

# AN UNEXPECTED SWITCHING OF PLACES

IMPRACTICAL SWEDES, RUSSIANS WITHOUT GOLD AND THE LAVISH DUTCH IN HOLLYWOOD STYLE. THIS YEAR'S MILAN FAIR HAS TURNED THE WORLD OF DESIGN UPSIDE DOWN.

**DOROTA MALESA** from Milan

Tourists enjoy Milan mainly because in comparison with other Italian cities it offers very few monuments and they can go shopping with a clear conscience. This is the city in which one can find the best shops with the latest fashion and design. And in mid-April, the city becomes one big, colorful metropolis ruled by designers.

The I Saloni fair has been organized for over 50 years and is considered to be the world's largest event dedicated to design. It is visited by over 300 thousand tourists each year. And no wonder. this year, the exhibitions have been organized nearly on every street and square in the center (as well as in the giant Fiera Milano halls situated in the suburbs). They were found to be fascinating even for those whose interest in design was limited to ordering the Commander cabinets.

Some exhibitions had to be watched through 3D glasses, some in order to be seen one had to go through a thick tangle of lianas hanging from the ceiling, and others were shown accompanied by an illumination of light straight from a Jean-Michel Jarre concert. Creatively, impetus, and very odd. Also groundbreaking, because this year's Milan design week has turned all my knowledge of design upside down. Walking from exhibition to exhibition, I felt like I was at an international culinary festival at which the Japanese are serving spaghetti, and the Mexicans - sushi.

## THE SWEDISH IMPRACTICALITY

I'll never think of the Scandinavian

design as the enclave of simplicity and universalism. This year, the Swedes took the trendsetter's announcements personally and implemented the idea of functionalism being more than passé in 2011 furniture designing. One of the main trends announced at this year's fair was an encouragement to give up comfort in the interiors and introduce wacky and avant-garde furniture. For that reason, instead of simplicity one could find an almost Italian impetus and impracticality at the Swedish stands – due to the sight of which the founder of IKEA, Ingvar Kamprad, would probably get a migraine.

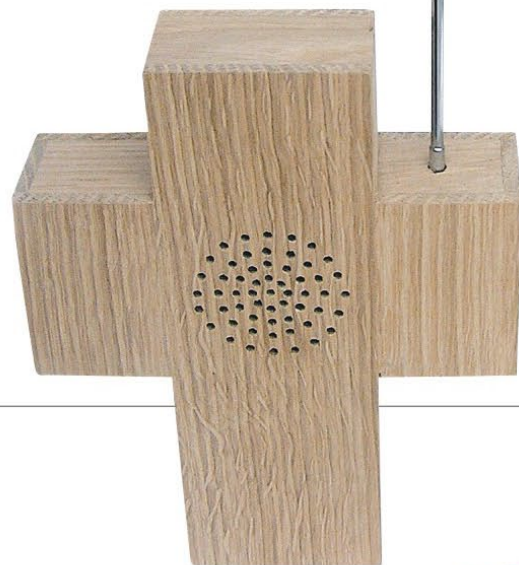
For example the crooked piece of furniture called Ivy, designed by Thomas Bernstranda for Svedese, looked like a Billy bookcase after a wild bachelor party. Or the Markus Johansson's chair made of radiate sticks. Truly impressive, however its comfort could be compared to a seat made of a cushion with needles. And finally, the interconnected web of zigzag rows of chairs made by Tengbom – an excellent idea and a touch of avant-garde for the interior of the Stockholm City Hall, in which the Nobel Prize is awarded.

## THE ITALIAN IMPERFECTION

Since the Swedes took the strengths of the Italians, what could the latter present in that case? It seems that the key word they decided to go with was yet another announced trend at the fair - the fashion for aesthetic imperfection. Of course, enriched with the typical Italian crazy ideas. The most complete edition of this

### THE KOSMOS PROJECT

A wooden radio from the „Unpolished 6” exhibition proves that Polish design is funny



### EUMENES

A chair made of russian market bags. Surprisingly made by the Italians and not the Russians



### PRZEMYSŁAW "MAC" STOPA

made quite an impression in Milan with his collection of futuristic corian lamps



### THE DUTCH STANDARD

A Dutch company designer a cosmic and luxurious armchair called The Moon



### THE STREET IS IN THE HOUSE

An Italian dishwasher made from a newspaper distributor.



