

# NeoCon<sup>®</sup>

CHICAGO | 9 – 11 JUNE 2025

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Consultancy Services

A Review

# The City

June is the perfect time to be in Chicago. With winter far behind and the sultry summer yet to arrive, the late spring sun and warmth are perfectly offset by a delightful breeze coming off the lake.

The city's economy hasn't yet fully recovered from the ravages of Covid, with a fair number of boarded-up shops, bars, and restaurants. Still, there's plenty of hustle and bustle—noisy traffic, energetic runners weaving through crowded sidewalks, and a sense of revival in the air.

*Merchandise Mart*



*The Wrigley Building*



*Chicago Riverscape*



## Words and photos - John Sacks

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# The Shows

There are now two simultaneous, rival, three-day office and commercial furniture shows in Chicago in June: the original **NeoCon**, founded in 1969 and held at the historic Merchandise Mart, where 400+ companies display their wares; and the much newer **Design Days** in the Fulton Market area, where about 55 companies—including most of the largest—have opened permanent showrooms.

Coaches, taxis, and cycle rickshaws shuttle visitors along the mile-long journey between the two locations. The split of venues wastes time, forcing attendees either to extend their stay or miss parts of the shows. By working together in the future, the two shows could both save visitors' time, and deliver greater value to exhibitors.

One benefit of some of the industry giants (MillerKnoll, Steelcase, Teknion, and Humanscale) leaving the Mart is that their vacated spaces have allowed dozens of international companies—previously unable to secure showrooms—to showcase their designs. This influx of fresh talent has introduced US buyers to previously unseen brands and innovations.

Monday and Tuesday were bustling, with just the right amount of energy—enough for a lively atmosphere but without overwhelming crowds. Designers of showrooms and furniture had clearly been hard at work. [Andreu World's](#) massive showroom (in Steelcase's former space) was spectacular, with clever lighting accentuating their vast product range. [Haworth](#) and [KI](#) also used their large spaces very effectively. The Japanese giant [Okamura](#), fresh from announcing its acquisition of the UK's [Boss Design](#), focused on the precision engineering behind its seating components.

Parties seemed more plentiful this year, starting as early as Sunday afternoon. Most were loud, drink-heavy, and light on food—perfect really.



