



Reimagined workplaces

Ellie Tennant on trends and highlights at NeoCon 2024, the world's leading platform for commercial interior design

The 55th edition of NeoCon was held at THE MART, Chicago, on June 10-12, 2024. Presenting game-changing services and products from more than 400 companies, this is one of the most innovative and influential design shows on the planet – a hothouse for fresh talent, *the* gathering place for architects, designers, manufacturers and commercial design organisations as well as a melting pot for new ideas and cutting-edge solutions.

NeoCon has been the most important event in the calendar for commercial design industry professionals ever since it launched back in 1969.

From the midcentury design renaissance when Florence Knoll assembled star architects and designers to make waves in the realm of office interiors, via technological advances such as the birth of desktop computers, economic recessions, ergonomic discoveries and – more recently – environmental developments and co-working trends, NeoCon has always been at the forefront of workplace design, incubating the latest and greatest products.

NEURO-AESTHETICS

With mounting evidence that immersing ourselves in beauty and feeling connected to nature

is at the root of happiness in the workplace, a new approach to design is developing, placing our fundamental human needs at the very centre of design decisions.

The nascent field of 'Neuro-aesthetics' was explored by many NeoCon exhibitors this year. Blending form with function, this concept delves into how environmental elements such as sound, art and colour can impact emotions and spatial experiences on a subconscious level.

Trend-setting studio Garden on the Wall (gardenonthewall.com) presented an 'Immersive Biophilic Garden' which embodies this fresh direction, crafting moss walls and interior preserved gardens to elevate moods and stimulate minds. The uplifting properties of light were explored by many, too, including CECOCECO (cecocoeco.com) who revealed ArtMorph – luminous wall panels that combine lighting and display technology with stimulating textures.

COLOUR INSPIRATION

Associated with feelings of calmness and contentment, blue hues dominated the

Above: Brightly patterned textiles for Momentum by British-Nigerian designer Yinka Ilori

show this year, perhaps reflecting a subtle shift towards a collective longing for purity, clarity and peace in our fast-paced and ever-changing digital age. Paint company Benjamin Moore's (benjaminmoore.com) bold 'Blue Nova' shade made a big impression, while the softer, steely tones of Sherwin-Williams' (sherwin-williams.com) 'Upward' hue provided tranquil accent colour inspiration.

VIBRANT ENERGIES

This year, Momentum Textiles and Wallcovering's (momentumtextilesandwalls.com) colourful collaboration with British-Nigerian artist Yinka Ilori (yinkailori.com) received the coveted distinction of 'Best in Competition' marking the first time a product in the wall treatments and textiles categories took home the top honours. His vibrant collection for Momentum brings his trademark playfulness and bold use of ▶



colour to the commercial built environment. The jury – a group of 53 including respected designers and architects – noted that Yinka’s colourful creations have the power to transform the look and feel of a space. ‘This collection is designed so exquisitely. One’s mood and outlook is instantly changed as soon as you see the product in use,’ said one juror. ‘Bright and colourful, it brings joy and happiness. It’s definitely a statement.’

Yinka Ilori also delivered a keynote presentation at this year’s show, in which he explored how design can celebrate cultural identities, elevating the individual while unifying the masses. ‘I am always looking for new ways to use art and design to tell new stories and bring communities together, all while highlighting my vibrant heritage,’ he explained.

ECO-CONSCIOUS INNOVATIONS

The show’s 2024 theme, ‘Design Takes Shape,’ was embraced by exhibitors, many of whom showcased creative designs that

Top Left: With almost one million square feet of exhibition space, NeoCon 2024 featured game-changing products and services from more than 400 leading companies Top right: Keynote speaker Yinka Ilori MBE is a British designer

blend eco-friendly materials and processes without compromising on style or performance. Fortunately, eco-friendly designs, ‘green’ materials and sustainable manufacturing processes are becoming the industry norm, but it was encouraging to see some firms really pushing the boundaries with exciting new concepts.

For example, Japanese eco-designer Taku Kumazawa launched a range of sleek ‘X50’ chairs and stools with Davis Furniture that combine functionality and sustainability to perfection. Made from 100 per cent recycled materials, they can be stacked 50 high and are impressively comfortable.

Meanwhile, Italian studio Slalom presented ‘Bloom’ – beautiful sound-absorbing wall

panels that offer acoustic comfort. Made from an eco-friendly blend of flax, regenerated plastic materials, grasses, flowers and petals, these floral panels are a wonderful way to introduce nature to a commercial space and nifty Velcro attachments simplify installation.

FURNITURE LAUNCHES

It’s hard to choose highlights from the vast selection of stylish and practical furniture on show at NeoCon, but a few collections stood out from the crowd, both in terms of aesthetics and performance.

Hightower (hightower. design) introduced the ‘Flote’ lounge chair and sofa, inspired by how it feels to relax on inflatable swimming pool ‘floaties’. Curvaceous and super-comfortable, this seating provides

a cocoon-like, wraparound feel that embraces the sitter.

Demand for flexible workspaces is increasing as more companies recognize the value of contemporary office interiors that foster communication, innovation and collaboration. With this in mind, Japanese office furniture brand Okamura (okamura.com), has created ‘Lives Post + Beam’ – a square-shaped frame with clever sliding wall panels that can be customised and altered as required. Whiteboards, sound-absorbing felt panels or wire mesh sections that are useful for storage solutions make this system incredibly versatile, plus it’s available in 20 colours.

You can close off a section for a meeting space or leave it open for a more collaborative, open environment. ■