and living rooms. They have become more and more one room and, as a consequence, kitchen furniture is no longer the same functional furniture that it was some years ago – it now has an aesthetic value as it 'continues' from the living room."

This year, the show saw more than 370,000 visitors from across the world descend on the city to view the products of more than 2,400 exhibitors. Though primarily a trade show, the Salone is also open to the public over the Saturday and Sunday.

Top trends

Some of the standout exhibits this year included Nike's first appearance at the Salone with its journey into interiors. It was titled The Nature of Motion and saw 10 designers exploring the concepts of mobility, motion and movement. Tom Dixon partnered with the Israeli quartz surface manufacturer, Caesarstone, to display four kitchens serving themed cuisine, and Swarovski created a home collection under its Atelier Swarovski aegis brand, with a range of trays, vases and other homewares from top designers, including the late Zaha Hadid. British design firm SCP

PICTURE CREDIT: SCP



Caimi Brevetti's Snowsound

worked with six designers to reimagine the sofa for its Sofa in Sight series. "At a time when ideas about domestic and commercial spaces are quite blurred, we thought it would be interesting to see how six very different designers responded to the same brief: design a modern sofa," says SCP's Sheridan Coakley.

There were also some revolutionary designs on display, such as Kartell's organic chair. The injection-moulded seat by Italian designer Antonio Citterio is fully biodegradable. Caimi Brevetti presented its Snowsound, a sound-absorbing fabric that's available in a range of forms, from dresses to desks. In fact, a focus on innovation, sustainability and new materials transcended all parts of the show. At this year's SaloneSatellite, an area dedicated to young designers, the theme was 'New Materials, New Design' and it explored the latest that new materials science has to offer. The winner of this year's SaloneSatellite award was Studio Philipp Beisheim from Germany, with its inflatable side-table made of Hypalon, a highly durable silicon-based material.

"Apart from all the wonderful products and stands, one of my highlights this year was the Before Design: Classic event, which the Salone del Mobile organised with art direction by Ciarmoli Queda Studio in homage to classic furniture," says Snaidero. "It was a reflection on the classical essence of contemporary living, unfolding among spectacular displays and theatrical installations. The core of this scenographic exhibition was the short film by multi-award-winning filmmaker Matteo Garrone discussing classic 'Made in Italy' taste."

In the kitchen

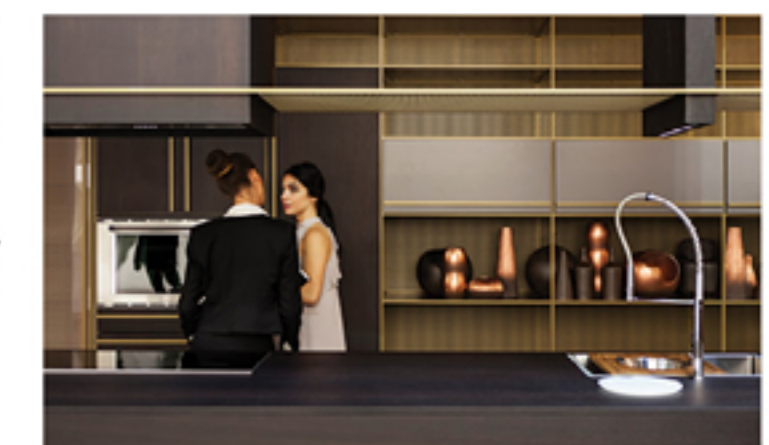
In addition to the main show, the EuroCucina and International Bathroom Exhibition, which run every two years, were both showcasing some impressive designs. At EuroCucina, the international kitchen furniture exhibition, the focus was largely on technology, even beyond the dedicated Technology for the Kitchen section. From touchpads to integrated oven cameras and smart induction systems that remove steam at the point that it's formed, the connected kitchen is well and truly here – one of the smartest being Grundig's Virtual User Experience that projects the control panel on to the worktop to control the induction hob, cooker and dishwasher. Meanwhile, in the Bathroom Exhibition, the trend appeared to be about wellness and making the room

PICTURE CREDIT: SVL_OIL_SCP

more luxurious than simply just functional. The interesting twist, though, was the outdoor bathroom facilities on show, including the shower pavilions.

Heading east

This November, for the first time, the Salone will be held in Shanghai, cementing China's relationship with the worldwide luxury furniture market. China has a history of importing furniture, especially from Italy, but its own designers are also seeking opportunities to sell more abroad. As with the Moscow Salone in Russia, which started in 2005 and is to be held this year between October 12 and 15 at the Crocus Expo, the Shanghai event, between November 19 and 21 at the Shanghai Exhibition Centre, will offer masterclasses in architecture and design-related issues, and will also include a large delegation from the Italian furniture market. The SaloneSatellite will also be a feature and will provide a spotlight for young designers.



Top: A modern kitchen unit in EuroCucina. Above: an in-cooker camera viewed remotely on an iPad