

NEOCON 2019

CHICAGO



A REVIEW

The City

Arriving unadjusted in Chicago, without adequate mental preparation, can give the senses – all of them – a real jolt. It's one of the boldest, brashest, noisiest, jaw-droppingly self-confident cities on earth and however many times you've been here, it never ceases to amaze. Everyone – except perhaps the sullen taxi drivers – engages everyone else in conversation, whether its welcomed or not. The architecture, like most aspects of the city, owes little to subtlety and rather more to drama and scale, compared to the lighter touches of Paris or London.



Delegates to NeoCon 51 were greeted by unseasonably cool, windy and wet weather, interspersed by some fleeting sunshine. That didn't seem to dampen the spirits of the blues fans who like to combine the show with the free, three-day, open-air, Chicago Blues Fest in Millennium Park.



Table of Contents

The City	02
The Show	04
Trends	06
Some Highlights	08
And Finally...	12



Words and photos - John Sacks

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5a Wilmington Square, Clerkenwell, London, Wc1X 0ES

Tel: +44 (0) 7688 1928 E: info@jsacs.com W: www.jsacs.com

The Show

NeoCon this year was as busy as most regulars could remember and instead of dying out with a whimper after lunch on Tuesday, there was steady traffic right the way through until the official close on Wednesday afternoon. As you'd expect, with the massive crowds came a real buzz of excitement; something only Neocon can create.

Everyone wore a hat at Massachusetts-based AIS.



Garden furniture displayed outside the Mart - but more and more rain!



Flex from Steelcase - a beautifully thought-through moveable presentation room system.



Herman Miller's swansong - all their brands presented together in the ground floor Lobby.

One new feature this year was the Gensler-designed NeoCon Plaza created on South Drive along the river frontage of the Mart. Providing a variety of outdoor spaces to work, meet and be refreshed, it worked well and was well used.

The Japanese company, Okamura, have taken over the very large area on floor 11 vacated by Knoll after last year's show. Knoll have set up shop in the Fulton Market area of town and the

talk at this year's show was that Herman Miller have given notice that they will be following suit, freeing up the area they have occupied on the 3rd floor for 51 years. These refreshing changes give other companies the rare opportunity of taking some of the prime space in the mart and breaking long-held monopolies, but don't the largest companies have a responsibility to the industry that feeds them to support its institutions, rather than just to walk away?



The Urban Boardwalk at Neocon.

Trends



Part of the Steelcase Worklife range.

For an industry that supports some of the world's largest and fastest moving businesses, there was little to be seen in the way of technology-related advances. It was as if last year's effort to introduce the sitstand tables presented by almost every manufacturer was enough, and much of the focus this year was on upholstery, textiles and eye-catching colours. Top designers' talents have been employed to do little more than to create yet more stylish seating styles for breakout, reception and collaborative areas.



Sixinch from Antwerp, Belgium, clearly had fun creating this using their foam-covering production process. More yellow!

Scandinavian rather than Italian influence has been the most important driving force for the past two or three years, as evidenced by displays from companies from that region, for example in the frantically crowded Scandinavian Spaces shared showroom, and in new products from exhibitors such as AllSteel, Vitra and even Okamura.



The crowds were drawn to the cleverly shared showroom 'Scandinavian Spaces'.



Soft Work by Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby for Vitra.



Furniture from Bla Station in the Scandinavian Spaces showroom.

The open shelving systems seen at recent European shows have arrived at Neocon with many variations on the theme seen at Davis, Herman Miller, Steelcase and others.

There was plenty of emphasis on enclosures for single and shared use, with most claiming acoustic properties. That was taken to the ultimate by companies such as Framery, Sound of Silence and Mikomax with soundproofed boxes of different shapes and sizes.

Some Highlights



AllSteel Two-Thirds by Joey Ruiter.



Dado by Alfredo Häberli from Andreu World - yellow is the colour of 2019!



Darren from High Point NC and their wire-mesh man 2Buzzispace.



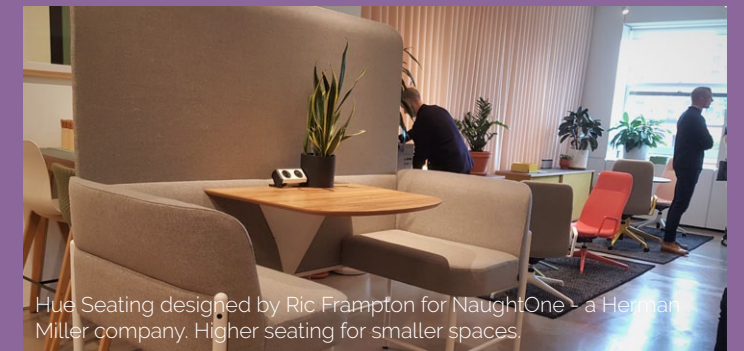
BuzziBracks designed by Alain Gilles for the Belgian company.



Davis showed how to pick upon a European trend - open shelving storage - and execute it beautifully.



Herman Miller used the slogan 'All together now' and featured a number of attractive domestic settings.



Hue Seating designed by Ric Frampton for NaughtOne - a Herman Miller company. Higher seating for smaller spaces.



ESI - a Fellowes company - and their sitstand tables.



Soft Work by Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby for Vitra.



Nienkämper Heartbeat seating benches won a Neocon Editors Award.



Martin Ballendat designed Flat seating for Sandler Seating.



Nagare designed in conjunction with the design studio, Rainlight, for Okamura.



Pride of place in the Teknion showroom was given to the new Bene Box system and marking a new cooperation with the Austrian company.



Senator Allernijr won three Neocon awards, including Gold for Kin, designed by Pearson Lloyd.



Staks benching for CFS.



Reefs Face to Face by Jessica Engelhart at Dauphin.



Woodstock from Three H in Ontario, Canada - credenza and sitstand work surface.



SIS Ergo system with felt screens and cable management.

And finally...



Welcome sign at one showroom;
after all, we are in Chicago!



Part of the Steelcase Worklife range.



More fun than office furniture.





John Sacks

London, June 2019



"Advising office furniture businesses around the world"