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**PREVIEW OF THE 2017 FURNITURE FAIR**

**Introduction**

A very warm welcome to the 80th edition of the Brussels Furniture Fair. We are officially the oldest furniture trade fair in Europe, perhaps even in the world. Having made history, we will continue to shape the future. Starting with this edition. The 2017 Brussels Furniture Fair is once again shaping up to be a wonderful occasion! All 7 halls are well filled with an exciting collection of 260 exhibitors, 60% of which are from abroad.

We may be 80 years old, but we are certainly moving with the times. To this end, we have modernised our house style, and are active on social media. You can like us and follow us here. The website has been made more interactive, to help you to prepare your visit to the fair even more efficiently and to map out a route. But without a doubt, the icing on the anniversary cake is the sheer range of what is on display! We have already had a look around and have had the opportunity to discover all manner of new things. Once again, the manufacturers have pulled out all the stops for this celebratory edition.

**Curiosity**

As a sector, are we sufficiently curious? Do we look at our field and at the collections presented by the manufacturers with an open mind? This is exactly what the campaign visual for the 2017 Furniture Fair is designed to express. As a trade fair, we want to keep our finger on the pulse and be able to offer our visitors a good overview of European furniture manufacturing in the mid-market segment. It is logical that the furniture trade works with fixed suppliers, but a trade fair is also always an opportunity to make fresh discoveries, and to look beyond the familiar. We also try to stay curious as an organisation, despite the temptation to keep on doing the same thing. It is only in this way that we can stay relevant and innovate. Therefore every year we actively search for new exhibitors that can truly add value to our trade fair. And once again this year we’ve been successful in this, for the 80th year in a row.

**80th Anniversary of Brussels Furniture Fair**

2017 marks the Brussels Furniture Fair’s 80th anniversary, a fact that you’ll have registered when you saw 80th anniversary logo, complete with crown, on our advertisements. You’ll also notice it when you’re handed a chocolate upon your arrival at the fair in the morning. It’s our anniversary, and it’s time for us to treat you! We are of course proud of our highly respectable age. But that doesn’t mean that we now believe that we can rest on our laurels. There’s no doubt that the fair looks very different to its incarnation 80 years ago. We have had our ups and downs, most of which have mirrored those of the Belgian furniture industry and trade. The 1960s were golden years. Retailers would place orders for dozens of pieces in one go, and there was a truly celebratory atmosphere in Brussels. It was a time of buoyant economic growth and rising prosperity. Later, the competition grew fiercer and the oil crisis struck. The Brussels Furniture Fair had to deal with competition from the Trademart, which was suddenly the place to be. From the end of the 1990s, the tide turned and the Furniture Fair in turn became the place to be for the West European furniture sector. And that’s what we still are today, thanks to the fact that we continually evolve with the times.

We do not purport to be trendsetting. This role is clearly played by Milan. However, we do want to showcase the latest commercial trends in the large mid-market segment. We achieve this not only by prospecting and persuading the right exhibitors to come to Brussels; but also through the trend styles that our Art Director Siegrid Demyttenaere develops every year. This year the title is “Let’s tell the truth”, and this will be visualised in the trend corridors using concrete new products from our exhibitors. We thus aim to inspire and surprise the sector.

For the 80th anniversary, we wanted to highlight the merits and the future of Belgium as a furniture country. The new design|industry platform showcases the impact of industrial design, and the interaction between manufacturers and designers. We have selected 19 collaborations and will be displaying these designs in a pared-down scenography in hall 3. On Tuesday evening, a meet&greet is being organised with these manufacturers and designers. Following this, the Balthazars will be awarded in the Square bar, this year in an especially celebratory anniversary atmosphere.

