

NeoCon®

FULTON MARKET

Design
Days

June 08 - 10, 2026

CHICAGO | 8 - 10 JUNE 2026

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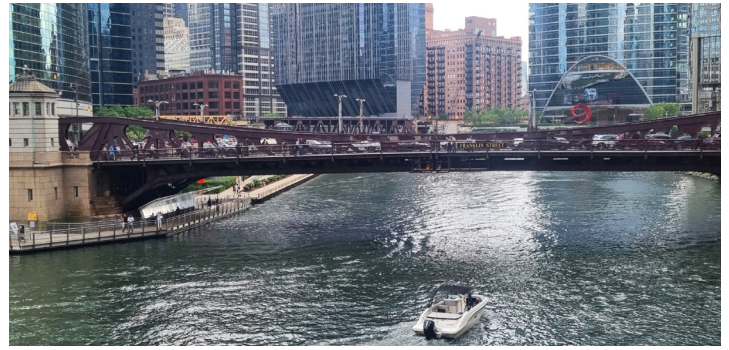
A Review

NeoCon & Fulton Market Design Days, Chicago, 8-10 June, 2026

- Chicago has recovered strongly as a destination city.
- Sustainability remains more discussed than fully demonstrated.
- Acoustic and privacy solutions continue to dominate workplace innovation, but is the extra space they demand affordable?
- Manufacturers appear to remain optimistic, despite economic uncertainty.

This year, Chicago's annual furniture pilgrimage felt less like a single event and more like two parallel exhibitions. NeoCon remains anchored in the Merchandise Mart, but Fulton Market Design Days has now emerged as a substantial destination in its own right. Together, they drew the global commercial interiors industry to Chicago, but forced visitors to divide their time, attention and energy between two distinct centres of gravity.

For more than half a century, the Merchandise Mart was the unquestioned centre of the North American commercial furniture industry. To visit NeoCon was to visit the industry itself. Beginning in around 2018 however, a growing number of leading manufacturers started relocating their flagship showrooms about a mile and a half west, in the Fulton Market district, a former meat-packing and warehouse area, west of downtown, that had been transformed into one of Chicago's most fashionable design and technology neighbourhoods.



The steady migration of major manufacturers to Fulton Market therefore represents more than a change of address; it is a redrawing of the industry's map, both geographical and cultural. What began as a handful of relocations has become a significant shift, with many of the industry's most influential brands now choosing to present themselves in a district that feels younger, more creative and more aligned with contemporary design culture.

From 8 – 10 June this year, there were two distinct office, commercial and interiors exhibitions in Chicago – *NeoCon* and Fulton Market Design Days - although there were some signs that they will, in the future, work together in increasing harmony. Despite the two shows being linked by a large, luxury shuttle bus service, the separated venues meant that those visitors who want to gain an oversight as to market and design trends, inevitably needed either to resign themselves to spending extra time in the city, or otherwise miss many potentially interesting and innovative showrooms.



Words and photos - John Sacks

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Published by: JSA Consultancy Services
5a Wilmington Square, Clerkenwell, London, Wc1X 0ES
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7688 1928 E: info@jsacs.com W: www.jsacs.com

Visitors to Chicago in mid-June are usually blessed with glorious dry, sunny and warm weather; not this year! The weather seemed to switch hourly, and visitors were treated to thunderstorms, strong winds and heavy downpours, interspersed with warm sunshine and periods of high humidity. Very disconcerting.

For the first time this year, NeoCon, and some of the Design Days showrooms, held previews on the Sunday before the three official show days. As the last day of the show, the Wednesday, has become less relevant over the years, with many visitors having fled the city by then, the extra time for viewing on the Sunday was valuable.

After several difficult years, Chicago appears to have fully regained its confidence and energy. The city was hard hit by Covid and, as recently as last summer, swathes of boarded up shops and restaurants were an ever-present reminder of the pandemic's knock-on effects. Now, however, the city seems to have regained its swagger.