*Uroboro serpentine sculpture  
by Patricia Urquiola for Haworth*



*Okamura Tasting of the parts of  
chairs Components*



*Global Furniture*

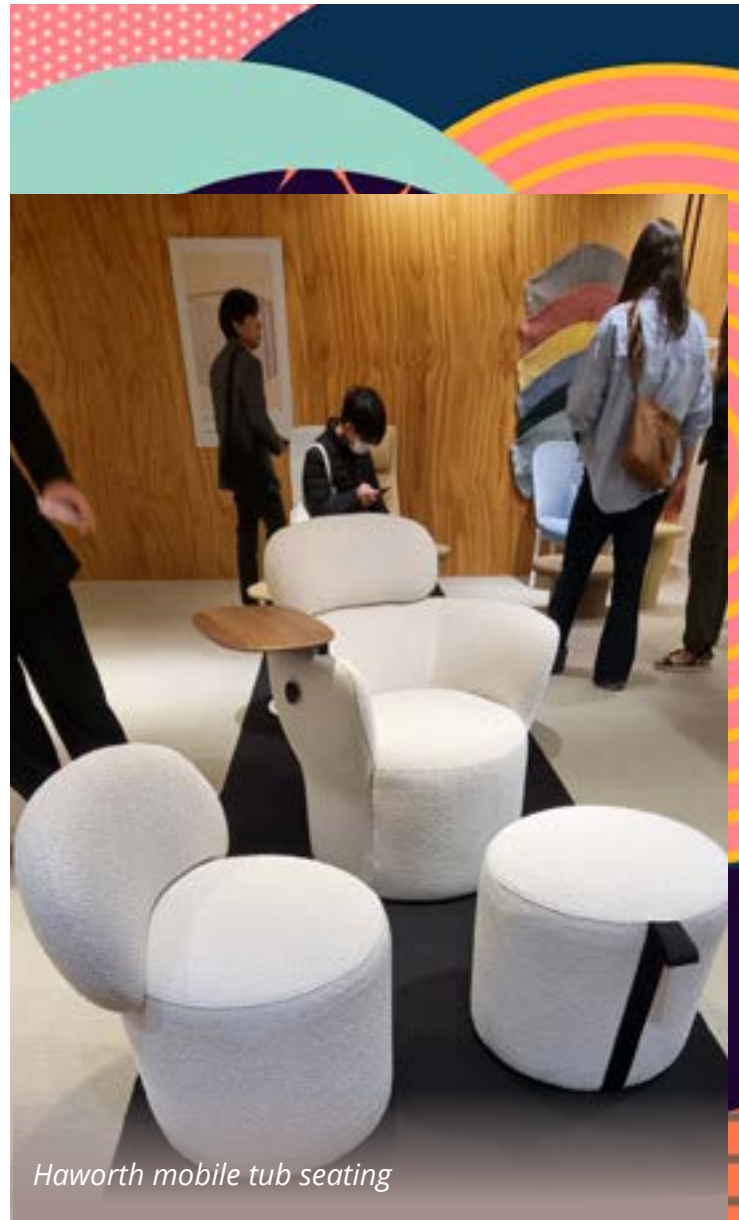
## The Trends

From a European perspective, one striking trend was North America's wholesale adoption of post-pandemic European design philosophies: mobility, flexibility, homeliness, space division, and biophilia—terms barely heard before 2019. These concepts now drive office environments trying to lure employees back, ideally full-time. The result? A surge in rearrangeable furniture, unitized soft seating, space dividers, plants, booths for meetings, and "concentration pods."

Traditional US case goods—desks, credenzas, and panelling suited to cellular offices —continue fading in favour of egalitarian spaces where workers move freely to zones which match their tasks.

## The Companies

[Haworth](#), the last of the "big five" remaining in the Mart, showcased its striking Patricia Urquiola-designed pieces, like the mobile tub seating and Valencia stool. Their expansive third-floor space, flanked by sister brands, made a strong statement.



*Haworth mobile tub seating*

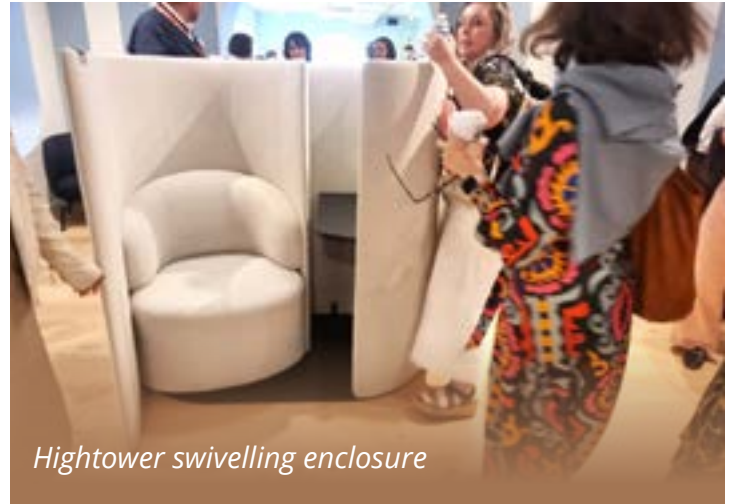


*Valencia stool by  
Patricia Urquiola for Andreu  
World*

Hightower, a women-owned manufacturer from High Point, North Carolina (*"Home Furnishings Capital of the World"*), featured soft seating, and this single-occupancy wraparound enclosure, as well as the *Sui* combi desk and seating by Halle and Hightower.

Davis Furniture, also from High Point, emphasized craftsmanship with designs like the *Vida* table by Hannah Willmann and *Seba* chairs by Sebastian Herkner.

Spain's Andreu World (based in Valencia) collaborated with Philippe Starck and Patricia Urquiola, presenting bold, contemporary pieces.



*Hightower swivelling enclosure*



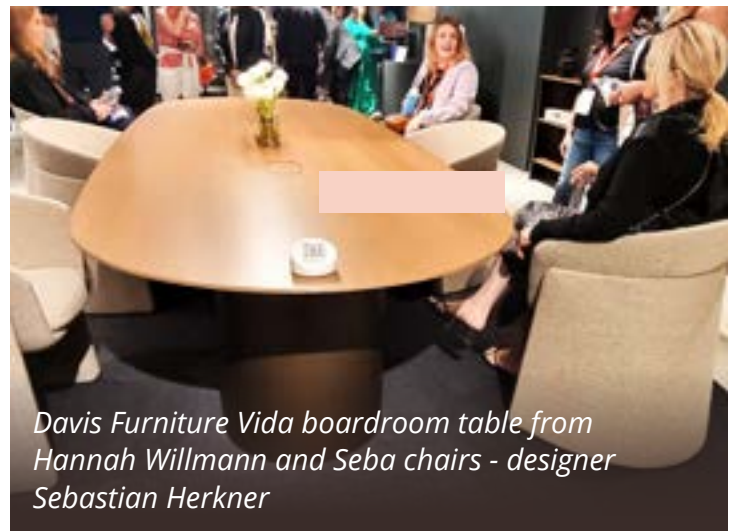
*Andreu World Phillippe Starck Solo chair and Triada table from Benjamin Hubert*



