

Inspiring reality through creativity and innovation

Saturday, May 31, 2008 - BizWeek, The Star
Bricks & Mortar by Teh Lip Kim

Someone once defined creativity as the act of turning new and innovative ideas into reality.

In order to be creative, we need to be inspired, and one of the sources of inspiration for us in the property development industry is the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan.

The Milan International Furniture Fair is an annual affair that attracts furniture designers from all over the world who use the fair as a venue to showcase their latest creations.

Visitors, who also come from all over the world, are thus given a glimpse of what they can expect for the home of the future.

A team of us from SDB visited the I Saloni 2008 last month.

The fair was held at Fiera Milano, also known as the Milan Fairgrounds, in Rho. Just outside the city centre.

Fiera Milano is an indoor exhibition area with eight huge pavilions covering approximately 345.000 sq m.

There is a central boulevard equipped with walkalators and flanked by exhibition halls on either side.

The roof of the Fiera Milano resembles a sail, made from glass and steel, making it a sight to behold.

This year's furniture fair featured 2,450 exhibitors. It was so well organised that in spite of the large turnout of 348,000 visitors, it did not feel overly congested. The exhibition was divided into 20 exhibition sections – too vast to completely cover in just six days.



The roof at the entrance of the Milan Fairgrounds

We, therefore, concentrated on the furniture, kitchen and bathroom exhibits, focusing on the high-end designer pieces in line with our local developments.

Each exhibitor had at least one or two attention-grabbing pieces that were notable in their design and innovation.

We observed that storage and the covering up of clutter was a big theme at the fair.

Flou, a well known company that designs bedroom furniture showed off cabinets that looked like large upright trunks.

Several variations of this were on display – one opened to reveal a vanity table with storage areas for personal belongings: while another opened up into a wardrobe; and yet a third concealed a writing table and bookshelf.

Renowned furniture house, Minotti, had very cleverly designed large seats with flexible back rests that could be detached from the chairs and re-attached in several different ways, making the chairs versatile addition to any household.

The furniture on display was generally stylish and well thought out. For example, there was a table made from an exceptionally thin and sleek piece of wood which, upon closer examination, revealed that it was, in fact, secured by bolts on the underside of the table.



One of the kitchens exhibited, showing considerable floor to ceiling storage space, large island countertops for food preparation and dining

The kitchens that we saw featured open plans with island counter tops.

Kitchen cabinets were mostly large, reaching from floor to ceiling and providing a generous amount of room for kitchen and pantry storage – the kind of set up that is ideal for keeping all kitchen wares out of sight, thus endowing the kitchen with a spacious feel.

In many displays, the kitchen was no longer tucked away, but was integrated into the living and dining areas.

Island counter tops, for example, were used as areas for food preparation as well as for dining and entertaining.

What was also interesting were the many different types of cabinet mechanisms – some cabinet doors would slide to the side when open, while others would slide sideways and back, allowing the door to be completely hidden from view when ajar. There were also high-tech electronic kitchens on display – doors, for example, could be opened at the mere touch of a button; and in some cases, there was the total luxury of having a flat screen TV, a CD player and a radio incorporated into the kitchen set up – all very practical when you consider the kitchen as part of your living space.

A lot of thought had also been put into bathroom storage. Like kitchens, bathrooms have become an "extension" of the bedroom space.

A large proportion of the display featured space-saving ideas in bathroom accessories such as small side tables that open to expose storage space.

The bathroom cabinets were generally very sleek-looking - some had large sliding panels that provided storage options for all manner of bathroom necessities including towels and toilet paper – a de-cluttering process that again gives a more spacious feel to the bathroom.

In addition to the fair, we managed to visit several furniture stores around Milan.

There, too, we found some engaging pieces. One kitchen cabinet manufacturer, Bulthaup, had cabinets, ovens and microwave ovens that were cantilevered from the walls.

Overall, the trip was an interesting one – we saw a good mix of interesting and appealing designs which were, above all, practical.

Our impression of Italian designers – in both the industrial design and fashion arenas – is that they have a natural flair for crafting first-class artistic creations.

The dimensions of their products, the quality of materials used and the designs were superior in many ways.

It is interesting to note that this design capital of the world attracts not only manufacturers and exhibitors to its fairgrounds; it also draws a wide variety of young designers who flock to the fair for the SaloneSatellite, as well as various fringe events like the Zona Tortona held in the south western part of the city, where young designers participate in exhibiting their design ideas and projects.

The writer is the managing director of SDB Properties Sdn Bhd, a lifestyle property company. Bouquets and brickbats are welcome. Send your email to md@sdb.com.my