

Quality Inside – Made in Europe

Authentic surfaces and “invisible” fittings

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Decorative surfaces and functional fittings that inspire users visually and haptically and offer them comfort were the focus of this year's interzum in Cologne. As the world's leading trade fair for supplier materials for the furnishing industry, it lived up to its reputation in May and attracted visitors from all over the world.

To mark the 60th anniversary of the supplier show, interzum (21.5.–24.5.2019) featured the largest product range in years: 1,805 exhibitors had gathered on an area of around 190,000 sqm to present their new developments in surfaces, wood-based materials, decorative and functional fittings, light and upholstery materials to more than 74,000 international visitors. This was more exhibitors and visitors than at the previous interzum in 2017. According to the trade fair management, 55,000 foreign visitors alone took the opportunity to get an overview of the latest supplier products at the world's leading trade fair held every two years.

In the even years, Koelnmesse, as the organiser of interzum in the German city of Bad Salzuflen, organises a smaller supplier product show under the name ZOW, which concentrates more on the regional furniture industry and focuses more on exchanging ideas with users than on presenting new products. It will take place from 4 to 6 February 2020.

Leading suppliers on board

At interzum in Cologne, the leading exhibitors of wood-based products, surface products and fittings competed in all product segments. The manufacturers of recessed furniture luminaires were also represented. The upholstered furniture industry also had a wide range of products on offer, including foams, adhesives, upholstery materials and relax fittings in several exhibition halls.

The products were often presented in a homely atmosphere or as ideas for tomorrow's living scenarios. In addition to the practical application ideas and solutions at the trade fair, hardware manufacturer Hettich (Germany) presented sophisticated application possibilities for its products, thus providing customers with a wealth of inspiration on their journey home. In addition to the huge range on offer at the fair, this year's interzum was also packed with a wealth of themed exhibitions on new technologies and disruptive materials. The aim was to give visitors a glimpse of new manufacturing technologies and materials that furniture manufacturers might change in the future. The supporting programme was supplemented by specialist lectures on current industry topics and product innovations, which provided further information at the four so-called Piazzas and familiarised visitors to the fair with future topics relevant to the industry.

Living today and tomorrow

Not only at the Piazzas but also at the exhibitors' stands, visitors were made aware of the expected changes and challenges that will result from the ageing of society, urbanisation and, as a result, the scarcity of affordable housing in the cities. The hardware manufacturers Blum (Austria), Hettich and Häfele (both Germany) came up with suggestions and solutions on how to live comfortably in confined spaces and how sophisticated functional fittings can ensure the multifunctionality of furniture and rooms.

As the boundaries between kitchen and living space are becoming blurred, end consumers are looking for furnishing solutions that allow them to hide the working areas of the kitchen. This is where pocket doors such as those seen at Blum (Austria), Salice (Italy) or Hawa (Switzerland) come in. When open, Blum's single or double doors are concealed in their own narrow corpus. To close, the door is only slightly pressed and thus gently ejected from the pocket. Even when opening, the door only needs to be pressed slightly and it moves to the side and can be pushed into the narrow body element by pressing lightly.

Other functional fittings also disappear from the observer's view: Two years ago, door hinges were integrated into the carcass and made their debut at interzum. This year they were followed by flap fittings for kitchen wall units. Integrated into the side corpus, hardly visible, they provide an optically seamless interior for the cabinets and at the same time do not take up any storage space. Even with the new, slim drawer systems, the technology is hidden in such a way that no cover caps or other technical details can interfere with the flawless interior of the drawer.

More differentiation

In addition, supplier products such as drawer systems are designed to be modular so that they allow users to differentiate prices within their product range or from competitors without having to stock large quantities. At the same time, storage is reduced because many components for the drawers are identical. The aim of the manufacturers is to enable their users from the furniture industry to individualise the process chain at the end. In addition, there are further tricks, such as a high degree of pre-assembly of complicated hardware systems and the simplest possible on-site assembly, which reduce effort and costs. This also applies to the electrification of movement functions: Salice (Italy) presented an innovative motorization solution for its various sliding door systems, which only has to be docked onto the guide rail and can therefore be retrofitted.

PVC instead of paper

Visitors to the fair experienced a small revolution in surface products: instead of printing on decor paper as before, almost all decor printers presented additional thermoplastic materials such as PVC and PP as substrates for their replicas of wood or other natural materials. The new base materials can score points with product properties that cannot be achieved with decor paper, such as the combination of moisture resistance with special surface effects. In addition to the ever more authentic reproductions of natural materials such as wood, stones or fabrics, the haptics and the functional properties of the surfaces were given an important role. More and more furniture surfaces are being equipped with anti-fingerprint properties. In addition, there are synchronous haptic structures that make it almost impossible to distinguish replicas from the original wooden or stone models.

Wood, marble and metal

For the designs, the decor printers focused on material diversity and not only on wood reproductions. In addition to marble and various stone reproductions, metal decors were shown, in which the spectrum of impressions ranged from oxidised steel to aluminium optics and finished surfaces.

With the woods, the companies set different accents, either remaining true to the rusticity of the oak and thus to the vintage look, or relying on exotic woods. Hybrid decors, in which different materials were combined, such as concrete and fabric look or floral wallpaper patterns with lime surfaces, were also on display.

The wood colours did not show a uniform picture. While one decor printer was dominated by light tones, other stands were dominated by medium to darker colours. Several suppliers showed decors inspired by burnt or charred wood, such as the old Japanese technique Shou Sugi Ban. Alternative materials to wood, such as metals and stones in particular, also served as models and were artificially "aged". In addition to carbonized woods, the designs included oxidized steel and brushed or flamed metals. Other suppliers had

chosen textile fabrics or worn carpets as models. In particular, the replicas of old wood or weathered woods were made using all the latest technology. Cracks, knotholes and traces of use and processing were reproduced plastically in such a way that, in combination with the corresponding haptics, they produced an authentic effect on laminates, melamine surfaces and also on finish foils. The manufacturers of thermoplastic furniture foils also followed this trend and equipped their materials with appropriate embossing. For example, the “Metalspin” embossing could be seen at Hornschuch (Germany). This is an iridescent polished structure that gives metallized plain colours the character of a used metal surface through “circular” traces of use. In line with the current metal trend, the new “ST 20 Metal Brushed” surface, which looks like brushed genuine aluminium, was on display at Egger (Austria). The “ST 75 Mineral Satin” texture, which gives decors a matt and velvety feel, was presented especially for worktops. Pfleiderer (Germany) presented the laminated panel “XTreme plus”. Fingerprints do not remain and even stubborn traces of grease can be easily removed. With its high abrasion and scratch resistance, it is even suitable for heavily used interior and contract furnishings.

The wood-based panel industry also used interzum to introduce new wood-based panels. The “Be.Yond” chipboard made its debut at Swiss Krono (Switzerland). According to the company, it is the most environmentally friendly furniture board of its kind on the market. It is manufactured with a binder system on a “DuraBind” biobasis from the Canadian company EcoSynthetix and has an emission level that matches that of trees.

Metamerism-free edges

The manufacturers of edge bandings were also able to come up with innovations. An important topic was the freedom from metamerism. Exhibitors such as MKT (Germany) and Kröning (Germany) will be presenting edge bandings that perfectly match the colour of the furniture surface under different light sources. So far, it has been possible for furniture fronts, edges and profiles to be identical in colour in daylight, but different in colour under a different light source such as LED or neon light. MKT also presented PP edge bandings for panels with tight radii where no white breakage is visible. *Richard Barth*

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