*Hightower Sui unit by Halle + Hightower*



*Andreu World Patricia Urquiola Bolete conference table and chairs*



*Davis Furniture Vida boardroom table from Hannah Willmann and Seba chairs - designer Sebastian Herkner*

Scandinavian Spaces highlighted regional brands such as Sweden's Blå Station from Åhus, on the southeast coast of Sweden, whose *Oppo* lounge chair by Stefan Borselius stood out.

British representation was strong, with Boss Design showcasing the *Brooke* table and *Uma* chairs. The Senator Group (with a showroom in each venue) spotlighted the Allermuir brand's *Ricco* seating by Martin Ballendat and the *Aura* sectional sofa by Patrick Norget. Spacestor's space-management solutions included a novel *Railway Carriage* booth.



*Boss Design Brooke table and Uma chairs*



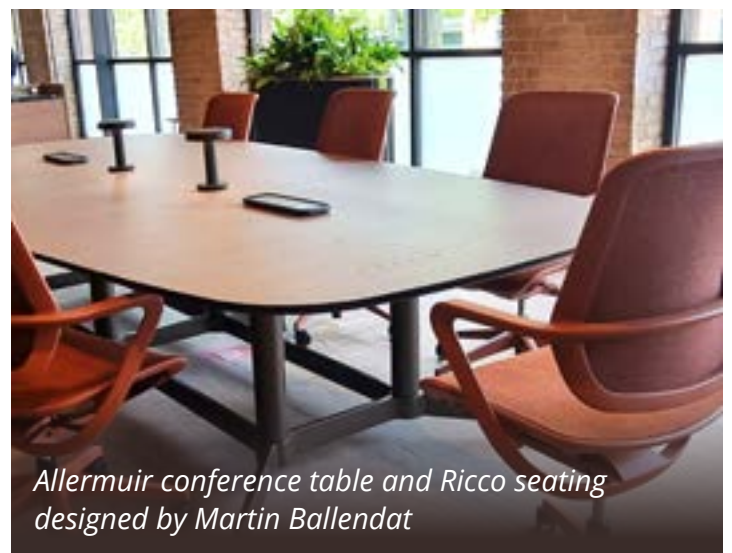
*Skandinavian Spaces Bla Station Oppo lounge chair by Stefan Borselius*



*Allermuir Aura sectional seating, designed by Patrick Norgetand Uma chairs*



*Spacestor Railway Carriage booth*



*Allermuir conference table and Ricco seating designed by Martin Ballendat*

California's [Arcadia](#) displayed colourful cocoon workspaces, while Sweden's [Mizetto](#) (deceptively Italian-sounding) emphasised sustainability with *Cargo* seating (Velcro-attached, recyclable covers) and *Evergreen* outdoor furniture (galvanized steel and bamboo).



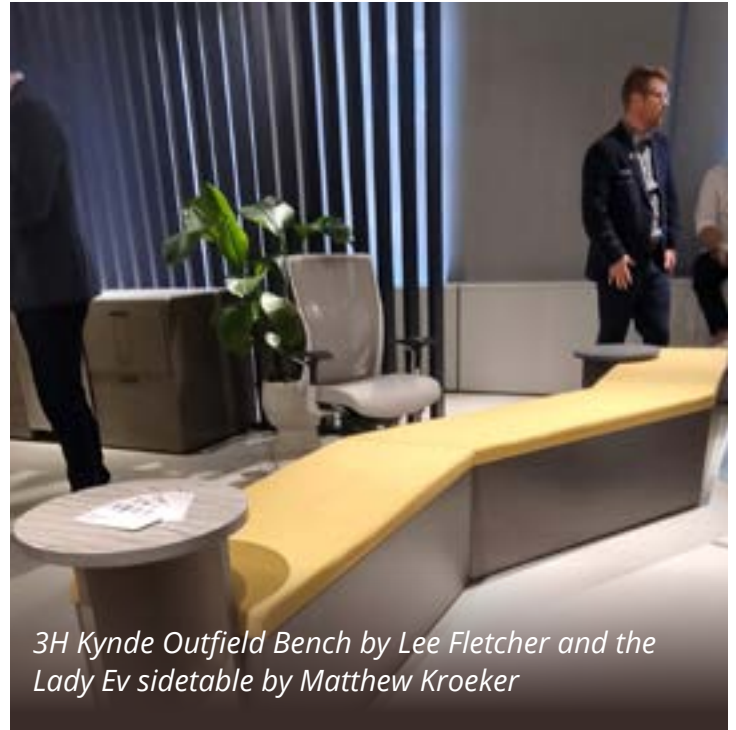
*Arcadia tub work cocoons*



*Mizetto seating system Velcro. Small pieces of fabric brought together to save waste*



