

Orgatec 2012 - A Review

By John Sacks



Ready for business – early morning, 23 October 2012

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Introduction and overview

There was rain in Köln, as usual and the temperature danced up and down. But there was also plenty of autumnal sunshine, and it was as if the city was showing this group of visitors, who only see her for a few days every two years, just how she behaves through the seasons.

In a rapidly changing world, where only the new and different seems to be appreciated, Cologne seems to remain untouched. The same views, the same cuisine, the same efficiency; the same unruffled atmosphere. Stability in a sea of relentless motion. As such, it's perhaps an odd venue for a show which tries to portray the latest thinking in a technology driven industry.

The naysayers clearly lost out. There were just as many enormous halls – six – as in recent years, and as many exhibitors – over 600. And there were plenty of visitors to keep those exhibitors happily occupied. As usual, visitor numbers built up during the week and the most crowded day was Thursday. Friday was a little less hectic and Saturday was quiet. The cafés and the Boulevard that connects the halls were bustling, and some of the most popular stands such as **Vitra**, **Bene**, **Dauphin** and **Haworth** were heaving most of the time.



The "Boulevard".

It was good to see that stands were generally as large and attractive as ever. Some like **König + Neurath** and **Interstuhl** were simply, dramatically, enormous and others, such as the UK's **Colebrook Bosson and Saunders**, **Hay** from Denmark and the joint Italian **DVO/Kastel** space, with their shared hospitality area, made up for their smaller size with high design quality.



Hay of Denmark

This was a serious Orgatec. There was less in the way of the frivolity than in previous years and, although there were probably not quite as many visitors as in 2010, those that came seemed intent on fulfilling their buying, specifying and information-gathering activities. Perhaps aware of the cost of their visits, it was as if they were trying to make the most of every minute of their time.

There was however one entertainment highlight with a “*Six to Nine*” party in the Boulevard on the first evening, where exhibitors and visitors could mingle and enjoy a few beers, wine, local cuisine and live music.

The trends

Colours were sometimes earthy greys and browns; sometimes bright and garish primary colours. White will not go away – it was everywhere, as if it was the safe choice – but the colour of the moment was probably light blue. Real wood finishes seem to be making something of a comeback, possibly because they are seen as being both “homely” and environmentally sustainable.

The increasing use of electronic rather physical storage of data appears to have encouraged companies supplying bulk storage units to show that their products have additional uses. **Bisley**'s new *Be* range incorporated workstations and acoustic enclosures and **Bruynzeel**, who won the AIT award at the show with their electrically operated mobile storage system, included a built-in coffee machine!



Be by Bisley

There was a strong focus on matters acoustic, with much of hall 10.1 being taken up with stands showing how sound could be controlled, deadened, absorbed, filtered and eliminated. The technology displayed was a mixture of electronic devices and conventional, physical, upholstered padded barriers of different shapes, sizes - and of course, colours. This theme linked to many of the furniture displays and the rest of the show, with dozens of exhibitors taking advantage of a fashionable product trend and fast, low cost design and development. Screens, enclosures, huts and hives were everywhere and in some cases, were promoted by stories about how they answered trending workstyles.

Buzzispace from Antwerp introduced *Buzziwings*, ceiling suspended strips of felt which to create acoustically controlled areas inside offices, and *Buzzitemp*, screen surrounded areas with worksurfaces, for short term working.

Nomadic working, where an area might be used by several different people in the same day, has encouraged some task seating companies, such as **Dauphin** with their *X Code* chair, to introduce self adjusting swivel chairs

Highlights

Interstuhl presented several new ranges including *Kinetic* occasional seats and tables, *Every* task and side chairs, *Vintage* executive and boardroom seating and an attractive mesh backed side chair, *Formeo* from designer Sven Von Boetticher. Few, however, of the new products will be available for several months yet.