Many companies mentioned aspects of sustainability, but relatively few presented a genuinely holistic sustainability philosophy. Any first-time visitor to the shows would have had a hard time understanding which characteristics exhibitors



consider really important. If sustainability was mentioned, it usually focused on single issues, such as products being made using recycled materials, or end-of-life recyclability. There were a few notable exceptions, such as MillerKnoll, Haworth, Allermuir and Humanscale, where the companies' philosophies and policies, and the importance of the issues were clearly presented.

Similarly, if seating manufacturers wanted to highlight their products' ergonomic principles, the message often seemed to be undermined by their presenting both task seating with credible postural support for workstations alongside the ubiquitous sofas, tub chairs and other soft seating, demanded for huddle spaces, work cafés and breakout areas which now predominate.

The acoustics in commercial environments are challenging. Creating semi-social settings encourages communication, collaboration and conversations. However, it can also make concentration and focused thinking difficult. The various solutions manufacturers provide are highly diverse, and include sound baffles, cladding, enclosures, booths, hubs and pods. Examples of all these were widely displayed at the show, but with sky-high city centre property costs, companies must surely worry that the extra space these solutions usually demand is verging on the unaffordable.

One European trend which doesn't yet appear to have been widely adopted is the introduction of biophilia – plants and greenery – into the office. [Sunon](#), from Hangzhou in China, demonstrated how this could work and even included recorded birdsong for added effect!

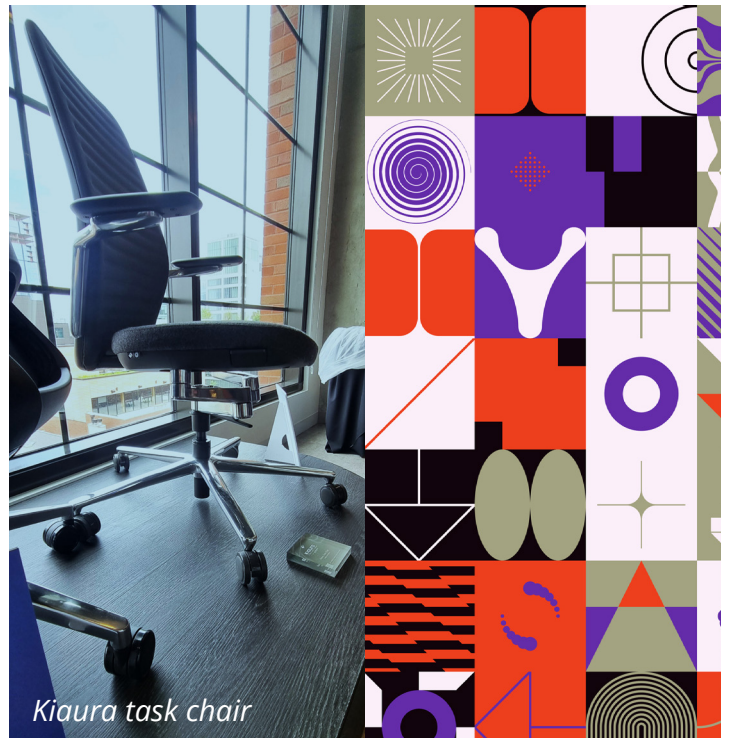
The long lines for elevators told a story. The Mart was very, very crowded on Monday, and only slightly less so on the Tuesday. Overall, there were probably somewhat fewer visitors than in previous years, possibly influenced by a mixed bag of the weather, the dual locations and economic worries. However, the atmosphere was very buzzy and upbeat, and the interplay between all the characters at the shows was a pleasure to see.

Among the many product launches, [KI's](#) Best of Competition winning Cognetic technology was one of the most genuinely innovative. Rather than relying on conventional levers and mechanical adjustments, the system uses a gravity-powered multi-axis mechanism that continuously responds to the user's movements. Demonstrated in the Kiaura task chair, it delivered one of the most comfortable seating experiences at the show.