**Exhibitors from at home and abroad**

As a Belgian trade fair, the offering from our own manufacturers is a key part of what we do. For our Belgian manufacturers, Brussels is the number one trade fair at which to showcase their new collections to clients from their home country, but also to those from abroad. This year, there are 105 Belgian stands; 10 more than in 2016. A number of these are exhibitors who are returning this year, but a few amongst them will also be exhibiting in Brussels for the first time. Belgium represents 40.70% of the total number of exhibitors. The Brussels Furniture Fair is also the leading trade fair for the Netherlands, and vice-versa, the Netherlands also plays an important role in our trade fair, as the largest delegation from abroad. The 67 Dutch firms attending may be 13 fewer than last year, but nevertheless still represent almost 26% of the total number of exhibitors.

Germany has leapfrogged Italy and is now supplying the third-largest number of exhibitors. In 2017 there will be 20 German stands, representing 7.75% of the overall offering, and 1 stand more than at last year’s fair. From Italy there are 4 fewer names, which puts them in fourth place with just under 7%. Therefore the difference with Germany is relatively small. France is once again in fifth place with 11 participants, two fewer than in 2016, representing a total of 4.85%. The remaining nationalities account for 37 names on the exhibitors’ list, together representing 14.34% of the total.

The surface area tells a slightly different story. The dominance of the Belgians, Germans and Italians is slightly greater than suggested by the number of exhibitors, and the overall share of the Netherlands, France and other countries is somewhat smaller. But the order remains the same, and the differences when compared to last year are all less than 1%. The key conclusion from this is just how stable the Brussels Furniture Fair is. Every year, there are shifts, but these are never dramatic. From this we learn the same thing as when we take a look at the floor plan: the Belgians, Germans and Italians have relatively large stands; whist the French have smaller ones. For the Netherlands, the picture is somewhat distorted due to a large number of smaller stands and a few very large ones.

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|   | **number** | **% number** | **% surface area** |
| **Belgium** | 105 | 40.70 | 47.65 |
| **The Netherlands** | 67 | 25.97 | 22.63 |
| **Germany** | 20 | 7.75 | 8.06 |
| **Italy** | 18 | 6.98 | 7.20 |
| **France** | 11 | 4.26 | 2.51 |
| **Other** | 37 | 14.34 | 11.95 |
| **TOTAL** | **258** | **100** | **100** |

**Countries and product groups**

What are the key shifts in the product offering? Which trends are becoming more marked? This is hard to say with any certainty in advance. Not all exhibitors let us know what they will be exhibiting. But there are a few key points that stand out. And of course, we already know which product groups and countries are on the rise in Brussels.

We have already looked at the big picture with regard to the countries, but in the “other” category, a number of interesting details have disappeared in between the cracks of the statistics. For example, we did not have a single exhibitor from Great Britain for years, until last year when Tetrad appeared on the scene. This year, there are already three stands from Great Britain; we know that Baker Furniture’s attendance is a direct consequence of the success that Tetrad enjoyed last year.

From Sweden this year, we have Furninova, Conform and S.O.U.L who are returning; and from Norway, IMG from the Ekornes group is coming to Brussels for the first time. Bellus and Hovden are actually manufactured in the Baltic states, but also fall under the Scandinavian category.

The 4 Portuguese firms attending this year are not the same as last year. Aleal, ARC and AC Moura have been replaced by Corti, Flam&Luce, OPR and the Belgian-Portuguese collaboration Beluga.

The key product groups that are gaining in importance are decoration and bedding. The latter is thanks to the international appeal and success of Brussels by Night. Sleep specialists from mainly Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Switzerland visit this hall, which specialises in sleeping comfort. It is therefore only natural that bed linen manufacturers also want to get in on the action. Furthermore, we have a French exhibitor with an innovative machine for personalising mattresses with embroidery on the sides.

The rise of the decorative segment is partly down to the abolition of the small All4Home trade fair, which focused exclusively on the Belgian market. These exhibitors do not so much present seasonal accessories. In November, Christmas goods are (almost) ubiquitous in the shops. Instead they specialise in home decoration, with lamps, mirrors, pictures, paintings and frames, boxes, rugs, cushions, furs, occasional pieces, gas fireplaces, etc. In short, they offer all you might need to create atmosphere in the home all year round.

