

Clerkenwell Design Week London - 2017

A Review

John Sacks



Photography by John Sacks

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CDW 2017

Clerkenwell Design Week is a loose grouping of events, activities, venues and presentations, held in an interesting village area in central London for a three day period in May. Clerkenwell is wedged between London's financial and shopping districts and its use of historic buildings – including a church crypt and a former prison – as well as the mainly sympathetically converted former workshops, provide some quirky surroundings. By contrast to the often whimsical temporary show spaces and pop-ups, the permanent showrooms, of all shapes and sizes, are very serious. Not surprising in view of the staggeringly high rent levels which local landlords are able to command.



London's weather in mid-May is usually a delight and this year was no exception. Dry, and with plenty of warm sunshine, the area looked a treat and the advance marketing drew big crowds, especially to the outdoor exhibits, the street food vendors and the pubs. Unsurprisingly, the many

evening parties were all very well attended. By contrast, at times, some of the permanent showrooms seemed staid and rather quiet during the day. The Farmiloe Building, formerly the focal point of the show, was badly missed, with some visitors drifting around aimlessly as if they were bees looking for the hive.

Few commercial interiors' shows have quite the same broad mix of exhibitors. Mainly from Europe, companies of all sizes were showing high quality furniture and other interiors' related products. Alongside the many well-known office furniture and furnishings manufacturers with their newly launched, if relatively conventional products, there were many UK and continental European-based craftsmen presenting beautiful individual pieces.

The visitors were the usual mix of architects, dealers, clients, manufacturers, industry watchers and students. Most exhibitors were happy with the balance and felt the younger elements created a good buzz and put smiles on faces.

Trends

Most of the mainstream companies seemed to be continuing the drift away from workstations towards casual, individual pieces of upholstery and tables of all shapes, sizes and colours, often in combination. Many 'new' table-related products owed much of their novelty to some interesting original finishes from the laminate and melamine paper suppliers such as the aptly named 'Concrete' from [Egger](#) and the soft touch, solid colour, repairable [Fenix 'nano tech matt'](#) surfaces. Table heights suited standing, rather than seated meetings.

Where there were workstations, they were electrically height-adjustable. Colours were subtle, often self-patterned, pleasantly co-ordinated. There was plenty of structural wood on show for table frames and chair legs, continuing the themes of recent international shows.

Thankfully, some belated input from professional designers has begun to counter the up-to-now dreaded monotony of showroom after showroom offering fundamentally similar, primary-coloured, felt upholstered, stools, booths and screens.

The companies

One of the most impressive areas was the understated, but attractively redesigned [Steelcase](#) showroom where the seamless integration of working and complementary areas were well presented. The new *Bivi* system from Steelcase's sister company, Turnhouse, was attractive and well thought through.



Steelcase showroom



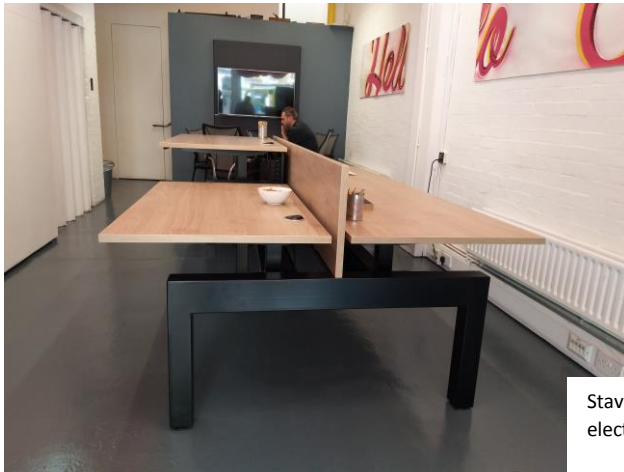
Bivi, by Steelcase

[Boss Design's](#) centrally located large showroom was very busy, with lots of new products on show, including a wide group of products from Simon Pengelly under the name of *Atom*. This featured a complete system with attractive public seating system in various configurations, screens and new workstations – a first for Boss.



Atom from Boss Design





Staverton showed their back to back electrically operated sit-stand bench

The Danish furniture maker [Thors-Design](#) from Vildbjerg use solid oak beams recovered from old bridges to make beautiful tables. They were sharing space in the Ege showroom in Britton Street.



Table from Thors-Design

[Connection Seating's](#) showroom in Great Sutton Street showed several new developments including *Tiers*, a modular spectator seating system which was an innovative new departure for the company and *Hygge*, a range of very comfortable soft seating.

