

CLERKENWELL DESIGN WEEK

LONDON, MAY 2022



A Review

The Show

Three long, strange and disruptive years have passed since the last Clerkenwell Design Week closed its doors and when, on Tuesday morning, the show came back to life, the sense of excitement and relief was almost tangible. Although, in some ways, its been almost as if time has stood still, the life of the office furniture industry has clearly continued. There were dozens of new and relocated showrooms, hundreds of new products and many, many new faces.

Sadly, the London weather, which is usually warm and sunny in mid-May, didn't play ball and, as well as thunder and lightning, we had rain, chilly winds and mostly grey skies. None of that dampened the spirits of the visitors and exhibitors alike, who were excited to be in face-to-face contact with so many old business friends once again.

Despite, or maybe partly because of, the long hiatus, this CDW featured more showrooms than ever before – more than 150 – including pop-up showrooms and 10 large exhibition locations, each featuring up to 20 to 30 exhibitors. When the 500 or so accompanying events are added in, it was clearly rather too much for any one visitor to take in, even if they used every minute of the entire three days of the show.

One of the exhibition areas was the allegedly haunted “House of Detention” dating from 1616, - in other words, an old underground prison. The space – even the cells with their subtle lighting, were used imaginatively.



Travelling around Clerkenwell in style



A cell in The House of Detention

Words and photos - John Sacks

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Judging by all the new products on display, most manufacturers have spent much of the past three years working with in-house and external design teams, designing and developing new creations. The stimulus was a combination of firstly, the demands of new, post-Covid, working practices and secondly, endeavouring to meet clients' demands for manufacturers to use more sustainable materials and processes. In many showrooms, product presentations explained how little material had been consumed in creating a product, how much waste material was used or how little energy was employed in manufacturing and transportation. Several companies showed chairs made using plastic waste dredged from the sea or tabletops fabricated from reconstituted PET bottles or even yoghurt pots. How long before we see yoghurt pots made from recycled office furniture?



For those interested in design, Clerkenwell has become a marvellous area of central London. Its higgledy-piggledy, often pedestrianised streets are full of pretty 18th and 19th century houses, interspersed with small parks, and alongside converted former workshops, now turned into co-working spaces, residences, design studios or attractive venues for eating and drinking. It's a fascinating area to walk around and soak up the sights and sounds of a delightful area of a big city.

As for the companies showing their wares, the larger, long-established, manufacturers from the UK and overseas were happily in company with many new and often highly innovative start-ups. Many of the products on show oozed quality of design and manufacture. The show was clearly well supported by most of the manufacturers selling into the UK market - with the notable exception of two of the very largest - Steelcase and Miller Knoll. It does seem a pity that the UK's most important commercial interiors show is not supported by two of the market's largest beneficiaries.

The Trends

The needs both of those working from home, and those wanting to feel at home, even when in the office, meant that a great deal of the emphasis was on upholstered, homely, furniture. Sofas, tub chairs, pods, enclosures and hubs abounded, many with integrated tables, high backs and connectivity. Colours and textures were overwhelmingly soft and muted with a domestic rather than corporate feel. Shapes were curved, organic and extravagant, with little apparent attention paid to the efficient use of available space.

In contrast, there were fewer than usual new workstations, benches or office tables, apart from coffee-style or signature presentation tables.

Storage was generally open, and often doubled up as space dividers, as with square tube, modular systems built up with components such as [Staverton TT](#).

In keeping with the conservationist nature of the area, many of the recently established showrooms, such as [Elite's](#), used the natural features of their premises including vintage support columns, flooring, traditional steel-framed windows and brickwork which created attractive, settings for the furniture.



The Companies and their Products

[Boss Design's](#) large attractive showroom had a wide range of new products including Amelia from the company's own design team led by Mark Barrell. The chair featured bent steel tubing which environmentalists are increasingly favouring over aluminium, based on aluminium requiring nearly ten times as much energy to produce, tonne for tonne, as steel.



Amelia by Boss Design

[Andreu World](#) from Barcelona presented a number of new chairs from designer Piergiorgio Cazzaniga including the ash wood framed Liceo available in a range of colours and Nuez Lounge Bio designed by Patricia Urquiola with its 100% biodegradable and compostable thermopolymer shell.



Liceo from Andreu World

A Slovenian specialist seating company, [Donar](#), used recycled felt to produce their Red Dot award-winning Nico Less chair designed by Niko Kralj.



