



Ikea



Cappellini

talking italian

The most commonly heard phrases at this year's Milan? It's nip and tuck between 'Things are challenging right now' and 'Jesus it's expensive here this year'. So how would the world's most important furniture fair, which has become dominated by superstar designers, slick marketers, and wildly extravagant installations, cope with global recession? The answer would appear to be that it's hanging in there.

While it was undoubtedly a more muted week than in the recent past – there were fewer parties, some of the larger companies pared down their spaces – this was no bad thing. Milan has been uncomfortably excessive for a number of years now and this new-found sense of austerity meant visitors were actually allowed to concentrate on the furniture rather than the PR.

Interestingly the new post-crunch atmosphere appeared to affect the fringe events more than the main fair itself. Over the past eight years Zona Tortona has been establishing itself as the week's beating heart. However, in 2009 there were signs that it had



Moooi

▶▶▶▶▶ Nearby Danish Crafts was showing shhh... Craft is Golden, a showcase for 12 of the country's makers and designers. A particular favourite were the disturbing (and downright dirty) pieces by Louise Hindsgavl. However, the highlight of the fair was undoubtedly Craft Punk. Curated by Design Miami in the 750 sq m Spazio FENDI, a group of emerging designers, including Simon Hasan, Peter Marigold and Raw Edges, was asked to create pieces using discarded materials from the FENDI production process during daily four hour performances.

Now there was potential for this to be a rather dry academic exercise, but the space was beautifully composed, a Campari bar was a neat touch and the DJ judged the atmosphere perfectly. Craft, for so long considered the poor relation to fine art and industrial design, suddenly felt kind of hip. Now let's hope the marketeers and fashionistas don't ruin it.

Having talked about the recession, the importance of reflective design by the likes of Gricic, and the rise of the handmade, it's also worth pointing out that Milan is so sprawling you can pretty much project any ideas you like on to its vast canvas.

The truth of the matter is that, for some companies, it was business as usual. Edra still appears to make pieces of bespoke furniture for gangsta rappers. Moroso still had the best stand at the fair. Moooi still dominated Superstudio. The Established & Sons party still throbbed, though once again the new collection lurched from the sublime to the vaguely ridiculous.

And Flos still remains the must-see of EuroLuce – the area of the show devoted to lighting.

Perhaps the final word should concern Gaetano Pesce. At a time when the likes of Tom Dixon are exploring ideas of utility and when Artek's literature proclaimed One Chair is Enough, he created a series of upholstered furniture in the shape of animals for the Italian company Meritalia. 'I have always loved animals, even the humbler ones. And I have always admired them, particularly the gentler, non-violent ones,' he explains. Not content with that he also launched Montanara for the same company, a wildly graphic sofa complete with an image of a mountain range on its jagged-looking back and waterfalls on the seats. Which all goes some way to proving that describing Milan as austere is a very relative term ●



Pesce



Cipria



Moooi



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