

Trend Letter from Milan, May 2008

Bold and Beautiful:

The New Design from Bathroom Salons to the New Authenticity

In terms of new design trends, the 2008 **Salone Internazionale del Mobile** in Milan did not disappoint. The one area of design that particularly stood out was the change of accent in the world of wellness. The evolution of bathroom design has shifted steadily over the last few years from the functional “wet” room, to a wellness zone, and now to a selfness-orientated bathroom salon. One of the best examples of these new trend products comes from a Spanish company Artquitect, whose neo-baroque designs by Jamie Hayon are both elegant and playful. The bathroom sink, tub, and cabinet are designed more to be pieces of furniture that turn the bathroom into a salon or second sitting room.

As designer Vittorio Radice pointed out several years ago already, “The whole question of the house hasn’t been looked at for 50 years, yet the way we live now is so different. The biggest room in the house should be the bathroom – so much of our life now is about health, wellness, about looking and feeling good. But in most houses the bathroom is still the smallest room, while the bedroom is enormous – and yet what do we use the bedroom for apart from the bed? A sleeping corner would work just as well. What we need is a large bathroom, and large entertaining area, and that’s it.”

Meanwhile it is not just the tub and the sink in the bathroom but the wall and floor tiles themselves that are also seeing a trend towards a strong decorative sitting-room style – with companies such as Italian Iris ceramics and Spanish Inalco showing “softer” designs including tiles that look increasingly like printed wallpaper or for example have the trompe d’oeil effect of a soft padded Chesterfield-sofa.

Another leading design trend at Milan was what Tom Dixon calls the “Rebirth of Rough”. Dixon presented a collection that was defined by what he describes as “honesty and strength and a lack of pretension”. This is if you like, the new authenticity. It is the search for a feel and look that stands out from the over-designed and polished work of many of the so-called designer brands today. In order to create this collection of lamps and furniture, Dixon reverts to “simple and honest methods of manufacture” (such as cast glass,

classic upholstery methods, and hammered brass), and manages to quote much classic 20th century design without being pedantic or boring.

As usual Boffi was one of the most spectacular exhibitors, with the new bathroom and kitchen designs presented “off-piste” in candlelight in the trendy and edgy Via Tortona area in an old railway siding. The stunning new Duemilaotto kitchen by Piero Lissoni stood out from all the other new kitchens presented at the fair for its “rougher” edge incorporating natural materials. This is a distinctively more tactile look – a bold but beautiful combination of small black Moonstone tiles for the working surface and artisan ceramic cladding on the ventilation hood. But the piece de resistance was clearly the combination of these materials not just with the cool stainless steel surfaces but with a huge elevated weathered wooden table top made from recycled and treated pinewood from an old Italian mountain hut.

Innovation and cutting edge trends in the home are never cheap at this level, but they are setting the standards and impulse for a new more environmentally aware design and architecture that satisfies our increasingly individualistic and eco-conscious lifestyles, as well as the need to bring an element of authenticity and history back into modern design and life.

www.artquitect.net

www.tomdixon.net

www.boffi.com