Nico Less by Donar



Nuez Lounge Bio

Connection Seating, based in Huddersfield and which was recently acquired by the Norwegian group, Flokk, have a large, busy, Clerkenwell showroom showing their new Grid system which can be used to create internal rooms.



Another new product at the show which boasted minimal usage of materials was Nia from Haworth. A simple, lightweight, chair suitable for home office use or hot desking.

Warwickshire-based furniture designer and maker John Eadon took space in the "British Collection" space located in the crypt of St James's Church. He used sustainably-sourced ash wood to make these attractive pieces.



Tuna Ofis, a large manufacturer from Istanbul, showed in the Project & Contract pavilion. Amongst a wide range of products on display was Meg, a new sofa and armchair range designed by David Fox.



Physiotherapist Caroline Ephgrave made sure that ergonomic issues were not forgotten. Her Ephgrave chair uses a single moveable cushion positioned to support each individual's keystone vertebrae, supporting the spine and balancing the body.



from Cornwall showed their Hive acoustic wall tile system made from discarded oak shavings and cocoa shells giving industrial waste a second life. The tiles provide acoustics calming and a pleasant odour are said to be reminiscent of the inside of a bee hive.



Workstories, the British workspace furniture company showed some attractive, and fashionable soft seating in their attractive Clerkenwell showroom.



Workstories soft seating

The German company, Brunner, has a very successful business in the UK with attractive, high-quality products. Their large showroom showed their new Ray series of side chairs with a selection of bases, designed by Jehs+Laub.



Brunner's Ray series

The Design Fields building featured a diverse range of international designs including furniture and lighting. Amongst the companies showing was a ten-year-old Danish company, Norr11, with a very attractive modular sofa system, Studio, with moveable arms, designed by Kristian Sofus Hansen and Tommy Hyldahl and upholstered in a lovely tactile fabric from Sahco, recently acquired by Kvadrat.



Norr11's Studio sofa system

Italian makers La Cividina from near Udine showed their interesting Couchette soft seating units designed by Lucidi Pevere.



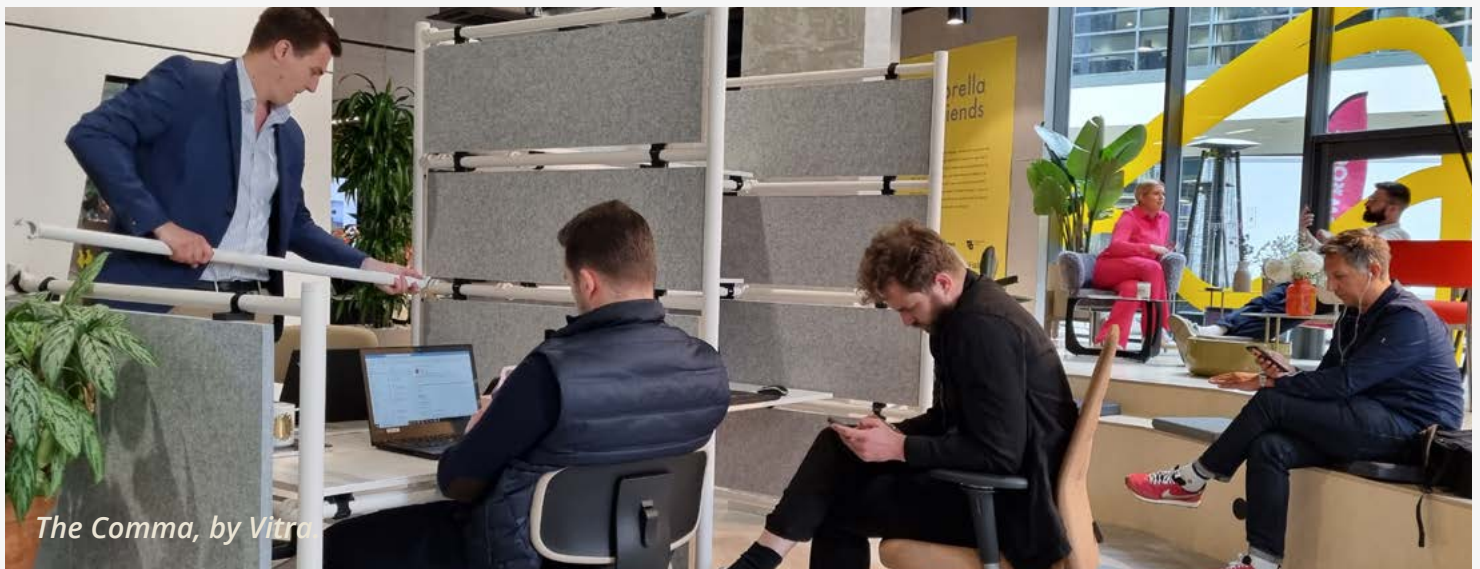
Couchette from La Cividina

Humanscale's new Path task chair is made using 4.5kg of ocean plastics and follows the company's philosophy of being self-adjustable based on the weight of the user. The company claims that, based on the materials used to make it and its manufacturing processes, the chair provides a positive environmental benefit.



