

Orgatec 2016 - A Review

By John Sacks



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Introduction and overview

The 2016 Orgatec office furniture show in Cologne which closed on Saturday was a successful and confident festival of everything the industry could muster to stimulate the interest and excitement of its visitors. The exhibition stands reflected the high level of investment of a very confident industry. Some of the larger companies were clearly trying to outdo each other, and boasts – or whinges – about spending one, two or even four million euros were being spread about. [Vitra](#), accompanied by their partners and associates, took an entire hall; something not seen since [Herman Miller](#) - not present at all this year - launched the *Sayl* chair in 2010.

The total show space was somewhat greater than 2014 although not yet back to the glory days of 2002 and 2004 when the show took up all the space the Kölnmesse had then to offer. Visitor numbers however felt somewhat down. The Tuesday started quietly; Wednesday and Thursday were extremely busy, and Friday was, again, quite quiet.

Orgatec week is as much to do with meetings – both pre-planned and spontaneous – as it is to do with visiting companies and seeing new products. The drawing together of such a high proportion of the senior people involved in an industry is an unmissable opportunity to network with contacts, old and new, hold short, but serious discussions and just catch up with many business friends. Something which is otherwise usually difficult because of distances and travel times.

With a few notable exceptions, many of the stands were conventional and unimaginative. It seems strange that most companies, while spending a small fortune on these temporary structures don't try to create much more drama and excitement. After all, their stands don't need to be especially practical and their main purpose is to attract attention in a forest of competitors.

From a British perspective, it was very disappointing that only three furniture companies - [Senator Group](#), [Hawk Furniture](#) and [Albion Chairs](#) - were exhibiting independently. There were more than that from Lithuania! Maybe if the recent fall in value of the British Pound had occurred earlier, it might have encouraged a few others.

Cologne revels in its exhibition visitors who generally wince at the outrageous prices charged by many service providers. Three hundred euros a night is not uncommon for a room at a modest 4 star hotel; the cost of taxis and the prices at the Kölnmesse cafes are just as eye-watering.

Trends

It is fascinating to see the major changes in emphasis between the types of products on show this week compared to those in 2012 and 2014. Gone were the hundreds of white benches - not before time – and in their place was every variety of soft seating, breakout furniture, furniture for agile working and enclosures. Acoustic properties were being claimed for everything!

Orgatec is the show where companies try to launch new products. This used to be the result of long periods of creative design, followed by development and tooling. One of the changes since the economic downturn of 2008 onwards was that smaller companies, with less in the way of resources, were able to demonstrate the fleetness of foot to bring simple, but innovative and well-designed products to market very rapidly. The growth in popularity of breakout areas has encouraged companies with no previous experience of upholstery to use simply-workable felt to create

attractive, colourful soft seating. Fewer companies are now prepared to invest the tens of thousands of hours and millions of euros demanded by a new task chair, or even an original, complex, workstation system.

This trend came to its fulfilment in Cologne this week with some beautifully creative designs of furniture for agile working from all over the world, notably in Hall 10.2 from Nordic and Eastern European companies and was, as is inevitable, emulated by other with some much poorer examples.

Wood has widely replaced steel and aluminium as the most common structural material following the trend seen first at Neocon in 2015. Table and workstation tops using solid wood, wood veneers and some extremely realistic wood-grain MFCs have replaced much of the solid, primary colour laminates seen in previous years. Wooden table bases and legs for chairs and tables were seen everywhere. A very attractive development.

The widespread use of wood is part of the ‘homeification’ – what a terrible word – of the office and the soft, earthy colours, fabrics and styles of the furniture on show are as relevant to the home as they are to the office. The feel was certainly of domesticity; the idea seeming to be that the worlds of work and home are merging, division lines are blurred and questioning why there should be any fundamental difference between the style of furniture at home and in the office. Some companies such as [Haworth](#) and [Koleksiyon](#) from Turkey had made a real effort to create coordinated colour schemes with really attractive results.

The new material of the moment was undoubtedly compressed [PET](#). Used everywhere in the show for dividing workstations, chair shells, wall-mounted phone booths and generally for breaking up spaces.



Nowy Styl



Abstracta



König + Neurath



Noti

The Companies and their products

[True Design](#) based near Venice in Italy worked with Aldo Parisotto and Massimo Formenton, designers of the *millepiedi* bench seating and Aldo Parisotto was responsible for the *Clara* chaise longue- a product of which there were several examples at the show.



millepiedi



Clara

[Loook Industries](#), one of several notable companies from Helsinki in Finland had some attractive upholstery including *Area* lounge-type seating designed by Ivar Gestranus and Kevin Lahtinen which was fully wired for phone and tablet charging, and some brightly coloured *Giant Donuts*



Area sofa seating system

[Quinti](#) ferom Arezzo in Italy presented a pretty white workstation and storage system which attracted plenty of attention



Quinti workplace and storage system

The Belgian company, [Extremis](#) were showing how outdoor furniture was relevant to an office environment with their *Hopper Picnic table* where table and seating were integrated to avoid wandering chairs looking untidy.