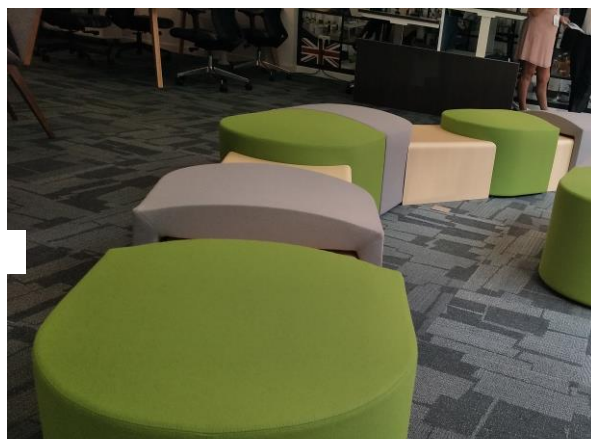


Hygge and Tiers from Connection

[Bene](#) went whimsical, with pride of place in their showroom being given over to *Pixel* by Christian Horner. A series of modular ply boxes with optional handles, seatpads, lids and clips which allowed them to be used as seats, tables or storage. The St John Street showroom of [Elite](#) presented the *Pill* range of sectionalised public area seating and tables from Radiceorlandini Design Studios.

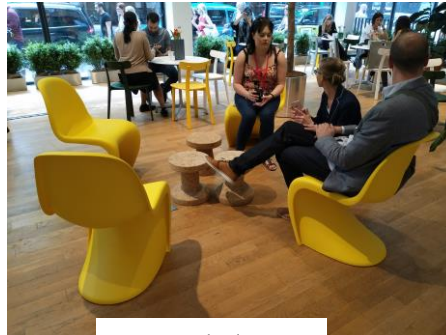
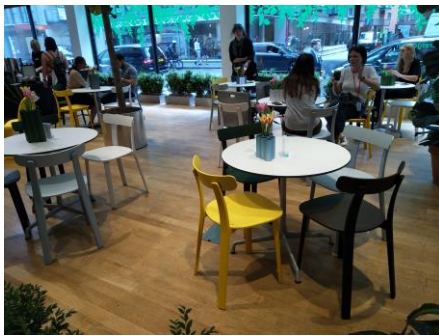


Pixel from Bene



Elite's Pill units

[Vitra's](#) large showroom always attracts the crowds and this year's visitors were well rewarded with plenty of new products on show.



Vitra displays



[Davison Highley's](#) showroom featured plenty of their hallmark soft seating and some well thought out and fully equipped new booths. [Wilkhahn](#) showed a new surprisingly low-priced cantilever chair – *Metrik* – designed by whiteID

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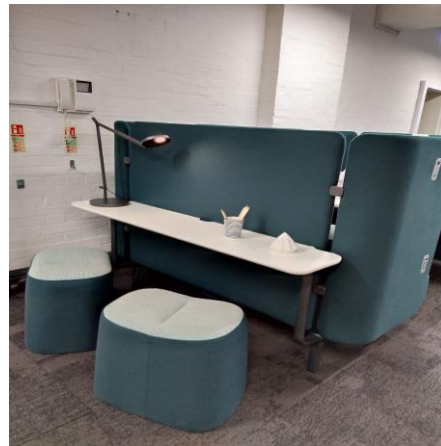
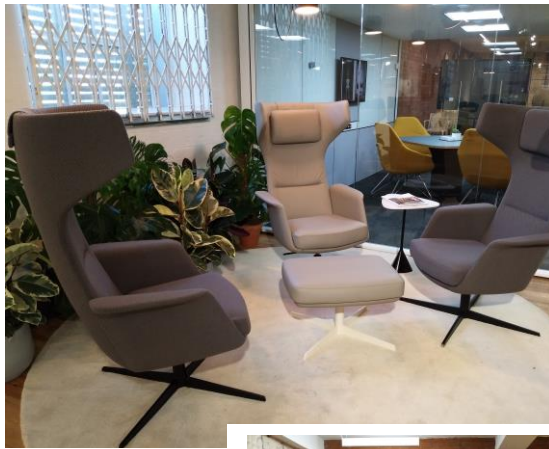


Davison Highley



Metrik from Wilkhahn

[Allermuir](#), part of [Senator group](#), presented a wide range of attractive upholstery and other breakout and occasional furniture.



Allermuir

There were plenty of ways of getting around Clerkenwell last week, many of them rather more eccentric than strictly practical. One of the most outlandish was the 7-seater PedalBus, fuelled by people pedal power, and kept going by adequate quantities of on-board beers.



John Sacks
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