*Global Rambler seating*



*3H Kynde Outfield Bench by Lee Fletcher and the Lady Ev sidetable by Matthew Kroeker*

Canada's [Three-H](#) featured Lee Fletcher's *Kynde Outfield Bench* and Matthew Kroeker's *Lady Ev* side table. [Global Furniture](#) impressed with geometrically shaped *Rambler* ottomans.



[KI](#) dedicated large sections of their show-space to sustainability and fabric innovations, while [SitOnIt](#) drew crowds with admission wristbands for NeoCon's After-Hours party at Treehouse nightclub.



*KI Fabrics and finishes area*



*KI sustainability display - plant a pencil*



*Tunnel-chicago-nightclub*

Belgium's [Extremis](#) (founded, owned and managed by product designer Dirk Wynants) showcased weather-resistant outdoor workstations so comfortable one wondered if staying awake might be a problem.



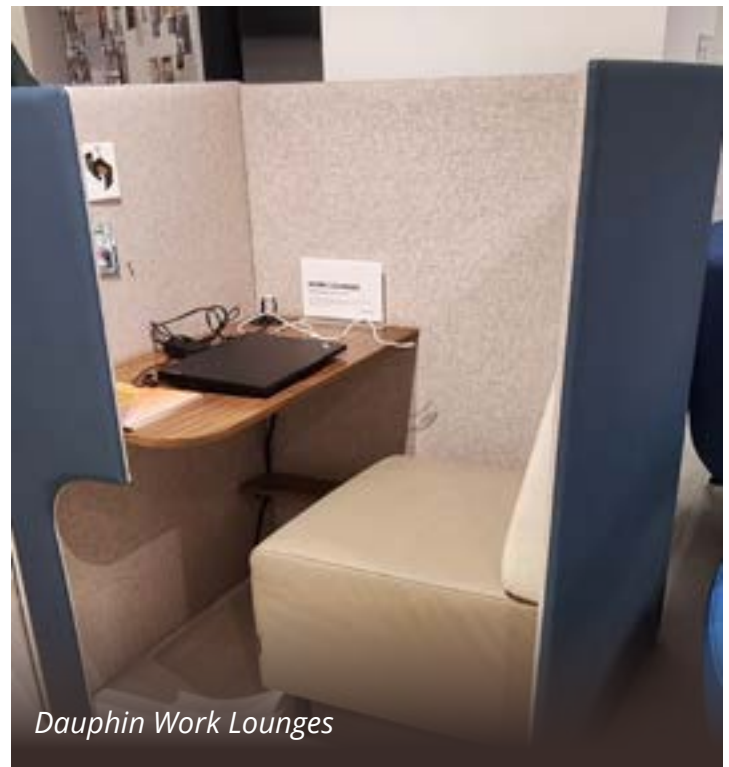
*Extremis outdoor workstation designer Dirk Wynants*

Italy's [Pedrali](#) presented the *Buddy* upholstery collection from busetti garuti redaelli, while Germany's [Dauphin](#), which has expanded beyond their traditional concentration on seating, to products such as these *Work Lounge* enclosures.

In Fulton Market, [Steelcase Learning](#) displayed the [Smith System](#), while other divisions showed a wide range of products, including this European-style space divider *Flex Active Frame*.



*Pedrali from northern Italy*



*Dauphin Work Lounges*



*Steelcase Learning  
Smith System Education  
furniture*



*Steelcase Flex Active Frames*

Plant life abounded, from [Nevins'](#) displays to [Hightower's](#) tulips.



*Hightower Tulips*

Nearby, China's [Sunon](#) (from Hangzhou) debuted a 15,000 sq ft showroom. [Teknion's](#) immersive space illustrated work modes, from private offices to casual collaboration, as with this shared workspace.



*Nevins biophilia*



*Teknion shared office space*



*Sunon new 15,000sq ft showroom at West Fulton*



John Sacks

London, June 2025



"Strategic guidance for office furniture companies worldwide"