Hopper

Borg were a company from Estonia with a range of personal enclosures



Borg



De Vorm

One of the most attractive companies were [De Vorm](#), a Dutch company from Arnhem. They were demonstrating imaginative and attractive uses of compressed PET for chair shells and acoustics. [Into the Nordic Silence](#) from Finland showed acoustic enclosures and also a range of electrically height adjustable tables with shrouded mechanisms.



Into the Nordic Silence

The spanish company, [Forma 5](#) had a large stand, again with emphasisd on seating and enclosures



Forma 5

One of the companies attracting considerable attention was the very successful German group [Brunner](#). They displayed a wide range of beautifully designed seating including, *Halm* and *Ray*, two new models from designers Jehs + Laub.



Halm



Ray

There were plenty of high meeting tables on show including this one on [Sedus](#)' very large and busy stand. [Soko](#) from France launched the attractive *Fly* table system from Lievore Altherr Molina. The very large [Nowy Styl](#) stand, one of the very largest groups in Europe,

headquartered in Poland, showed some of the results of the investments they have been making in design, and presented all their brands including Rohde & Grahl and Sitag.



Sedus high meeting table and draftsmen's chairs.



Fly table system



Colourful height-adjustable workstations from K+N



Nowy Styl homely wood feel

Another Polish company making its mark was [Profim](#) with some very well designed and executed upholstered products.

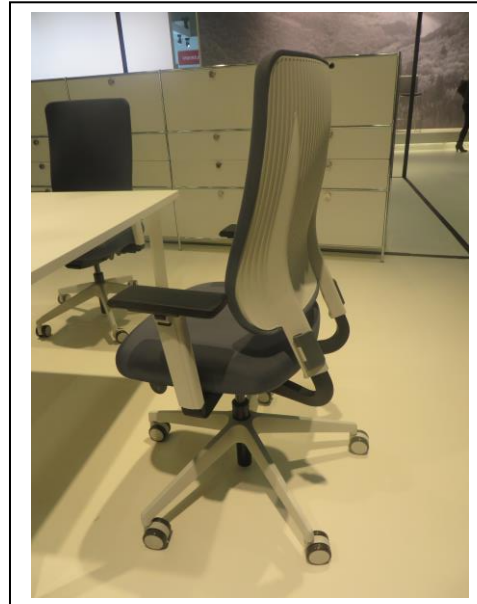


Profim

Martin Ballendat's designs were well represented at the show including a new chair, *Drumback*, for the German manufacturer, [Viasit](#). He was also responsible for one of [Dauphin](#)'s new offerings, *Lordo Flex*



Lordo Flex



Drumback

As for stand design, [Kokuyo](#) from Japan once again created a stir with a Nendo-designed creation, the Rolling Works, hinting at the office being a place of constant movement. One of the most out-and-out attractive stands was that of [Famo](#) from Portugal.



Famo

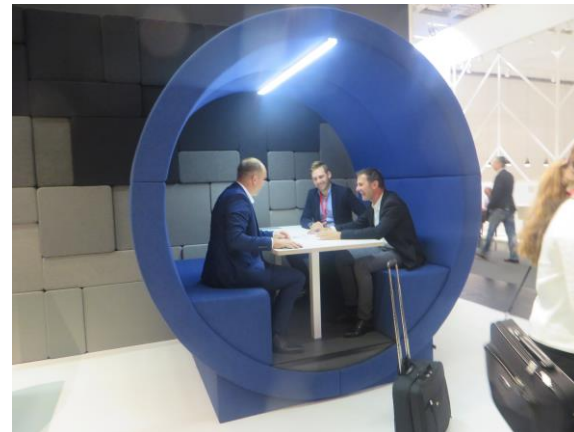


Kokuyo

A manufacturer with much improved products and presentation was [Bürotime](#) from Konya in Turkey; the Belgian company, [ABV](#), showed some interestingly created enclosures. One of the few North American majors exhibiting was [Teknion](#) from Ontario, Canada. Their display of homely-styled products was a natural progression to the company's theme at Neocon with emphasis on the attractive Zones collection.



