

**BRUSSELS FURNITURE FAIR 2019 – FINAL REPORT**

*The 82nd Brussels Furniture Fair has once again drawn to a close, after 4 exceptional days with outstanding visitor numbers. What’s more, everyone noticed that the fair has again been upgraded, with beautiful and commercial collections of furniture and home accessories and some breathtaking stands. Following last year’s fall, visitor numbers increased again this year. This is a highly encouraging result, given that sales in the furniture trade in Belgium and in the majority of our neighbouring countries were pretty disappointing this year. Not only did the Brussels Furniture Fair see a visual upgrade, but once again it also became more international. This year, our visitors came from some 52 countries, including 18 outside Europe. Foreign visitors climbed to more than 65%.*

**International and Belgian growth!**

We would have been happy to sign on the dotted line in advance for this positive result. Prior to the fair, the market signs were not favourable. Of our neighbouring countries, only the furniture trade in the Netherlands was seeing positive sales figures. We were therefore braced for fewer visitors again, which would have been no real surprise given the difficult market.

But the opposite proved to be the case: there were 3.57% more visitors, with an increase in almost all markets. It was only from Great Britain and Ireland that there were 30 fewer visitors. The protracted regulatory questions around Brexit are just part of the explanation; we also know that two flights on which a number of buyers were due to travel were cancelled.

In our home market, we have once again grown slightly, following a decline 10 years in a row. This is an encouraging evolution. We counted 1.62% more Belgian visitors. The Belgians now make up 34% of the total figure. At 2.17%, the proportion of from the Netherlands also increased slightly. The Dutch thus represent 27.46% of our visitors. We are also gaining ground in our third most important market, France. This year, 4% more French visitors came to Brussels than in 2018.

What’s more, there was a marked uptick in interest from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. This is our strongest-growing market, with an increase of almost 12%. The quality of the German-language visitors was also outstanding, with a number of head buyers from a series of key groups attending. The fact that these market leaders are honouring Brussels with a visit is a pleasing recognition of the international importance of the Furniture Fair and an important point for our exhibitors to consider. This will be a factor for them to take into account when selecting their models for the 2020 Furniture Fair. Finally, we saw a sharp rise of 9% in the ‘other countries’ group. This shows that the Brussels Furniture Fair’s growing trend towards internationalisation continues. We have gone from 64.95% foreign visitors to 65.62%.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2018** | **2019** | +/- | +/- in % | % of total |
| **BE/LUX** | 6427 | 6531 | +104 | +1.62% | 34.38% |
| **NL** | 5105 | 5216 | +111 | +2.17% | 27.46% |
| **FR** | 2638 | 2744 | +106 | +4.02% | 14.45% |
| **DE/AT/CH** | 1246 | 1394 | +148 | +11.88% | 7.34% |
| **UK/IE** | 532 | 502 | -30 | -5.64% | 2.64% |
| **Other** | 2391 | 2607 | +216 | +9.03% | 13.73% |
|  | **18339** | **18994** | **+655** | **+3.57%** | **100** |

For the 2019 edition, there were 274 exhibitors of 18 different nationalities. With one exception, all came from Europe. There were 6 more names on the exhibitor list than in 2018, and the leased surface area also increased slightly. 63 manufacturers were presenting their wares in Brussels for the first time this year. For them, but also for the exhibitors that have been attending the fair for many years, there was a great deal of news to pick up. There were some absolutely fabulous collections on display. Year upon year, the upgrade of the fair is clearly visible and the same was true this year. The campaign image perfectly matched today’s trends: fresh, young, sleek and cheerful. This image was consistently adopted in the design of the entrance halls, the reception desk and the various bars, right down to the name boards on the stands. The trend passages made for an inspiring walk through the corridors between the various halls. All in all, it solidified the impression of a fair that had been perfectly organised right down to the finest details.

