

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE FAIR, NEW YORK, 15-18 MAY

DESIGNERS LIGHT UP NEW YORK

Aiming to become a major event in the design calendar, the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York produced some surprises. Marcel Krenz highlights his favourites

As with most furniture shows, at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) sparks flew predominantly outside of the fair – by and large in SoHo stores, at the uptown design mile around 58th Street, and with some exciting shows at the legendary Chelsea Hotel. The ICFF presented itself as a true generalist, with a designer's smorgasbord of tastes and styles ranging from carpets, lighting, seating and wallpaper to accessories and textiles.

Still, the show managed to lure in some major design-specific players, such as COR (which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year), the Vitra Design Museum and Herman Miller. But if you deduct the scorching joint presentations by Federlegno-Arredo and Made in Denmark, and the German Design Council with manufacturer e15 (introducing a great new table lamp by London designer Marc Holmes), there'd be little left.

Yet the fair did come up with an abundance of product launches by smaller design studios, some of which are by companies prominently featured in Blueprint's last report on the ICFF, such as 3 Square, intoto, twenty2 and Wolf-Gordon.

Of course, visitors at SoHo's celebrated design store Moss did not burst into flames at the sight of Maarten Baas's torched furniture – though some of them burst into laughter. The exhibition of the intellectually charged, mutilated pieces at the shop-cum-gallery was the talk of the town at this year's ICFF. Baas had burned design classics like Ettore Sottsass's 1981 Carlton (Memphis) room divider, Antoni Gaudi's 1902 Calvet armchair or Fernando and Humberto Campana's 2002 Favela chair down to a charcoal-coloured skeleton. This raises questions about the state of the design market: if the project is meant to be art, it only revisits an idea that Robert Rauschenberg had in 1952 when he erased a de Kooning drawing. If it is furniture design, who's going to buy it and use it?

Brooklyn-based 3 Square's Palo chair (4) and ottoman, designed by Michael Cannamela (Blueprint featured his Stretch Stool last year), attracted attention with its angular frame and signature style. It looks a bit as if it was inspired by Daniel Libeskind's zigzag-shaped lightning structures. Palo's bright colors, sharp edges, comfortable

upholstery and contrasting lines will fit in almost every home.

Janet and Joe Doucet of intoto have come up with a table system called ... Motif (3). Every aspect is derived from the relationship between various circular forms. The table's overall shape takes its outline from two circles meeting at their radii. The tabletop employs a circular motif to create forms which vary from baroque to minimal. Motif is so new that it was only just finished for the ICFF, but it is now available in varying heights of side table, table height and bar height.

Most impressive were newcomers to the ICFF, such as the minimalist fibreglass forms of Messier Designs from Montreal, Canada. Its Gamba table (2) and chair can be used indoors and outdoors, due to a special high-gloss coating. Particularly eye-catching was the contrast between the thickness of the legs and of the seat and backrest, as well as a contrast between the rigidity of the material and the comfort experienced by the user.

The ICFF has a tradition of being interested in cutting-edge student designs and giving young talent space to show their pieces. The Clemson

University School of Architecture and Truck Product Architecture had seven students design a hybrid of furniture and environment. The task was to create a desk for an architect's daily work. As with most office workplaces, it addresses functions such as writing, drawing, building, eating, cooking and playing. The result is an 8.5m-long, lightweight communal desk (1), made from a concrete mix of glass bubbles and polypropylene fibres for reinforcement that is practically non-inflammable.

