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***Brussels Furniture Fair 2017 – Final Report***

***During the recent 80th edition of the Brussels Furniture Fair, there was an optimistic mood afoot in the halls, despite a difficult year for the Belgian furniture trade. Over 90% of the exhibitors with whom we have been able to speak were downright enthusiastic about the 2017 Furniture Fair. Following last year’s decline, this year’s visitor numbers showed a slight increase (+2.24%), but above all, it was the sales figures that were good, and in some cases excellent. For some time now, due to the concentration in the market, the success of a trade fair edition has been unrelated to the number of visitors. Sadly, however, this is the only yardstick by which trade fairs are judged. The quality and buying potential are harder to measure, but are far more important. And luckily, both were present in profusion.***

**An increasingly international trade audience**

Every year, we see the proportion of international visitors increase. This year, it rose to 62.16%, as opposed to 61% last year. The number of Belgian shops is still declining, and for the Belgian furniture trade, 2017 was a bad year. This means that there were also somewhat fewer Belgian visitors, although the decline has stabilised (-0.76%). The number of foreign visitors also increased, also in absolute terms. Indeed, it is from abroad that the growth of the Furniture Fair needs to come. It goes without saying that as an organisation, we are very pleased with this! It is only from Germany/Switzerland/Austria and from Great Britain and Ireland that we have seen a tiny decline of -0.29% and -1.5% respectively. In reality, this translates to a mere 4 visitors fewer from Germany and 8 fewer from Great Britain, which is actually an entirely normal fluctuation. The growing market in the Netherlands and France translated into a pleasing growth in visitor numbers from these two countries, which are traditionally very important for Brussels. From the Netherlands, there were 1.83% more visitors, and from France there was a significant increase of 7.28%! There was also a pleasing increase in visitors from other countries, of 8.71%. In total, we welcomed 463 more guests from abroad.

Furthermore, the quality was also good, and this is difficult to express in figures. All the groups from France and the Netherlands were present, and a number of key purchasing groups from Germany also made their way to Brussels. In addition, there were also a considerable number of large individual furniture shops. All have placed good orders, and this confirms Brussels Furniture Fair’s reputation as a true sales fair. The total visitor numbers, 18,668 represented an overall increase of 409 visitors (+2.24%).

Once again, it also became clear that the result of a fair only becomes definitive on the last day, and that every day counts. A number of exhibitors had not yet achieved the expected result on Monday evening, but by closing time on Wednesday evening, the balance had shifted decisively in a positive direction. Moreover, the increase in visitor numbers was apparent every day, but perhaps not in every hall. Ultimately, however, what counts is the final result.

**2017 Visitors**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2016** | **2017** | **+/-** | **+/-%** |
| **BE/LUX** | 7118 | 7064 | -54 | -0.76% |
| **NL** | 4729 | 4817 | +88 | +1.83% |
| **FR** | 2431 | 2620 | +189 | +7.21% |
| **DE/AT/CH** | 1363 | 1359 | -4 | -0.29% |
| **UK/IE** | 542 | 534 | -8 | -1.50% |
| **Other** | 2076 | 2274 | +198 | +8.71% |
| **TOTAL** | **18259** | **18668** | **+409** | **+2.24%** |

In total, there were 258 exhibitors, or 10 fewer than in 2016, once again spread over 7 halls. The surface area thus remained the same. What we find enormously pleasing is to see the quality of the presentations and of the collections being improved year after year. The exhibitors are clearly all following the trend towards the high quality and high standard that befits an international trade fair. This was particularly apparent to visitors who had been absent for a number of years. The 2017 Brussels Furniture Fair is no longer the same as the 2014 edition, let alone that of ten years ago. And this is only logical wa if we want to stay relevant. We also try to set the example ourselves, with striking scenography for our own stands and bars, as well as for the entrance halls and the trend presentations in the corridors. Everything should be about quality and creating a special atmosphere. The result is a professional fair at an international level of which we can all be proud!

