

The Maison & Objet Show - The HB2 View

As we have come to expect, the fall 2007 Maison & Objet show in Paris was a feast for the eyes, an inspiration for the mind, and a balm for the soul. Never a venue to disappoint the strong of foot and the adventurous of spirit, this semi-annual gathering brings together the best of European home furnishings vendors. It's a visual assault on the senses that is at once uplifting and daunting. The sheer size, inclusive of 7 massive halls, each holding acres of exhibits, cannot be approached without a minimum of pre-planning. This "cult trade show of home-fashions" as it bills it's self, is a not to be missed event for retailers, designers and, manufacturers who are design, color, and trend forward in their orientation.

Each year the Maison creative staff identifies global trends they see affecting the way we live and the products we create. The themes this year they were;

- Alternatives – the “re-think, reduce, reuse, recycle attitude” that we see in the prominent green movement here in the USA. Eco-citizenship demands that we stand as advocates for reduced waste and that we engage in environmentally friendly practices in our homes and in our businesses.
- Artsy-Craftsy – “a new very human luxury based on a sense of quality and know-how”. This trend celebrates the provenance of mico-produced products where the work of man's hands trumps the sameness of the mass produced and machine made products.
- Trash – or as the Maison gurus explained it, “the art of waste – which transforms the useless into gold.” Thrown away plastic wrappers, tin cans, and cardboard, morphed into seating, lighting, and objet d'arte. A bit of a stretch for our taste – but then stretching ones imagination is really at the root of what makes the Maison & Objet show so special.

Color, form, and materials are always used in new and fresh ways at the Maison show, and this 26th rendition was no exception.

The standout color was undoubtedly purple in all its many hues. Deep eggplant covered product categories as varied as bombe chests, bedding, and lamp shades. It's browned tones of raisin and plum were paired with pumpkin and ochre, while the lightest lavenders and violet were often so subtly combined with smoke greys that it was hard to distinguish one from the other. Taupe tones, driftwood colors, platinums, and greyed-neutrals were abundant, and when punched-up with a Deep Honey, Chartreuse, or Capri Blue they looked directional and fresh.

The luster we saw so prominently at the recent Showtime fabric fair in High Point was evident in almost every category of merchandise. Finishes for fabric and furniture were generally of a higher sheen; and you were “no-where” if your products weren't embellished with a handful of Swarovski crystals. Crystals hung from dresser pulls, chandeliers (no surprise there) and every category of domestic linens. Careful when you towel off after you next shower or when you lay your head to rest on that crystal covered pillow case! If crystals were too gauche for you, then how about a few Lurex threads running through that throw, sheet, or bath robe? Everywhere you turned sparkle, shine, and luster were evident on a broad range of products– tacky on some—hyper luxurious on others.

New to the show this time was a whole pavilion dedicated to outdoor furniture. The level of design innovation and orientation to indoor/outdoor living as high art, reached a pinnacle in this building that was one of the highlights of the show. Garden pavilions, creative seating, lounging, and dining, as well as innovative display and beautiful use of materials, was a delight to behold and inspiration for all who made the effort to get into this hall.

Finally, no trip to the Maison & Objet show would be complete without a couple days scouring flea markets, restaurants, and the endlessly varied boutiques of Paris.

Our favorite new store: Emery & Cie 18 Passage de la Main d'Or, F75001, Paris.
www.emeryetcie.com . Awe inspiring artisanal tiles, paints, ironwork, and fabrics.

Our favorite new restaurant: Jacques Cagna, 14 rue des Grands Augustine, Paris 6, 01 43 26 49 39. Twenty-first century haute cuisine in a 16th century setting- elegant, scrumptious, un peu cher – but worth every sou!

Our favorite show quote: From a very well informed French home accessories supplier, “Americans are so obsessed with price. They no longer create dreams for their customers. They get lost in that no-mans land between being too expensive for the poor and not expensive enough for the rich.” He pleaded for us to use color, tell stories, and evoke emotions in our merchandising.

HB2, a dynamic new resource for the furniture industry, provides guidance for those looking for new solutions to the changing dynamics of our times. Partners Caroline Hipple, Dixon Bartlett, and Joseph Bowers provide services in three key results oriented areas: Creating innovative brand invigoration strategies, Providing transformational architecture as a blue print for change management, and Guiding multi-channel and multi-functional alignment for both retailers and manufacturers. Based in Atlanta GA, they can be reached at www.hb2.biz, or 404-974-2520.