Interstuhl's new *Formeo*

Bene's large and very busy stand was well thought out and featured Pearson Lloyd's developments and extensions to *Parcs* and a new exclusive fabric from Kvadrat. *Docklands* is an alternative workplace product in several sizes which combines curved and straight screens and worksurfaces. *Toguna Square* is a squared off version of the original circular *Parcs* enclosure, and claims to be the world's smallest conference room



Docklands by Bene

Haworth led the way in incorporating technology into furniture to facilitate their interpretation of modern working practices. The *CalmSpace* unit designed by Marie-Virginie Berbet was an answer to workplace stress allowing an employee to take a "power-nap" for a controlled period of 10 to 20 minutes in a sound and light controlled environment. *Workware* is a group of products providing simple, self-configuring connectivity between users allowing free flowing exchanges of ideas.



CalmSpace from Haworth

Vitra showed a high backed “room within a room” version of *Alcove* by designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, who were also responsible for *Workbays*, a range of easily reconfigurable and flexible, slim screens. *Ad Hoc High Work* by Antonio Citterio is a height adjustable bench, now incorporating wire management.



Vitra's *Workbays*.

Connection from the UK launched the *Why* task chair, delivered in a small box, which can be quickly assembled without tools and has a list price of just 150 euros. **Mobica**, one of the largest office furniture companies in Egypt, announced their new German-based manufacturing business with a full range of furniture, seating and accessories designed by the omni-present Martin Ballandat, who had also designed the stand and all the marketing materials.

Another Ballandat product, *re-pend*, an attractive and comfortable plastic shell chair in a variety of configurations and finishes, was being shown by the German company, **Viasit**.



Re-pend by Ballandat for Viasit

Okamura, the very large Japanese office furniture company who launched the iconic *Contessa* chair in 2002, showed the latest offering from the Guigaro studio – *Sabrina*. This attractive and colourful mesh chair seemed to be generally well received, apart perhaps from it's name.



Sabrina from Okamura of Japan.

Abstracta from Sweden had a very attractive stand - almost entirely white - and displayed a wide range of tables, workstations, screens and chairs which stood out from the crowd and attracted plenty of interest.



Abstracta home office set.

The Portuguese manufacturer, **Famo**, who are about to open for business in London, showed some finely crafted executive and meeting room furniture as well as height adjustable workstations.

The 2012 Neocon award-winning *JumpSeat* from Chicago manufacturers **Sedia Systems** attracted plenty of international attention. Made from two sheets of flat, surfaced, ply, this auditorium and conference table system has (fortunately) been tested to loads of up to 400lbs (181kg).



JumpSeat

Nowy Styl from Poland, now incorporating the German seating manufacturer, Grammer, had a large stand with a wide range of products. The newly launched *E Range* designed by Gernot Oberfell and Jan Wertel was a new direction for the company.



E Range from Nowy Styl

There was plenty of exhibitor representation from Turkey including **Koleksiyon** who showed an innovative simple tiled screen system as well as **Nurus** and **Burotime**. **Ersa** showed their interesting new Claudio Bellini designed range of workstations called *So*.



Erso's new Claudio Bellini designed *So* workstations

The number of nations represented must have been greater than ever before, with exhibitors from all the usual countries, as well as from as far afield as Slovenia - **Gonzaga** were showing some stylish and inexpensive *Vista* workstations, Malta (for the first time), Egypt, Latvia, Lithuania and Lebanon and the Ukraine.

Enea from Spain presented a cleverly engineered mobile table, the *Folio*, designed by Josep Llusçà, which quickly folds and unfolds using its own weight as a locking mechanism, and has wheels that lock and unlock automatically.



Folio from Enea

The attractive *Meet-U* meeting table system, designed by Broome Jenkins for **Burgess Works**, incorporated an elegant solution for easy reconfiguration.

One particularly clever use of technology came from **Dauphin** who incorporated a label with a QR Code into their new *X Code* task chairs. When the symbol is scanned by a smartphone app, you are taken directly to the webpage for the specific model of your chair which describes the position and function of each of the chair controls.



Dauphin QR Code label

and finally...

from **Globeconcept** of Sweden, the *Tree*, a design by Peter Opsvik, a most unusual and surprisingly comfortable all-in-one laptop workstation. The spherical backrests rotate as does the seat and the single footrest providing constant active and passive movement without distracting you from your work.



The Tree from Globeconcept

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