**Balthazars 2017**

Major efforts at product innovation were the order of the day at the 2017 Furniture Fair. This time, manufacturers went right to the core of product development, coming up with genuine innovations. The results of this could be seen on the trade fair floor, and this was reflected in the buyers’ enthusiasm. With the Balthazars, the Furniture Fair aims to put pioneering, innovative and on-trend products in the spotlight. Exhibitors can register free of charge for these Furniture Fair awards. An independent jury first compiles a longlist, before distilling it into a single winner and two laureates per category.

As a Belgian fair, it is only logical that one of our Balthazars should be “Best of Belgium”. The Belgian industry is the driving force behind the fair, and for them it is an annual commitment. But each year, the Brussels Furniture Fair is becoming ever more international. This is highlighted in the “Best International” category for the most deserving foreign collection. In 2017, ecology is of course a key consideration for the furniture sector. The best ecological product is therefore awarded the “Ecology” Balthazar. And finally, innovation is rewarded with the “Innovation” Balthazar.

The jury members this year were Siegrid Demyttenaere (Furniture Fair trends, BE Magazine, DAMN°), Elien Haentjens (lifestyle journalist), Frances van der Steen (freelance furniture journalist & trendspotter), Harry Van Hoyweghen (organiser BAD Ghent and manager Nestor Creative Event Organizers), Chris De Roock (managing director, Wood.be) and chairperson Marie-Anne Desiere (managing director, Modulo Communication Agency).

After a lively discussion, the jury took the following unanimous decisions:

In the **BEST OF BELGIUM** category, the 12-litre bottle of Drappier champagne and the large certificate went to **Mintjens Group** for **Bloom**. The Bloom collection stands out for its huge versatility of lifestyle ambiances, based on a relatively limited number of cleverly designed material and styling options.

Alongside the winner, there were also two laureates. They received a small certificate and a magnum of champagne. In this category were **Joli** with the **Wire** chair, and **Boone** with the **Cubed+**.

The new **BEST INTERNATIONAL** Balthazar was awarded to **Era Grupa** from Croatia for their **entire collection**. The surprising thing about Era Grupa’s collection was its international appeal. It stands out for its versatility, originality and durability.

**Discalsa** with the **Fioco** **Table** and **Jan** **Kurtz** with the **Sit’s** **concept** were the laureates in this category

For the **ECOLOGY** category, **MTE** **Theuns** was proclaimed the winner, with the **Göteborg** collection. Oak is becoming scarcer. That’s why with Göteborg, MTE Theuns has made the ecological switch from traditional oak to FSC ash, in an evergreen retro style.

The only Ecology laureate is **Kluskens** with **Désio**. This sends a subtle signal to the sector that there is still work to be done in this area!

The Balthazar in the **INNOVATION** category was awarded to **Recor** **Group** with the **Recor** **Home** **Collection**. With this new lifestyle brand, Recor has developed a striking conceptual innovation in a short space of time. From product design to marketing, everything is focused on the new consumer, defined in 5 different target groups.

The laureates for Innovation are the firm **Moome** with **Hugo** and **Passe** **Partout** with the **Low** **Dining** concept.

**Conclusion**

Together with our exhibitors, we look back at this anniversary edition of the Furniture Fair with pride. First and foremost, we are delighted that visitor numbers have once again seen a modest rise, despite a difficult market. We are also pleased with the manufacturers’ good sales results, which we have divined from a good number of positive comments. The new collections have been well received by purchasers from both at home and abroad, and this is a reward for the hard work that went into their presentation at the Furniture Fair. Visitors from the whole of North Western Europe have been inspired by what they have discovered at this meeting point for our sector, and have hopefully been given a boost for the next furniture season. We are already looking to the future with confidence, starting with the next edition of the Furniture Fair, from 4 up to and including 7 November 2018. We’d already like to wish you a warm welcome!

Lieven Van den Heede

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**Next Furniture Fair: 4 to 7 November 2018**