**New trends on the trade fair floor**

The trends in the furniture offering are less easy to sum up. It is more of an evolution; there are no real shocks. Nevertheless, we have noticed four themes that are growing in importance: responding to smaller homes, the increasing personalisation of the interior, making luxury accessible, and the blurring of the boundary between the contract market and the residential market.

Firstly, firms are responding to the trend towards smaller living spaces. It is no coincidence that this is coinciding with a fifties revival. Directly after the Second World War, there was also a scarcity of living space, materials and money. Tubular steel became steel wire. Solid wood pieces became more compact and lighter. Today, there are also ecological reasons for using materials more sparingly. For decades, Belgian manufacturers were accustomed to simply producing pieces for large Belgian homes, but they are now joining in with this compact trend. Up2date, for example, is presenting a new concept, City Living, aimed at smaller homes, smaller budgets and smaller purchases. We are seeing a comeback of metal wire frames from the fifties beneath chairs, sofas and cupboards, with even a manufacturer like Bauwens presenting hairpin feet beneath its cupboards. Gami is also drawing inspiration from the 50s. Devina Nais is presenting a more compact and transparent bookshelf. At Moome, the entire collection has even been built up around the concept of more compact living.

Complete dining room, living room or bedroom ensembles are firmly a thing of the past. The rise of the box spring has split bedroom purchases into “sleeping comfort” and the rest of the decoration. These box springs are becoming slimmer and more compact, in order to make the room appear larger. We have seen this with Veldeman, Magnitude, Polypreen and Nillspring, amongst others. Bedside tables now float, like those from Nolte; bookcases are integrated into the headboard, for example by Recor Bedding. Sofa beds are on the up and are becoming more compact. Sofabed by Recor reduces the sofa bed to an absolute minimum format (but without compromising on sleeping comfort). It is also no coincidence that Maxdivani is now presenting a separate brand of sofa beds, Brera58. Steele is presenting a nest of slim metal tables. Furthermore, we are also seeing more and more stand-alone occasional armchairs, for example from Rom or Hima.

The second trend is the increasing personalisation of individual pieces of furniture. Manufacturers are offering more and more opportunities for customers to put together their own pieces, based on their own individual taste, height, comfort and other requirements. The boundary between authentic and standardised customisation is becoming blurred. Some firms are making custom-made furniture collections part of their company philosophy. At firms such as Cube Interiors, Leda, Micheldenolf, XO Furniture, Kessels, Steele, and Beluga, all models can be custom-made. Moreover, manufacturers are also working out custom-made concepts, which they are continually perfecting with still more options. You can see this with Neococoon, for example, but also with Hima, Gerlin, Theuns and Meubar. And at Mintjens with made-to-measure tables. Chairs and sofas can virtually be finished with a different upholstery on each element, for example with Calia. At Rom, you can even configure the layout of your seat cushions. In the world of sleeping comfort, we have been accustomed to entirely tailor-made mattresses and bases for some time now. Naturally, that same principle can simply be applied to seating comfort. For example at PR Living and Ligna, you can choose between various different types of seating comfort.

The third trend was already visible last year, and revolves around making luxury available to everyone. Tabu Living takes this a long way, and uses a microscopically thin layer of real gold, silver or copper on its cupboard doors, or upholsters them with leatherette. In the case of manufacturers such as Magnitude, Serta or Heavens, luxury is part of their DNA. We see greater user-friendliness with Rom, which is introducing a pet-proof flocking into the market, which is better resistant to claws and hairs from your cat or dog. Reclining functions that are invisible and smartly integrated into the sofa are omnipresent. With Himolla, you can even operate them using speech recognition.

Would you like to sit even more luxuriously? With Bert Plantagie, an extra mat on the seat of an already upholstered chair makes this possible. Chairs are sumptuously upholstered and tufted from Calligaris or Unic Design, for example. At Steel&Stockings, the bedspreads, knitted with oversized yarns, create a super-de-luxe feeling of warmth and comfort.

The luxury of velvet is something you’ll be encountering frequently at the Furniture Fair, including from up2date, Willi Schillig, K+W, and Passepartout. Sometimes this is combined with leather on the outside to create a contrast between hard and soft, such as at Calia.

