

IMOB, Istanbul 2017

A Review

By John Sacks



Istanbul World Trade Center

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Introduction and overview

Istanbul's January climate isn't always comfortable. The weather can be harsh, with a biting wind stirring up flurries of snow or driving it horizontally into every crevice. The temperature rarely goes much above zero but it feels much colder. However, if the weather leaves something to be desired, the welcome from the locals is invariably very friendly. In these days of easy international travel, saying you've come from London or Paris or Rome, can still create a stir of more than passing interest which may be a reflection of the security risks, real or imaginary, that travellers to Turkey are seen to have taken.

Istanbul didn't feel unsafe. As someone who has been visiting the country for many years, life seemed very much the same. Maybe there was a greater police visibility but no one here has ever taken security checks seriously. Were there fewer overseas tourists? If so, their places were filled by locals enjoying easier access to the city's many attractions. The roads were just as congested as always; perhaps more so. The metro and sidewalks were heaving and the restaurants were busy and noisy and smoke-filled. Yes, of course the law bans smoking in restaurants, but this is Turkey, so a law which isn't enforced will be ignored.

This year's IMOB was held as usual in eight halls of the Istanbul World Trade Center close to the main airport. The office furniture exhibitors – fewer than thirty of them, almost exclusively from Turkey – were in Hall 3 and with most of the larger, internationally-oriented companies absent, the show didn't fairly represent the industry. The show is organised by the Turkish trade association, OMSIAD, and it's a pity that so many of their members such as Koleksiyon, Nurus, Tuna and Bürotime, who are all happy to show at the vastly more expensive Orgatec, turn their backs on a show which serves the very large local and regional markets perfectly well.

Judging by the products on show, with a few notable exceptions, there is little if any sign that Turkish manufacturers are serious about Western markets. Whilst it is true that there is demand for typically Turkish products from the former CIS countries, North Africa and parts of the Middle East, the wider world markets will remain inaccessible until serious attention is given to product styles, finishing and attention to detail.

Turkish manufacturers are effectively being held back by their customers who are far more interested in low priced products than they are in good quality, well designed furniture. The result is that their products are almost unsaleable outside Turkey and Turkish influenced markets.

Sadly, these problems have existed for years and there was little or no sign at the show of any improvement. Ironically, the home furniture sector, which is of course much larger, has shown that it understands these issues and their products which are generally of a much higher standard are able to be sold widely across international markets, taking effective advantage of manufacturing efficiency, relatively low costs and a weak currency.

Although the show was busy with plenty of interest from locals as well as visitors from the Middle East, especially Iran, and a few from other parts of the world, moving the show to June or September and the participation of the larger and better known Turkish companies would give the show a major boost.

Trends

Most of the workstations on show were fashioned in styles clearly targeting the traditional Middle Eastern and North African customers as well those from as Turkey itself. Product design concentrates on form rather than function, with stylistic embellishments and variations of finishes to standard configurations being used to distinguish one product from another. It's as if the appearance of an office is far more important than its efficiency, ergonomics or indeed the reason it exists.

By contrast, much of the seating had a more international appeal and exploited the upholstery skills for which the country is well known.

Products generally have not developed much over the past few years although the use of locally manufactured modern styled, wood effect, melamine faced chipboard with realistic deep grain texturing was a definite improvement. Real wood legs on some tables and side chairs owed a nod to products seen at other recent international shows and there were some attractive mesh task chairs on show. Breakout furniture has yet to make a serious inroad in this region but a few companies such as [Rapido](#) from Ankara, were showing enclosures.

Judging by the products on show, Turkish manufacturers do not yet think it important or commercially opportune to design products addressing issues such as acoustics, ergonomics or office technology.

Companies and their products

[Burobig](#) from Ankara were in some ways typical. Their workstations integrated a traditional Middle Eastern furniture configuration with somewhat updated styling.



Burobig



Goldsit

[Goldsit](#) is located in Bursa, a city just across the Sea of Marmara from Istanbul known for its engineering capabilities.

[Vizyon Ofis](#) are a full-range company from Izmir with some attractive upholstered products.



[Istanbul-based Panelkon](#) have a wide range of auditorium, cinema and theatre seating

[Casella](#), another Istanbul-based company, was one of the most interesting companies exhibiting with some very attractive seating.



[Rapido](#) of Ankara are one of the most important seating businesses in Turkey and they had a large display of products including the new *Dias* range of bench seating, some easy chairs – *Spot* and *Unite*, a range of modular breakout furniture.



[Ereno](#), also headquartered in Istanbul, showed some settings of executive furniture with the traditional layout of a very large table in front of which is placed a low refreshments table for visitors. In their case, they had used massive, very heavy, only partially-finished walnut logs.



The one “major” company that were showing, Ersa Mobilya from Ankara, had a large stand in Hall 4, reflecting their launch of some new residential furniture. They were however also displaying some office furniture, much of it the result of their co-operation with Italian designer, Claudio Bellini.



Some attractive passenger terminal seating was on show from Moby Office Furniture of Konya in the Anatolian part of Turkey.



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