**IKER** The entangled sofa called Hidden designed by Tomek Rygalik was part of the „Young Creative Poland” exhibition



**OSKAR ZIĘTA** presented the already known equipment in Poland, i.e. the Drab ladder and the Chippensteel chair



**MARKUS JOHANSSON** has proven that Swedish furniture does not need to be practical

trend was demonstrated by some young off artists. Carlo Sampietro, the founder of The Street is in the House studio, has picked up old, dirty newspaper distributors from the streets of New York and then turned them into aquariums, refrigerators and even dishwashers! Whereas, his friends from Turin's artistic circle have made frames for their mirrors from car tires and used pastel colors to paint them.

However, it was the I like sit sofa-seat made from cardboard box and a battery that was the biggest sensation at the exhibition. This piece of furniture, designed especially for Facebook lovers, vibrates every time the owner receives a new notification from this site.

All of these ideas could be however regarded as a mere whim of niche artists, if not for the fact that similar solutions have been apply even by the most respected Italian companies known for selling expensive furniture. The middle-class serious Edra presented lamps, wardrobes and chests of drawers from the "Edra in Wonderland" series, covered in dignified, shiny, but broken glass.

## THE DUTCH TINSEL

The works of the Dutch this year were mostly associated with the United States. There were only a few eco-products, typical for this nation, in the form of hangers made form wire and string. Surprisingly, there was a lot of furniture straight from American science fiction movies, or one imitating the chic Hollywood style form the 40s.

So the shiny, elegant chandeliers (for

example designed by Willem Matthijs Schilder or by the Brand van Egmond company), which are best described with only one word: glamour. There were also some futuristic ideas presented by the Dutch Standard company that specializes in interior design of luxurious yachts - a fluorescent sculpture called Gice or a lunar chair with the name Moon. On the other hand the Dutch designed horrible, scary looking silver dragon-shaped candlesticks, which would probably only be appreciated in shoddy Hollywood mansions inhabited by kitsch lovers.

## RUSSIAN FOLK

Speaking of kitsch, I should mention Russia as it probably caused the biggest chaos in Milan. Instead of the traditionally expected furs and trinkets (maliciously called the 'the gold teeth design') they have presented a folk-market design. Literally.

The very entrance to the Russian pavilion amazed – it had a canopy made of checked fabric, the same kind that is used to make the famous bags which we know from our market places. Inside were chairs upholstered with the same fabric. And in their midst - industrial matryoshka dolls made from a material used to produce ventilation. Or big cute poufs embroidered with felt cherries.

However, it is much too early to congratulate the Russian designers on their sense of humor as most of these items have not been created by Russian artists. They were just the exhibits that have won the competition at last year's Moscow Design Week festival, including

the ones made by the Italian company Eumenes. Though a different matter is that that this exhibition stand was practically the only noticeable Russian business card in Milan. Only one more company presented itself apart from them - the Alexander's Collection which was showing carpets with patterns that probably have not changed since the Romanov dynasty times.

## THE POLISH CREATIVITY

Did the Poles also manage to surprised? Me for sure. Looks like I'll burn in hell for questioning the abilities of Polish artists. They showed class on a world scale. The futuristic lamps made from corian (a mixture of aluminum hydroxide and acrylic resin), designed by Przemyslaw Stopa, were the hit of the "Fresh Light of Corian" international exhibition that took place in Milan. Another exhibition – the "Salone Satellite", exposed the talent of Lukasz Opalinski who currently lives in Miami. He was the author of walnut-like sculpture, which after extending drawers turned out to be a well-designed cupboard.

The "Young Creative Poland" exhibition, in addition to the already known in Poland Moho carpets or the Plopp stools by Oscar Zieta (which were attached to balloons filled with helium during the promotional event and were freely flying in the air), a company called Vox has presented their works.

In my opinion, this was the greatest success story of Polish furniture in recent years. Until a few years ago, the Vox furniture was only good for offices of provincial notables. Today, after employing a group of creative designers the company gave itself a second chance. It shines in the Milan interior design showrooms with it colorful collection of unusual children's furniture, in which one can personalize the cabinet doors, design them to be darts targets, etc.

An last but not least, the „Unpolished 6 – Young design from Poland” exhibition, which proved that the Polish design has the Scandinavian practicality and the Italian creativity. Economy is our strength – a sofa made from plaster bags in the height of saving; nature - funny wooden pocket radios; and wit - these radios are in the shape of a cross. Will appeal not only to the audience of Radio Maryja!



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