



*Paul Cockedge installation at Swarovski*

# carnevale

In an essay written in 1963 Michael Frayn, the journalist who was later to become a brilliant playwright, famously divided the British into two species: herbivores and carnivores.

In his world the former represented the left-leaning, well intentioned middle classes that came to power immediately after the Second World War and faded after the Festival of Britain, while the latter were the more individualistic, extravagant, go-getters who presumably reached their zenith under Margaret Thatcher.

It's long struck me that the Milan Furniture Fair, that enormous annual shindig for the contemporary furniture crowd, can be divided along similar lines. On one hand you have the undemonstrative, understated designers – best personified by the likes of Matthew Hilton or Jasper Morrison – gently tweaking and improving products without making too much of a fuss.

On the other there are the extroverts – think Marcel Wanders or Jaime Hayon – whose more decadent (and usually more decorative) work is designed to have an immediate, high impact.

Manufacturers can be broken down in much the same way. In the UK, for example, SCP or Modus can probably be described as herbivores, while Established & Sons definitely



*Teepee by Konstantin Grcic at Cassina*



*Jet Set by Jaime Hayon at Bisazza*



*Him, one half of Him&Her, by Fabio Novembre at Casamania*



*Carved Chair by Marcel Wanders at Moooi*



*My Beautiful Backside by Doshi Levien at Moroso*

▶▶▶ falls into the carnivore camp. It applies to stand design too. Artek, a classic herbivore, commissioned Stefano Tagliacarne to create a booth using its Alver Aalto stools, while in an effort to draw attention to itself Moco covered its stall with hundreds of fairy lights, inadvertently making it look like one of those houses that get pictured in the local press around Christmas.

So which camp do I belong to? Well, by inclination I'm a herbivore but over the years I've come to recognise – and in a curious way respect – the sense of theatre that carnivores have brought to the event. And, with the dip in the economy not yet biting, there was plenty to enjoy from both sides of the divide, as well as the handful of practices that successfully bridge it.

Chief among these is Doshi Levien. Jonathan Levien is a slightly reserved, typically European industrial designer, while his wife Nipa Doshi is more obviously extrovert, bringing a dash of Indian colour to their work. The combination of herbivore and carnivore works a treat. Their new sofa, called My Beautiful Backside, was one of a handful of standout pieces on an excellent stand from the Italian manufacturer Moroso – which also included products from the likes of Ron Arad, Patricia Urquiola and Tokujin Yoshioka. A blend of obtuse shapes and hand-sewn Indian textiles set on an industrially-made frame, it could have been designed by no-one else.

Another who defies categorisation is the young artist-cum-lighting-designer Paul Cockledge, whose installation at Swarovski's Crystal Palace was my personal highlight of the week. Located at the back of the company's cavernous space, at a glance the ▶▶▶▶▶





*Jetstream by Marijn van der Poll at Ahrend*

►►►Doshi Levien's work) contained a sense of provenance.

Prominent herbivores included Matthew Hilton, who was launching the furniture first seen at 100% Design in 2007 but which is now being made under license by De La Espada. The dining table with a leg detail that appears to defy gravity is the designer at his absolute best.

Terence Woodgate, meanwhile, was the star of the Established & Sons installation with a 3m long table he'd created alongside John Barnard, the Formula 1 designer. Made from carbon fibre and a mere 2mm thick at the edges, it's a breathtaking piece of engineering and about the best piece Established has done since its launch four years ago.

Interestingly, for the second time in three years one of the most controversial products came from the most unassuming of designers. While herbivore-in-chief Jasper Morrison had pieces at Magis and Established, it was the Basle chair for Vitra that got tongues wagging. Essentially a variation of an old fifties-style dining chair, it raised a host of questions about the nature of the industry. Isn't it just a bit boring? Shouldn't a top name designer do more than simply modify an old classic? And besides, if it hadn't been designed by Morrison and manufactured by Vitra would anyone have even bothered to stop and look? Well to my mind it's extremely elegant, beautifully made, and extremely comfortable. In short it's a very tidy little chair. Depending on its eventual retail price, it will be interesting to see if consumers feel that's enough or whether, at a time when designer egos, global brands and an inflated media have changed our expectation of what 'design' means, they'll expect more bang for their buck ●



*Stitch Folding Chair by Adam Goodrum at Cappellini*



*Light Table by Matthew Hilton at De La Espada*