ABV enclosure

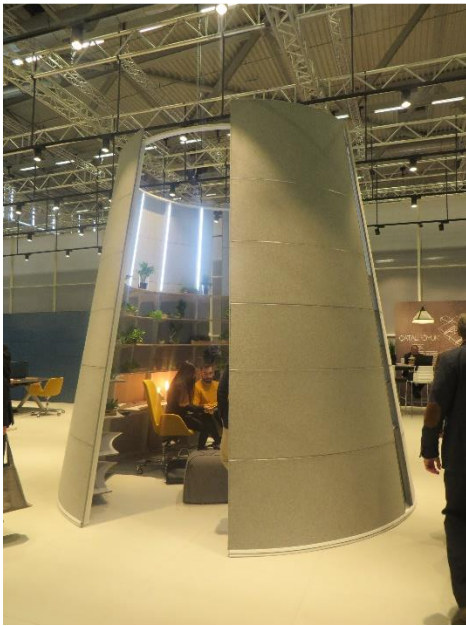


Bürotime bench



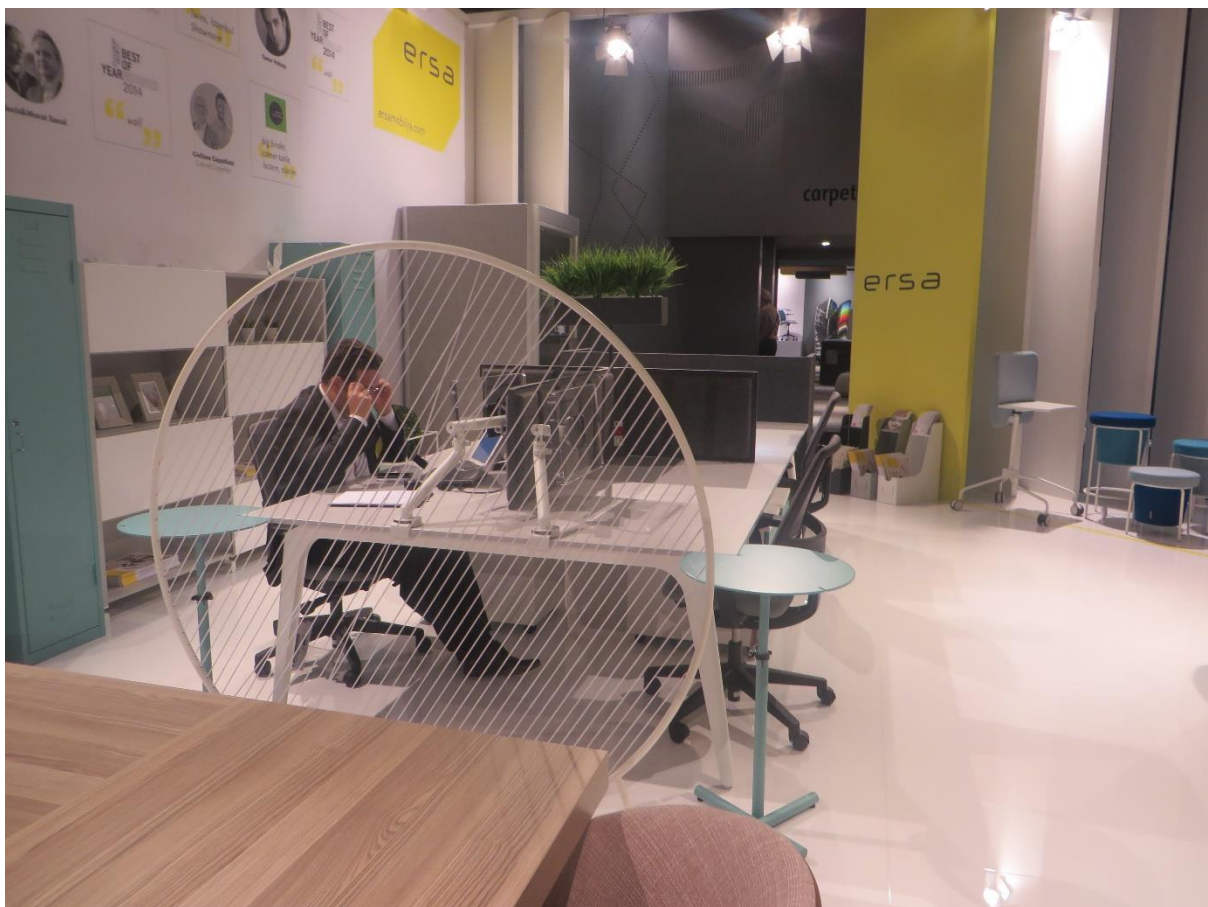
Teknion Zones

[Koleksiyon](#) from Istanbul, Turkey had a large attractive stand with an enclosure which was probably the biggest in the show!



Koleksiyon

[Ersa](#), also from Turkey presented some attractive products which were the result of their work with a number of international designers, including Claudio Bellini.



Ersa bench system

The very large [Haworth](#) stand was designed by Patricia Urquiola who has given such style to the company's products and presentation in recent years. There was a harmonious, co-ordinated feel to the display which you felt was partly due to the colour scheme, but also because of the delightful design themes.



Haworth

[Okamura](#) from Japan showed a re-engineered version of their classic Contessa chair and some attractive enclosures. The Australian company, [Thinking Works](#), launched a series of new products including a wood structured workstation system from Jones & Partners.



Okamura enclosure



Thinking Works workstation

The largest space in the show by far was that of Vitra and its partners. Vitra's own products were in well-defined groups representing applications and environments and featured a large, frantically busy café at its centre. Fourteen partner companies such as Artek, Kvadrat, Swisscom and Bulthaup surrounded the main exhibits and the whole was constantly packed with very serious-looking visitors. A massive investment but a real statement of commitment to the world of office and commercial interiors.





Vitra views

The prominently displayed results of a project by a group of local university students charged with rethinking the office was thought provoking and attracted interest.



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