****

**BRUSSELS FURNITURE FAIR 2018 – FINAL REPORT**

*Exhibitors and visitors alike were unanimous in their praise of this year’s Brussels Furniture Fair: this was a brilliant edition that once again saw the fair upgraded. There were stunning stands and appealing collections, and a pleasing level of buying from both the international trade and the Belgian trade. It was also important that visitors did actually turn up, as prior to the fair there was some unease about this. Total visitor numbers did fall slightly. It is no surprise that this was chiefly apparent among Belgian visitors, as these comprise the largest number of visitors. However with the two most important foreign visitor groups – the Netherlands and France – we actually saw an increase! Moreover, the trade fair has again become more international, this year attracting visitors from 40 different countries.*

**Visitors from 40 countries**

The atmosphere at the fair was surprisingly positive. And yet as a trade fair, we are not immune to the difficult situation in the furniture trade, and did see a slight fall in overall visitor numbers following a small increase last year. What’s more, the internationalisation of Brussels continued this year too. As compared to 2017, more visitors came from abroad to Europe’s capital city. Foreign visitors also ensured that visitor numbers remained robust.

In Belgium we are again losing ground, with a fall of 9%. This figure should not come as a surprise, given the somewhat skewed domination of Belgian visitors, which nevertheless still comprised 35% of the total figure. There is probably no need for us to outline the reasons for this: following truly dreadful sales figures in the shops since early spring, it should come as no surprise that a number of shops have chosen not to attend. Over the past year a number of businesses have also closed.

We also received 113 fewer visitors from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, a drop of 8.3%. The German market in particular is in a state of flux and is extremely volatile. The combination of buyers who are changing group and fewer buyers in the shops probably meant that a visit to Brussels Furniture Fair was not top of their to-do list. Visitors from the United Kingdom and Ireland remained stable (-0.37%, or 2 fewer visitors).

However we did see cheering figures from France and especially from the Netherlands. We welcomed 0.7% more visitors from France. Visitor numbers from our northern neighbour rose by no fewer than 6% and we went over the threshold of 5000 visitors! The Netherlands is coming ever closer to representing 30% of all visitors. Is it merely a matter of time before they overtake the number of Belgians? Time will tell. In any case, this has only served to burnish the image of Brussels as the most important fair for the Benelux region and a strong fair for the French market. And it goes without saying that we are very pleased about this. Indeed, our important role on these markets is one of the key reasons why manufacturers choose to participate in the Brussels Furniture Fair.

Visitor numbers from other countries also rose, by 5% or 117 visitors. This year there were two additional countries on the visitors list, bringing us to a total of 40 nationalities that visited the Brussels Furniture Fair, including 9 non-European countries. The total number of visitors from abroad rose by 2.65% or 308 visitors. We take pride in this figure, as according to the logic of the market, growth will have to come from the non-Belgian visitors.

In total there was a decline in visitor numbers of 1.76% or 329 fewer visitors. A reduction in Belgian visitors accounted for the most significant drop. And yet we were told by a number of exhibitors with whom we were able to speak during the fair that buying from both Belgian and foreign visitors was better than had been expected or feared prior to the start of the fair. In general, the closing balance of this year’s fair was positive. It would seem that the furniture trade believes that the way to get out of this impasse is to renew its offering. We wholeheartedly hope that they succeed in this, and are more than willing to consult on how we can better align our offering to their expectations.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2017** | **2018** | **+/-** | **+/- in %** | **% of total** |
| **BE/LUX** | 7064 | 6427 | -637 | -9.02% | 35.05% |
| **NL** | 4817 | 5105 | 288 | 5.98% | 27.84% |
| **FR** | 2620 | 2638 | 18 | 0.69% | 14.38% |
| **DE/AT/CH** | 1359 | 1246 | -113 | -8.31% | 6.79% |
| **UK/IE** | 534 | 532 | -2 | -0.37% | 2.90% |
| **Other** | 2274 | 2391 | 117 | 5.15% | 13.04% |
|  | **18668** | **18339** | **-329** | **-1.76%** | **100%** |

In total there were 268 exhibitors from 24 countries. There were 10 more than in 2017, spread over a slightly smaller surface area. 76 of them were new, which meant that there were a lot of new things to discover at this year’s edition. The level of the stands and collections was higher once again, and truly worthy of an international trade fair. The fact that loyal exhibitors upgrade their stands year after year also shows that participating in the Brussels Furniture Fair is worth the investment.

