

***Brussels Furniture Fair 2016 – Final Report***

***The reactions of exhibitors and visitors to the recent Furniture Fair were broadly enthusiastic. It was a great edition with stands that were even more outstanding than in previous years. Buyers from Belgium and abroad were eager to buy, although their overall number did decrease slightly. Although there were slightly fewer visitors, their quality meant that the final balance can be described as positive. The fair also continues to become increasingly international, with some 61% of visitors coming from abroad and with 64.5% of stand holders being non-Belgian.***

**Key international buyers present**

The presence of all the key purchasing groups from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain and Norway was an important factor for our exhibitors. Their satisfaction with the orders agreed at the fair is certainly a result of this. A number of German and Austrian giants visited the fair for the first time, and were absolutely charmed by both the atmosphere and the commercial offering. The independent furniture trade also showed considerable eagerness to buy.

However, 5.37% fewer entry tickets were scanned overall. This is largely due to the reduction in Belgian visitors (-7.86%). The explanation for this lies on the one hand with the Belgian furniture trade’s less than rosy figures since February 2016, and on the other hand with the concentration of the market. The reduction in visitors from our neighbouring countries was less marked. There were 3.21% fewer visitors from the Netherlands, but having seen a 4% rise last year, we still remain above the 2014 figure. In absolute terms, there were 157 fewer Dutch visitors. Discussions with our exhibitors would suggest that it was chiefly the sleep specialists who showed up in lower numbers. From France there was a 4.96% reduction, or 127 visitors. The large buying groups did all come, but there were fewer representatives of individual shops. And the French purchased enthusiastically. Moreover, they also came from all over France, so not just from the north of the country. Visitor numbers from across the English Channel declined by 4.58%, although here too all the key names were present. Perhaps they are taking more of a ‘wait and see’ approach because of Brexit. However exhibitors’ perception was that there were more British visitors to the fair, but in terms of purchasing some were rather hesitant, waiting to see how the exchange rate would evolve over the coming months. From Germany, Switzerland and Austria, there was a status quo (-0,66%). Furthermore, the aforementioned attendance of the big market leaders meant that the presence of 9 fewer visitors was barely perceptible; indeed the opposite was true. Visitors from other countries declined by a total of 111, or 5.08%. International visitors are becoming increasingly important to the Brussels Furniture Fair, with a figure of 61.02%. This is of great consequence to the fair. For a significant number of participants, our visitors from abroad are one of the key reasons for taking part, and it justifies their investment in a stand of which they can be proud. At the Brussels Furniture Fair, you can reach a number of key markets at the same time for a relatively limited cost. This is one of our fair’s key strengths.

We can conclude that visitor numbers reflect the current market situation. Visitor numbers are no longer the be all and end all. For exhibitors, what ultimately counts the most is whether they have done good business. From the many discussions that we had during the fair, we can conclude that the result was certainly positive. The majority of exhibitors were also satisfied to very satisfied, certainly also about the quality and profile of visitors. And a significant number of exhibitors have already let us know that they definitely plan to come back next year!

**Visitors 2016**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2015** | **2016** | **+/-** | **+/-%** |
| **BE/LUX** | 7725 | 7118 | -607 | -7.86% |
| **NL** | 4886 | 4729 | -157 | -3.21% |
| **FR** | 2558 | 2431 | -127 | -4.96% |
| **DE/AT/CH** | 1372 | 1363 | -9 | -0.66% |
| **UK/IE** | 568 | 542 | -26 | -4.58% |
| **Other** | 2187 | 2076 | -111 | -5.08% |
| **TOTAL** | **19296** | **18259** | **-1037** | **-5.37%** |

In total there were 268 exhibitors, or 7 fewer than in 2015, spread over 7 halls. This year occupancy rose slightly, by 1.11%, thus illustrating the trend towards larger stands. In general, fair participants this year – both new and loyal exhibitors – strongly focused on their stands, some of which were truly exceptional. Stands were more open and models on show were afforded a little more space. The stands’ decoration was also outstanding and carefully considered. Finally, the decoration of the fair as a whole was inspiring, with atmospheric trend passages, concepts that added value, and bars in which you could catch your breath in a trendy and convivial environment. The overall impression of the fair was even more attractive and more prestigious. The experience for the visitor was that of a truly international trade fair.

One key conclusion is that purchasing was particularly strong at exhibitors who had made a big effort in terms of new products and who offered genuine innovations. It was these exhibitors who benefited most from the Furniture Fair. Because of this, the result was somewhat mixed. This has always been the case, but this year it was perhaps even more striking.