Limited editions create an ultimate sense of luxury, of exclusivity. A brilliant example are Calia’s Matera pouffes, which are printed with photos of this charming South Italian town.

Finally, we have noticed that the offering for the contract market and the residential market is converging. The inspiration for bedroom decoration is coming from hotel rooms, whilst restaurants are being decorated in a style that is more homely, rather than in a typical catering business style. Moreover, products developed for the care sector no longer look in any way medical. Now, everything can be a little cosier. Naturally, this is related to the fact that elderly people both want to and are able to stay living at home for as long as possible, equipped with all possible comfort. This is a segment that Otium Care by Mecam, for example, is reacting to strongly, but other firms such as Mobitec, Mahoton, Kreamat, Veldeman Bedding and Boone also offer ready-made solutions.

Tables and chairs are suitable for both home and contract use, whilst dining tables and chairs are also available at bar height, for example from Infiniti, Calligaris, Perfecta, Vandecasteele, Zons, Chairz Classo, Nix Design and Henk Schram. And indeed, there are tables in typical contract sizes of 80x80 or 70x70. This only increases the attractiveness of a visit to the Brussels Furniture Fair for contract specialists. A special indication on the trade fair plan and on stands’ name boards will help them in their search for the right specialists.

**Names that come and go**

As is the case every year, there are some exhibitors that stay away and others that come in their place. There are a variety of reasons for this. Some choose to come to Brussels every two years, whilst others go in search of new horizons. Still others cease to exist, sadly enough. This year, the number of new exhibitors is quite high at 25%. Normally the figure is just under 20%. The majority are small, one-off stands, but there are a few important names too. Our strategy has always been to replace manufacturers who are staying away with new exhibitors who represent added value for our visitors. This is significantly different to simply persuading any old manufacturer to come to Brussels. It demands a consistent and highly targeted prospecting over the long term. Luckily, Brussels is able to count on a large group of loyal exhibitors. The key names will all be attending.

In hall 3, Nicoletti is the most important absentee, in addition to Trendteam and Mondosofa, amongst others. Fortunately, the new names more than compensate for this loss: Natuzzi has once again chosen to come to Brussels, where it will be staging the world premiere of its new shop concept for Editions. Maxdivani will be introducing its new brand Brera’58 at our fair, which features sofa beds in leather, fabric and microfibre. These are two significant firsts for the Brussels Furniture Fair! In addition, Hovden, Era, White Oak Furniture, Cube Interiors, Steele and The Wool Studio are also new faces at our fair.

In hall 4, the absence of MDR Decruy will be the most noticeable, given its longstanding presence in Brussels. The company is looking for a new dynamic and is therefore searching for an external manager. As a result, there were no new collections and there was no point in its participating this year. Further, firms including Ada, Gwinner, Aleal and Skovby are also staying away. This means a good deal of space for fresh faces in hall 4. Karma by Sympa will be taking MDR Decruy’s strategic position. The Belgian firm Vandenberghe will be coming to Brussels for the first time, with solid oak furniture. Furninova from Sweden is one example of an exhibitor who wishes to come once every two years, and is therefore back this year. IMG Norway, from the Ekornes group, is a new exhibitor for Brussels. For Infiniti from Italy, this first participation is a test for the West European furniture trade. Topstar is also bringing its sister company Wagner along, with high-quality chairs and office furniture. Other new names are the English Chesterfield Company, Corti from Portugal, Rossini from Italy, Dutch Sofa Company, Drimmer from France and Discalsa from Spain.

The large hall 5 will see little change. This is very much the hall of the big Belgian manufacturers, who always faithfully return. Only Lee&Lewis is new in this position, having previously stood in hall 8. Key things to look forward to here are the presentation of the new residential brand Recor Home; Theuns’ experimentation with ash instead of oak; Gerlin’s metamorphosis; up2date, which aims to reach a whole new audience with City Living; the updated Sitino, which has been taken over by Mintjens; and Mecam’s new concept collection Authentix. Passepartout is broadening its collection to include dining tables, chairs and rugs, and Rom is increasing its focus on customising and smart living. Of course, there are also new collections from Unic Design, Varam, Mobliberica, Moome, Perfecta, Neyt, Mintjens, Probilex, D&D and De Eiken Zetel.

