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The leading lights of international design have been showing their wares in Milan. **Katrina Burroughs** reports on her most dazzling discoveries

Every April, the interiors industry decamps to Milan. The Salone Internazionale del Mobile, the design circus where the big furniture brands parade their latest launches, featured more than 2,500 exhibitors this year, most of them Italian, including pavilions dedicated to lighting and workplace interiors. Yet not even the most dedicated cushion-wrangler has the stamina to cover all 24 halls.

The fair is enticing but indigestible, like a tanker of tiramisù. So most visitors divide their time between their own personal edit of the mammoth fair-ground and the smaller, and frankly sexier, Fuorisalone events. Scattered across the city — in museum buildings, showrooms, galleries and pop-ups, these offer a tasting menu of international design, including cool brands, cutting-edge tech and crafts.

Although the theme this year was innovation, traditional materials still starred: marble, metal and wood. A great deal of wood. At Tom Dixon's show, Most, held at the Museum of Science and Technology, the standout stand was Japan Handmade, six craft firms from Kyoto that have collaborated with a Danish company, OeO, to apply ancient artisanal skills to contemporary designs in copper, brass and timber.

The concept of partnering Japanese makers with European creatives was echoed at Spazio Rossana Orlandi, where Karimoku New Standard unveiled its latest range of tables and chairs in pastel-stained wood, manufactured in Japan, but created by hip designers such as the Stockholm studio TAF and the Dutch duo Scholten & Baijings. There were more outstanding designs in wood at Edit by Designjunction, a tiny, principally British show (think Ercol, Modus, Case, All Lovely Stuff), with particular delights among Samuel Chan's characteristically understated creations in walnut and oak for Channels.

Italy being home to the international lighterati, Flos, Artemide and Foscarini, innovative lighting was bound to be an unmissable aspect of the fair. The highlight this year was Paul Cocksedge's ethereal Shade, for Flos, in the EuroLuce pavilion. Another favourite find — again wood and metal — was the Briccole range of furnishings at Riva (riva1920.it), made from weatherbeaten oak posts salvaged from the Venetian lagoon.

The most memorable object, however, was in marble, and more art than design. The installation by Michael Anastassiades, a London-based Cypriot, was a series of curled marble discs inspired by the red cellophane fortune-telling fish found in Christmas crackers.

Milan's design week is so gargantuan that every visitor can come away with a different perspective. This year, I felt I'd travelled to Italy to be reminded of the brilliance of designers based in Britain. It turns out there's no place like home.



Vegaz lights from Seletti (H60cm), in LED-studded metal. £330 each; rockettstgeorge.co.uk



From the new Etrange Zénith collection by Philippe Starck for Baccarat, this 24-light chandelier with Murano glass stag heads is called Zénith sur la Lagune. £45,400, special order only; harrods.com

The Mass coat stand (H200cm) is the heavyweight in Tom Dixon's new collection: £1,500 worth of brass-clad blokiness. tomdixon.net



These chazutsu tea canisters are handmade from copper and brass in Kyoto, Japan. From £97; postcardteas.com



Japan Handmade's Ki-oke stool comes in cypresswood or lignified cedar, with brass details. £3,900; japan-handmade.com

A pink bin by Scholten & Baijings, made from a single piece of milled wood. £44; available soon at twentytwentyone.com



Paul Cocksedge's brainteasing design for Flos, called Shade, appears to be a free-floating lamp, but is actually suspended on almost invisible wires and lit by an LED uplight. Available soon at www.flos.com



The orange Finnieston tripod table from Channels can be collapsed and hung on the wall. £325; channelsdesign.com



A lively collection of Danish labels included Applicata, which showed these Blossom wooden candlesticks. €39; applicata.dk



This installation was designed by Michael Anastassiades and made by marble technicians at Henraux. michaelanastassiades.com



The London-based designer Pia Wüstenberg's Transformed vessels range from 25cm to 60cm in diameter. £750-£1,500; piadesign.eu