Luckily there was a great deal of innovation to be picked up, thanks to an exceptionally high number of product developments and genuine innovations. There was a noticeable trend towards more compact models as a response to the reduction in the size of living space. In addition, more luxurious materials were also in evidence at a number of stands, some as part of an ingenious mix of materials.

**Balthazars 2016**

To put novel, innovative and trend-inspired products from the furniture sector in the spotlight has for years been Brussels Furniture Fair’s motive for organising the Balthazar awards amongst participants. These not only put ‘Best of Belgium’ in the spotlight, but also honour manufacturers who immerse themselves in new and innovative products. Moreover, there is also a Balthazar for a trendy product, and for contemporary country living.

This year’s 2016 jury was comprised of Leen Creve (design journalist), Siegrid Demyttenaere (Furniture Fair trends, Be Magazine, DAMN°), Marie-Anne Desiere (Director of Modulo Communication Agency), Elien Haentjens (Lifestyle Journalist), Frances van der Steen (Freelance Furniture Journalist & Trendspotter), Chris De Roock (Managing Director of Wood.be) and president Moniek Bucquoye (Biënnale Interieur).

As well as considering the products put forward by participants, the jury also visited all the stands at the fair. It was delighted to note that all the manufacturers were truly working hard to pursue more consumer-oriented product development, offer integral concepts, be unafraid to try new or unusual material combinations and technologies, and to take account both in terms of content and of the environment of both design, material choice and presentation. The striking thing was the innovation and increased quality of the design in the middle segment, with the conclusion that an ideal balance was often created between robustness, look and price.

After some lively deliberations, the jury came to the following unanimous conclusions:

In the **Best of Belgium** category, the Balthazar was awarded to the furniture manufacturer **Joli**for the **Layers** furniture collection by Belgian designer **Sylvain Willenz**. The reasons for their decision include the innovative tabletop material ‘Wood-on-Glass’ and the particular attention that the company paid to ensuring that Belgian suppliers were involved in the production process.

New this year is that in addition to the winner, there are also two laureates per category. These are an honourable mention for those manufacturers that truly stood out. For Best of Belgium these are the upholstered bed Hans Christian by Studio|Nedda for LS Bedding - Magnitude and Respiro, the fully upholstered box spring, with integrated mattress, from a design by Stefan Schöning for Kreamat.

The Balthazar in the **Most Trendy** category goes to the Danish firm **Lifetime Kidsrooms** for the multifunctional concept **Play&Store**. This was developed for children’s and teenage bedrooms, but the jury also sees other potential applications. They applaud the robustness, the price/quality ratio and the compact concept that fits into the trend towards ever-smaller living spaces. The laureates are the modular sofa concept Camu by designer Roel Vandebeek for Moome, and the Franz concept from Mokumuku by Bullfrog from Germany for their refreshing, flexible and affordable approach to seating.

Thirdly, there was a Balthazar **Country Today** for the **Brooklyn** collection by **Karel Mintjens**. Here the jury was struck by the unusual combination of robust oak veneer with wafer-thin metal, the ecological aspects, and the country-style toughness wrapped up in a design package. Honourable mentions go to Mobitec’s Lindsay chair collection and to the collection presented at the fair by the Dutch firm Kluskens.

Finally, the **Innovation** award went to **Veldeman Bedding** for the concept and production of the **Finesse** bed. As well as its elegance, the jury also appreciated the technological innovation it represented, the variations in finish and the extra focus on ventilation and on a feeling of wellness. The Tatu sideboard by the Italian firm Devina Naïs and the Frames room divider/shelving unit designed by Gerard de Hoop for Moome are the laureates in this category.

**Conclusion**

The 2016 Furniture Fair was a great trade fair, an edition in which together with our exhibitors, we have once again taken a step forward. The visitor numbers may have turned out to be somewhat lower, but we can still look back on the fair with satisfaction. Purchasing was strong, both from Belgians and from foreign buyers. The fair offered an inspiring experience, with visitors returning home with a wealth of new ideas and impressions. It is a meeting point for the furniture trade in North-Western Europe and a must for interior designer professionals. The fair is predominately designed to generate orders, but it is also in part a place in which to find inspiration. The appeal of the Furniture Fair is undimmed. See you next year in November!

Lieven Van den Heede

Brussels Furniture Fair

[www.furniturefairbrussels.be](http://www.furniturefairbrussels.be)

**Next Furniture Fair: 5 to 8 November 2017**