[Allermuir's](#) new award-winning showroom on four floors in W. Fulton Market showed a wide range of new workplace and hospitality collections, including this *Plum sofa* range and *Crate Divide* storage units as well as the *Aura* sofa system and the new *Curve* lounge chairs.



Sunon, from Hangzhou



Kiaura task chair



Plum sofa range and Crate Divide storage



Aura sofa system and new Curve lounge chairs

Also in Fulton, [OFS](#) launched the *Kaleid Workstation* system designed for them by Roger Webb and [Teknion's](#) large, 6th floor, showroom presented a good selection of their products, including this display of products from their *District* line.

Ikea had a large pop-up show space and their products on show included this workstation.

This *Diffrient Lounge*, work surface and Ottoman featured in the [Humanscale](#) showroom.



[Actiu](#), from Alicante in Spain, had a very large and attractive showroom. One product – the *Plek Folding Desk* from Alberto Meda, operated with one hand, attracted a great deal of interest.



Most of the NeoCon's big brand showrooms were on floor 3, including [Haworth's](#) very large, well-designed space. Products displayed included the *Za:Za Max sofa* and pouffe designed by Zaven and the iconic *Cassina Tre Pezzi* armchair, designed by Franco Albini and Franca Helg in 1959. Their range of spacious, glass-enclosed *HushMeet.L* acoustic pods for larger team meetings were particularly impressive.

[Borgo](#) from Toronto, owned by the Spassiano family, flaunted their Italian design heritage with attractive upholstery, including these stylish booths and pouffes.

The *Verner-Panton-Collection* of seating for the education sector for [VS](#), used colour very effectively to attract attention.



Za:Za Max sofa and pouffe designed by Zaven and the iconic Cassina Tre Pezzi armchair



HushMeet.L acoustic by Franco Albini & Franca Helg

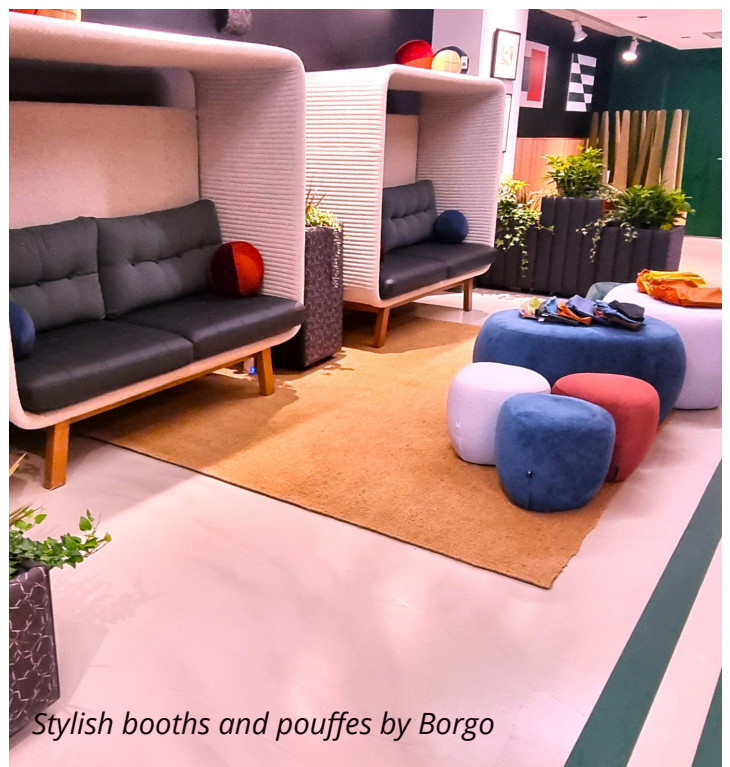


The Verner-Panton-Collection for VS

[Impact Acoustic](#) from Switzerland, were one of only a few specialist manufacturers of products - lighting, ceiling baffles and cladding - for managing noise levels in commercial premises.



