

NEOCON, CHICAGO

SHOWSTOPPERS

Designer and writer **Yetta Starr** was at Chicago's Neocon this summer. Here she reviews some of the major developments unveiled at the show

Thanks to a handful of contract furnishing manufacturers and eager specifiers, an industry icon was borne in the second half of the 20th century to serve an emerging commercial interior design business sector. In 1969, NeoCon – National Exhibition of Contract Furnishings – debuted in Chicago with 50 exhibitors to showcase furnishings developed for office and public environments. Approximately 5,000 trade professionals scoured a single floor of the renowned Merchandise Mart, challenged to find product information for interior office design.

At this year's 34th annual show, Merchandise Mart Properties

produced a monolithic exhibition staged over a million square feet with more than 40,000 visitors. Despite economic fluctuations during the past three decades, the Mart and its manufacturing partners have adapted and created new opportunities for a diverse range of visitors. Temporary exhibition space, for instance, was introduced to several floors, opening the playing field to international partners, neophyte companies and risk-takers.

Among the success stories, newcomer izzydesign tested the waters last year with a temporary space on the eighth floor and managed to collect an Editor's

This picture, the Diffrient Light from Humanscale. Below, the Jack folding table unveiled by izzydesign



Choice Award for their informal workspace collection, Clara.

This year, the company's first permanent showroom designed by The Environments Group, was the talk of the trade as a place focused more on people enjoying the space than on the ensuing commercial opportunity. The debut space won a Creative Excellence showroom design award and izzydesign was also recognised with a Best of NeoCon Silver Award for Jack, a foldable training and ganging table.

Another new Mart tenant and Silver winner, Joel Berman Glass, added to their three-dimensional textures with Arrigado, a rendition of an abstract folded paper that was displayed in thermal-formed plastic and is also available in tempered and laminated glass. The product can be developed as a clear, frosted, matte

or Pantone coloured sheet.

Talking about Pantone opportunities in product manufacturing, the specialist in colour communication is forging relationships with innovators such as Joel Berman Glass and The Mohawk Group to integrate its professional colour standards into the design process. Perhaps it's no surprise then, that Pantone made an outrageous pinky splash at the show and unveiled Pantone for architecture and interiors. The new system allows design professionals and manufacturers to achieve consistent colour across multiple material categories such as floorcovering, textiles, solid surface materials and furniture. The Pantone for architecture and interiors system became available last month in cotton, paper and digital formats.





Above, Joel Berman Glass adds texture to plastic with Arrigodo. Below, USG Corporation gave new life to suspended ceilings with the Topo 3-Dimensional System

Again, seasoned building products manufacturer USG Corporation and its ceiling products and grid subsidiary has set themselves apart from the crowd, delivering another bold product for speciality ceiling design. Passing through a clumsy stack of ceiling tiles at the entrance to the Solutions Centre, the mock-up area revealed a stunning undulating vignette of Topo's three-dimensional system in pre-formed translucent Lexan panels, installed into a curved suspension system.

Nearby, metal ceiling panels might typically conjure up images of institutional and bland ceiling design, but not so with USG's new Geometrix Metal Ceiling. The panels are made in lightweight aluminum with four distinctive profiles to add dimensional variety to ceiling space.

Interface showed brilliance with its new Random category flooring featuring interchangeable tiles. Also, Lees enhanced its popular hybrid floorcovering collection with Metafloors II.

Celebrated as a revolutionary concept during NeoCon's second decade, workplace ergonomics must be one of the most challenging directives given to a design professional. While there's an abundance of furniture makers in the marketplace, there are few mechanically-minded innovators who concentrate on human factors. But for Humanscale, creating accessory tools to make the office environment a more comfortable and healthier place to work has been the core of their business since the 1980s.

With the lightest of touches, the



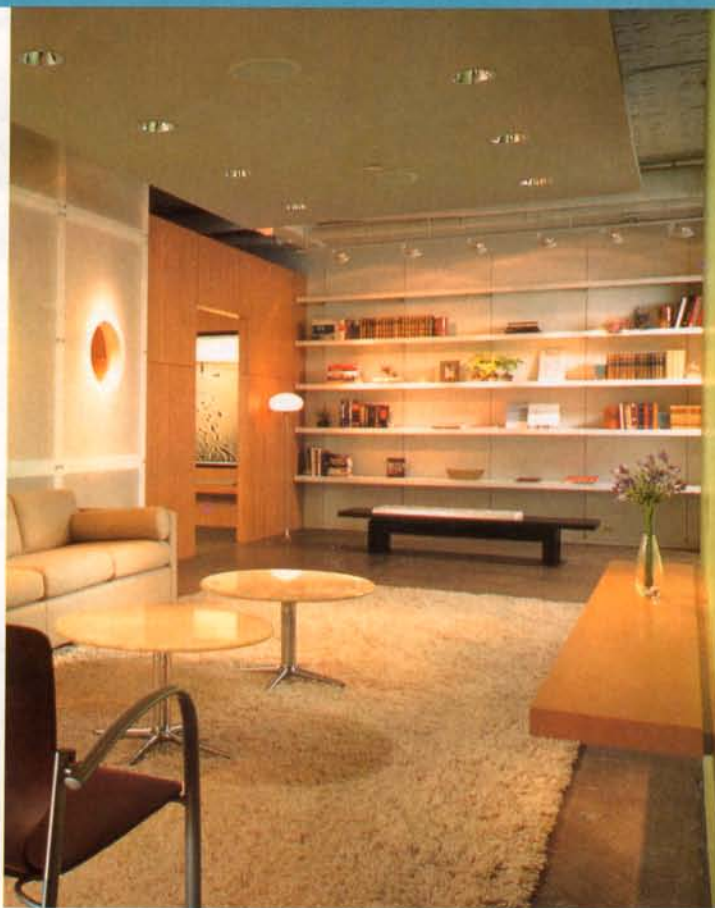
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prototype Niels Diffrient Light allows effortless adjustment. Glare-free lighting is achieved with a multi-positioned parabolic reflector on a single or double arm. Humanscale also tackled bottom, lumbar and foot support with the introduction to the US of the Freedom Saddle, a lightweight alternative to a stool that can be tucked just about anywhere.

Other attractions at the show included the Obek collection from Luna with the nuts and bolts inspired Hardware textile, pictured in the foreground. For a whimsical approach to worklife in the sun, another indication that non-territorial teamwork and socialising areas are increasingly popular, Richard Schultz Design presented Topiary for outdoor use.

No doubt, the emergence of NeoCon in the late Sixties was timely. Every year since its inception, NeoCon has hosted the introduction of new products and technologies. It has grown to become an industry event and resource for the many trade professionals. For those who have experienced multiple Neocons, the shows have a seasonal quality, a kind of pre-NeoCon and post-NeoCon demarcation of time. *Yetta Starr can be reached at ystarr@starrdesign.net*



Top right, Izzydesign's showroom at the Merchandise Mart, designed by the Environments Group; top left, the Freedom Saddle from Humanscale; above, Obek fabric from Luna; right, topiary seating from Richard Schultz Design



Reviewed companies:

Humanscale:	www.humanscale.com
Interface Flooring Systems:	www.interfaceflooring.com
Izzydesign:	www.izzydesign.com
Joel Berman Glass Studios:	www.jbermanglass.com
Lees:	www.leescarpets.com
Luna Textiles:	www.lunatextiles.com
Merchandise Mart Properties:	www.merchandisemart.com
Nucraft Furniture:	www.nucraft.com
Pantone:	www.pantone.com
Richard Schultz Designs:	www.richardschultz.com
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