There are a large number of absentees – and therefore new names – in hall 6 this year. The sleep sector has had a challenging time over the past year and this was apparent to when we were filling in Brussels by Night. However in this section, our aim is to focus on quality over and above quantity. We have therefore made a conscious decision to place the lower-end bed ranges in Mozaïek in hall 9, where the entry-level segment of the market is on display. The other absentees are predominately smaller stands, with the exception of Viking Beds of Sweden, Isbir, and Bijnen’s bedroom ranges. The result is a number of highly interesting new names. Recor Bedding will once again be taking a stand in Brussels by Night, in addition to its stand in hall 5. On this stand they will be showcasing the more technical aspects of sleeping comfort, specifically for sleep specialists; whilst in hall 5 the focus will be more on the sleeping concepts. Acro Bedding, Greensleep with ecological sleeping comfort, Custom8 with high-tech solutions, and Redcorner Beds will be returning after an absence of a year or more. New names are Cartel Bedding, Euroflex, Heavens and Jooken, the latter with bedroom ranges. There is also an interesting bed linen offering, for example from Lysdrap (Dewerchin&Caems), Brun de Vian-Tiran, Steel&Stockings and Brinkhaus. And opposite the bar, Mon-Tec will be demonstrating an innovative machine for manufacturing mattress covers. Just like Custom8, these are aimed more at manufacturers than at retail sleep specialists.

In Fusion there is less change. The exhibitors who are not returning this year include Artelore, Arista, Vips&Friends and Hoogendam. A number of well-known names are taking their place. PR Rogiers has decided to come to Brussels again after a few years’ absence, and has immediately opted for two stands. Another Belgian firm, Chehoma, will be present for the first time. Van Rees from the Netherlands has been absent for a while, but is now embracing the Furniture Fair once again. Baker Furniture from England is a name that is already well known across the Channel, and that now wants to make its presence felt on this side of the water. Thanks to the wide international audience, Brussels was a logical choice for them. Other new exhibitors in Fusion are Pole to Pole, Maretti and Flam&Luce.

Mozaïek in hall 9 has also seen little change. The key absentees here are Enbe, Jakobsen Home and Bussche. We have already alluded to the shifting of the beds in the cheaper price range to Mozaïek in hall 9, and this year we will therefore find Kretschmar, Padvaiskas and Forbed Europe in this hall. Other new exhibitors are Wajnert and Restyl, both from Poland, Bonino from Italy, Lama d’Or, Zons, Thermobrass, Linea Verdace and Livorno from Belgium, Hela Tische from Germany, Vince Design from the Netherlands, Bar Stool Holland from the United States, and Ladin from Turkey.

Finally, in the Patio, Holland à la Carte’s fresh new concept from 2016 will be repeated and further fine-tuned. Teugra, Jamé, Bree, Helderr and Leclercq&Bouwman will be absent this year. Their places will be taken by Bert Plantagie, which is moving from Square; Kessels, Label51, DN Design, Van Buren and Urban Cotton. The latter two will be presenting accessories, sometimes in a highly unconventional way.

**Conclusion**

As you can see, there is once again a substantial trade fair just waiting to be discovered. There is no shortage of inspiration. The Grand Old Lady’ of the European furniture fairs is full of energy and is looking ahead, to the future. If a trade fair is a snapshot of a sector, then this edition reveals a striking momentum for innovation amongst both Belgian and European furniture manufacturers. This 80th Brussels Furniture Fair is not only our celebration, but also a celebration for the sector as a whole. And as a welcoming, optimistic trade fair, this is a role that we in Brussels are only too pleased to play.

Lieven Van den Heede

Brussels Furniture Fair

**2018 Furniture Fair: 4-7 November**

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