This upgrading was also apparent in the overall design of the fair. When entering through Hall 5, visitors immediately saw a reference to the campaign image, with a giant cage and a promotional film on a big screen. Extra space was also created to welcome visitors. The new, sleeker style of the trend passages clearly appealed to visitors, large numbers of whom took photos of them and shared these on social media. Visitors could pause for a breather in one of our stylish themed bars, which were furnished by our exhibitors Joli, Kluskens, Toon De Somer and Yaskworld. The visitor experience was that of a truly international event for the furniture sector. Anyone keen to rekindle the atmosphere at the fair should take a look at the short film that we have created and which can be found on our Facebook page and our YouTube channel.

The trade needs innovation in order to be able to make sales figures rally again next year. It is therefore no surprise that those exhibitors who sold well had also made huge efforts to come up with innovative, surprising or original products that are also commercially viable. Of course, the result of a fair cannot only be measured in terms of sales figures at the stands themselves. The work is not done when the fair closes its doors. And that work is so much easier if the furniture trade has already seen the new models.

**Balthazars 2018**

The annual highlight during the furniture fair is the announcement of the Balthazar winners. As the organiser, our aim with these awards is to stimulate innovation amongst our exhibitors. Participation is free of charge: all exhibitors need to do is to enter so that the jury members do not have to study all 268 stands in detail. Judging by the attendance, this prize is highly popular with both Belgian and foreign manufacturers and exhibitors. During the festive ceremony, the winner receives a certificate, but it is the giant bottle of Drappier champagne that is most highly prized! As the bottles contain no fewer than 12 litres of champagne, winners are advised to find a large fridge and plenty of revellers before they pull the cork!

Unlike in previous years, the jury had to deliberate for an unusually long time. The prize for best international product was a particularly close call. The jury members were Leen Creve, Marie-Anne Desiere, Siegrid Demyttenaere, [Colette De](mailto:colette.de)mil, Elien Haentjens, frances van der Steen and Chris De Roock. Based on the entries, they put together a longlist before the fair opens. From this they select one winner and two highly commended entrants per category. This year, the following names triumphed:

**BEST OF BELGIUM:** **Reset by Magnitude by LS Bedding (design: Alain Berteau)**

This hybrid 24/7 design concept anticipates the trend towards open interior design and the new living culture. The bed becomes a micro world in the space that is designed both to sleep in and to live in.

Highly commended in this category were **Mintjens Furniture** with **Caress** and the **Wire Lounger** by **Joli**, a design by **Mathias de Ferm**.

**INNOVATION: Resleep by Velda**

A revolutionary and marketable cradle-to-cradle box spring concept which revolves around recycling. Neither PU foam nor glue is used, including for the pocket springs. Thus the individual parts can be quickly and simply recycled.

**Recor Originals** with **Soul** and **Otium Care** with **Daan** were highly commended in the innovation category.

**BEST INTERNATIONAL: Glide by Kluskens (design: Tiel Design Studio)**

The V-shaped profile on the underside of this tabletop led to an inventive redesign of its support. The table’s length feels highly contemporary, whilst its width is a nod to old-fashioned cosiness.

Highly commended were **Design Studio Zürich** with **Edge** and **Egoitaliano** with **Honey**.

**LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT: Lucie by Moome (design: Tessa Lauwaert)**

An attractive, feminine design sofa with unusual details such as idiosyncratic feet and the uniquely upholstered curve above them. Sleek and slim on the outside, but soft and nonchalant on the inside.

**Passe Partout** with **Thor** and **Mathy by Bols** with **Discovery** also caused the jury’s heart to beat faster.

Lieven Van den Heede

Brussels Furniture Fair

**Dates for Brussels Furniture Fair 2019: 3-6 November**

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

You can find photos on the site under the heading “Press”

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Meubelbeurs/](http://www.facebook.com/Meubelbeurs/)

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/meubelbeursbrussel/](http://www.instagram.com/meubelbeursbrussel/)