Humanscale's Path chair

Umbrella + Friends, formerly Wagstaff Bros, showed products from a wide range of European and Scandinavian companies, including Vitra's new screen, worksurface and storage system, The Comma. Inspired by builders' scaffolding, it uses different lengths of steel tubing, mainly connected by Velcro, to form a framework, and then PET panels to divide space. Designed by the Vitra Project Design team, it is intended to be easily reconfigurable by the user, and incorporates a number of very clever, innovative ideas.



The Comma, by Vitra

Interface, the carpet tile company, colourfully presenting its environmental credentials.



Interface

Frövi, the British company with a Scandinavian-styled name, displayed an attractive range of enclosures featuring greenery.



One of the largest industry companies in Europe, Nowy Styl from Poland, presented products from several of their group companies including Kusch & Co, in their large showroom.



A newly launched offshoot of B&T Design from Turkey showed a wide range of seating, including the Zen sofa, in their new St John's Lane showroom.



The north of England manufacturer, Gresham, launched their new range of Relo seating.

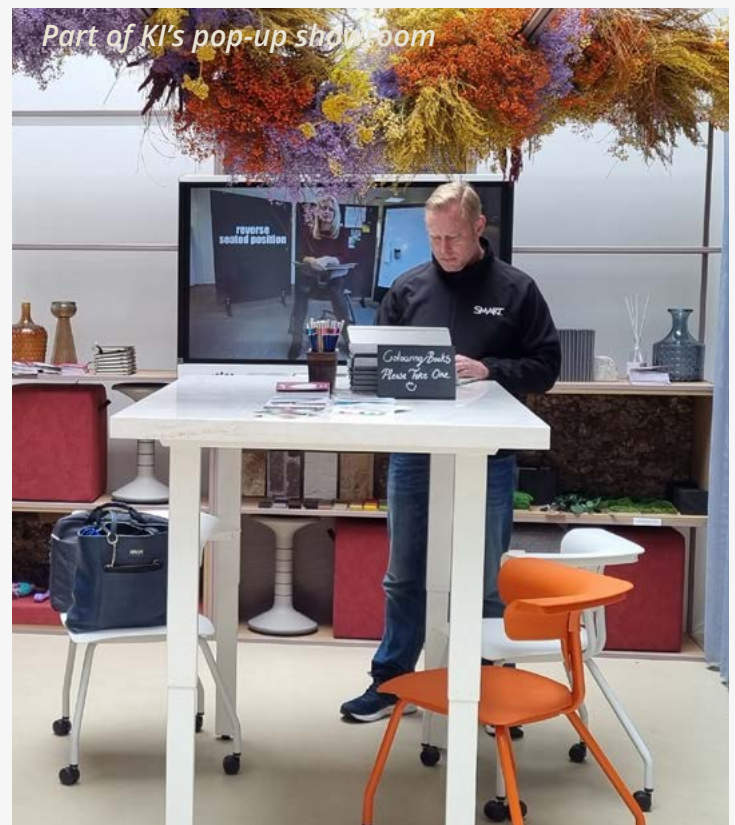


The [Allermuir](#) division of Senator, the largest UK manufacturer were working from their new and very attractive, multifloor, showroom and presented a wide range of new and established products. The new Bastille range of tub chairs designed by Patrick Norguet was attracting a lot of attention.



The north American manufacturing giant, [Teknion](#), opened their beautifully designed new showroom in a typical reworked and refurbished Clerkenwell building. Their Luum fabric display and planning area was unusual for the UK market and is likely to prove popular with designers. The new fabrics used on their upholstery was bold and exciting.

[KI](#) were showing in a colourful and imaginative pop-up showroom.



And Finally...

Sign seen next to the elevator in the Orangebox showroom.





John Sacks

London, May 2022



"Advising office furniture businesses around the world"