



*Haworth*

# chicago bare

Exhibitor-speak: 'Yes, but the quality of visitors was very good!'  
De-coded, this tends to mean 'Where is everybody?'

**m**ix can reveal that at this June's NeoCon, the annual mega contract interiors show in Chicago, visitor numbers were significantly down. As Cilla used to warble, 'surprise, surprise'. If you want the facts and figures, check out the official website, but here's an even more revealing fact that tells you all you need to know: we never once waited more than 30 seconds for an elevator. Seasoned Merchandise Mart veterans will tell you that the times they are indeed a-changin'.

We reckon though, that those exhibitors who sang the praise of the visitors they did welcome were actually telling the truth. The state of the US economy in general (and the interiors market in particular) being what it is means that if you chose to spend time and money getting to NeoCon, you did so with serious intent. The boondogglers and blues aficionados were absent. Buddy Guy down on South Wabash must be looking forward to an upturn in the interiors industry just as much as all the VPs of Finance in West Michigan.

So, once through the doors on Kinzie, was there anything new to see? Or would it be a swift and disappointing recce and straight out▶▶▶▶▶



*Allermuir*



Shaw







*Steelcase*



*Steelcase*



*KI*



Haworth

collection that should appeal for a wide range of corporate interiors. Shaw won a coveted Gold award for Wool – a collection that mimics and replicates the nuances of natural wool, while providing the performance and recyclability aspect of nylon. The introduction of Wool marks the expansion of Shaw’s Eco Solution Q nylon line, with some shimmering metallic elements resulting in an extremely impressive offering. It’s worth noting also that Wool is Cradle to Cradle Gold certified. InterfaceFLOR is another carpet giant that impressed visitors to its NeoCon showspace, and continued to promote its environmental credentials. No less than nine new collections were introduced under the Convert design platform – all with extremely high post consumer carpet and recycled content. Particular favourites among the host of new lines are Cap & Blazer and the ‘far out’ Surreal.

Plenty of verbiage and no mention of any North American furniture yet? Actually, there were a surprising number of quality introductions and enhancements from the majors – not the quantity you would expect in a boom, but better than is feared in the depths of a recession. Take for example Steelcase – Big Blue had a busyish showroom, clearly laid out and as impressive as you would expect. The slick access floor Nesso is new, Cogent textiles were introduced eight months earlier, the Think chair had some aesthetic and/or green upgrades, Elective Elements offered some nice new add-ons and the funky i2i chair is now available with a tablet arm. There were numerous enhancements from Haworth too – as well as some new products of considerable merit. LIM (Light in Motion) is a really stylish multi-purpose, multi-task task light with an easy magnetic attachment, while the Planes height adjustable tables won a Gold – probably because of its wide array of adjustment mechanisms. The



*Luna*



*Knoll*



*Humanscale*



Humanscale



Herman Miller

►►► TecCrete raised floor has a newly refined surface; while the US take on bench desks got some pleasing lifts from the clean lines of Compose.

Herman Miller is always a must visit showroom, but to tell you the truth, we were a tad disappointed this year. The star of their show was Setu, designed by Studio 7.5, of Mirra fame. Designed to address a need for multipurpose (eg. conference), chairs that are used for longer than intended, Setu features a 'Kinematic Spine' and 'Lyris' seat suspension material, not to mention the 'H-Alloy' base. It's as green as you like too. All this is fine and dandy, and no less than you would expect from the designed seating powerhouse that is Herman Miller – but in our opinion it looks more than a bit like a plastic Eames Aluminium Group Chair. Maybe it's just us.

Whilst on the subject of chairs, Knoll's new Generation task chair sparked plenty of chat. Like Miller's Setu, Generation makes use of new developments in plastics, the most important of which are elastomers featured in the 'Flex Back'. Created by Formway, the team that designed Knoll's Life chair, Generation is designed to encourage the user to move, flop and slop, twist and turn and generally do the opposite of what most task chair manufacturers have been encouraging us to do for a...generation. We suspect that Generation's many competitors may relish being pitched against it when the ergonomic element of the seating bid is up for discussion, but we actually rather liked its boldness. Generation's marketing strapline is: 'It's not a chair. It's a movement.' Another stylish new piece from Knoll is the Don Chadwick designed Spark – a lightweight side/stacking chair offering a pleasant clean simplicity.

Ergonomic specialist Humanscale had plenty of new kit to view – a favourite being the Mixology award winning ►►►►►►►►



*Teknion*



*Teknion*



*KI*



*Unika Vaev*



*HON*



Boss

►►►dynamic M2 monitor arm. There was also the ultra simple Diffrient World chair (previewed at Orgatec) and the Element LED light, which overcomes the ‘shadowing’ issues that are typical of the genre. KI offered a number of functional new designs as always, with the infinitely flexible Enlite table system being a highlight. Particularly appropriate in the education sector, Enlite is an impressively thought through and offers a varied collection that will tick most boxes. Another KI product worth checking out is the DuraMesh folding chair – really versatile, specifiable in all sorts of environments, lightweight and comfortable for long periods.

We started this NeoCon round up by saying that there was more that was new than one would expect. We’ll conclude the piece by underlining the point – as exemplified by the Teknion offering. Our friends from Canada previewed the new Optos Curved Wall, Altos Acoustic Fascia, W/R/S (a new wall rail system), a new accessories collection (including a clock ‘which is symbolic of the individual’s time within the context of corporate time’) and a bunch of new chairs. The Marini executive task and Visio task chairs are worthy, but our favourite is the Sitara side chair from one of the masters, Zooey Chu.

Cast your mind back over 1,300 words to the bit where we praised Allermuir. Let’s finish our Chicago review with another excellent and ambitious British company that we should all be proud of – Boss Design. The joint venture with Tayco is really putting on a head of steam now, with no less than seven Boss products on display in an impressive showroom. And we’re really chuffed that the David Fox designed Kruze picked up an award for Boss too. So chuffed, in fact, that we sloped off to Harry Caray’s for a celebratory rinse ●