Once again, our ongoing efforts to constantly lift up the fair a step higher have resonated with exhibitors, who spared no expense to bring their own stands up to the same high level. They did credit to the international character of the Brussels Furniture Fair. As the organiser, we greatly value the fact that many furniture manufacturers work with us on the upgrade of the fair as an international platform for the furniture sector.

The commercial result of the Furniture Fair is more difficult to ascertain, and can vary from stand to stand. It also depends on individual objectives. Nevertheless, we are confident that the vast majority of exhibitors were very pleased. We tried to speak to as many exhibitors as possible, and around 95% of them were able to conclude the fair with a pleasing result, often with a turnover that was significantly higher than last year. But of course, it is not only the sales at the fair itself that count. The days and weeks that follow will see many more deals being made concrete. Today, buyers take less time for a trade fair visit than they did in the past. The main thing is that they have at least seen the new collections, which will make the subsequent work easier.

**Balthazars 2019**

Every year, we once again look forward to the festive presentation of the Balthazars on Tuesday evening. With these awards, our aim is to stimulate innovation by putting deserving new models in the spotlight in front of visitors and the press. An exceptionally large number of people attended the ceremony in the bar in Hall 6. All attendees were welcomed with a glass of champagne and tasty canapés. You could cut the tension with a knife when former Miss Belgium Virginie Claes appeared at the microphone. It goes without saying that all exhibitors would dearly love to take the giant bottle of Drappier champagne back home with them! A 12-litre bottle of champagne is not something you see every day…

Category by category, the laureates were projected onto the LED wall. One winner emerged from each set of three finalists, chosen by a professional jury. This year, the jury members were Marie-Anne Desiere, Siegrid Demyttenaere, Colette Demil, Elien Haentjens, frances van der Steen and Chris De Roock. Based on the entries, they compiled a long list before the fair opened. This is because it is physically impossible for the jury to visit all 274 stands. The following firms won awards at the Balthazars 2019:

**BEST OF BELGIUM: Mintjens Sleepline – Rialto (design: Bart Coolen & Gust Koyen**).

A stunning symbiosis of two sleep worlds: box springs and wooden beds. The upholstered headboard has an almost sculptural design. In close-up the sophistication of the veneer and upholstering are clear. Rialto epitomises the phrase “craftmanship is mastery”.

The two laureates were **Mathy by Bols** with **Asymetry** and **Saunaco** with **Cas audio**.

**BEST INTERNATIONAL: Himolla – Signa (design: Tamara Härty).**

What a metamorphosis at Himolla. Signa is young and trendy, whilst retaining the familiar seating comfort. Reclining functions are discreetly concealed and are easy to operate. The elegance of this sofa lies in the small details such as the stitching. Signa represents a big step forward for this market leader.

**Kluskens** with **Adam** and **Urban Cotton** with **Queen** each received a magnum of champagne as laureates in this category.

**LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT: Rom – Vegas (design: Damien Melard).**

With Vegas, Rom both surprises and seduces. The various elements inspire creativity and the throwing of all codes overboard. By combining them, you arrive at original and dynamic compositions. But the real surprise lies in the modules themselves. Each element can be custom configures in 10-cm steps. Vegas is an avant-garde model entirely in line with the retro trend.

**B-Etnika** with the **Rominna** chair and **Vipack** with **Casami** impressed the jury and were named as laureates.

**INNOVATION: Otium Care – Multi (design: Otium Care R&D)**

Multi is innovative answer to a pressing demand from the market, the need for practical, beautiful and affordable solutions for people in need of care. You can transform your own, familiar reclining armchair into a care armchair simply by replacing the base. This brilliant, modular solution successfully meets emotional, functional, budgetary and ecological needs.

Finally, the two laureates in the “Innovation” category are **LS Bedding** with the **App Ergosleep Ecosystem** and **Revor** for its **Circular mattress.**

Lieven Van den Heede

General Manager

Brussels Furniture Fair

**We look forward to seeing you again next year!**

**Furniture Fair 2020: 8-11 November**

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