Impact Acoustic's lighting, ceiling baffles & cladding



Stylish booths and pouffes by Borgo

[Narbutas](#), the 35 year-old Lithuanian company showed this elegant height-adjustable boardroom table.

One of Japan's largest office furniture companies, [Okamura](#), have an impressive 11th floor showroom at the Mart, although it is rumoured that they will be moving down to Floor 3, to be close to [Boss Design](#), the British company they acquired last year. This year, they launched *Muku*, a very attractive, impressively engineered and comfortable task seating range, designed in conjunction with Foster + Partners Industrial Design. Boss themselves, from England's Black Country, showed a wide range of seating and ancillary furniture, including their new *Lumae* range of hospitality seating and this attractive *Mews Connect* meeting pod in their always-busy showroom.



Narbutas height-adjustable boardroom table



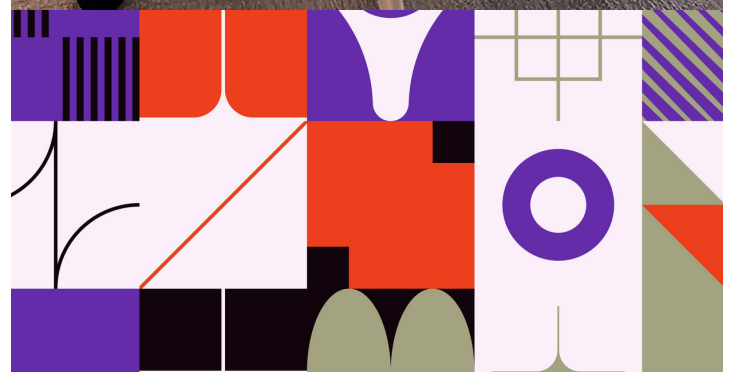
Boss Design's Lumae range



Muku, by Okamura



Mews Connect meeting pod by Boss Design



Bürotime, manufacturers from Konya in Türkiye, introduced their *Syn.Energy Table*, designed by Utkan Kızıltuğ and Nurçin Özcan Akın, and named after the combination of synchronization and energy, to transform office furniture from static elements into an active workspace platform that adapts to team-needs, thanks to its mobile structure.

One of the most dramatic showroom spaces was **Andreu World's** large, airy and cleverly lit space. Their *Patin* chairs and stools designed by Patricia Urquiola, and launched this year won NeoCon Gold awards.

The go-to company for height-adjustable workstations, **Innovant** of New York, had an attractive showroom on the 3rd floor.

allseating, from Mississauga near Toronto, worked hard communicating well with their reps and dealers, including giving probably the best and liveliest party of the show. They had a good display of their wide range of office and commercial seating in their large showroom, adjacent to the Mart. Also from Mississauga, **ThreeH** used their woodworking skills to create this attractive modular *Sutton zoning system*.



One of the most eye-catching displays on floor 7, was from the British company, [airiia](#), who showed a range of air-filled structures – including enclosures, space dividers, screens etc, described as energy efficient, lightweight, easily transportable and installed with no waste. The company adds “*Most importantly they put a smile on peoples’ faces.*” One example was *BoneWall*, a bone-shaped space divider creating visual and acoustic privacy in open plan areas.

[Scandinavian Spaces’](#) showroom included products from a wide range of companies from the region, such as this segmented sofa system from [Bla Station](#).

Whether viewed as one exhibition or two, Chicago remains the most important annual gathering of the North American commercial furniture industry. The emergence of Fulton Market Design Days has undoubtedly complicated the visitor experience, but it has also injected fresh energy into the city and created new opportunities for manufacturers to differentiate themselves. For visitors willing to invest the time to explore both districts, Chicago 2026 offered a fascinating snapshot of an industry continuing to adapt to changing patterns of work, evolving expectations of workplace design and increasing demands for environmental responsibility.





John Sacks

London, June 2026



"Strategic guidance for office furniture companies worldwide"