

don't

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Josh Sims reports from Milan's Salone del Mobile, the world's biggest interior-design event, on the trends of tomorrow



Inside the future

When is a lamp not really a lamp? The Japanese design company Yoy Idea was perhaps posing that question this month at SaloneSatellite, a show within a show at Milan's Salone del Mobile, the world's biggest interior-design event and the place where young design talents set the trends of tomorrow.

Yoy Idea's simply named "Light" answers it thus: the table lamp looks like a stem without a shade, the shade being projected as a patch of light onto a wall behind. The design captures one of the key trends in interiors: after years of very grown-up modernism, now comes a spirit of playfulness – interior pieces that are as entertaining or gently provocative as they are useful.

Imagine is another Japanese company with a similar idea: a bold, cartoonlike version of a shower that casts a pool of light onto the floor, as though it was water. Indeed, playing with the elemental proves to be something of a trend in itself: the designer Markus Johansson's

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Hello Dude table lamp has a cap that screws up or down and swivels over the bulb to reveal light, as well as direct and control the amount emitted; Arturo Erbsman's lighting mixes two things that one rarely wants together – electricity and water – to create what could become the new lava lamp; and the Japanese design company Kappes has created several products that blur the boundary between interior design and art pieces, from its mantle clock – requiring the push of a button to print a paper slip showing the time – to its crowd-pulling and mesmerising Momentum, an MDF bowl with a white, water-repellent urethane coating into which are fed individual beads of water that streak and bounce around until coalescing and passing through a plug to be recycled.

Such designs operate well beyond whimsy, encouraging their users to think about how they interact with their interior objects, what their purpose is beyond the merely functional and of what those objects actually comprise. Karoline Fesser's All Wood Stool, for example, is just that: a traditional workshop stool, with screw up/down seat, but beautifully and entirely articulated in maple and hornbeam. Guglielmo Quaranta's Issa e Issu is a figure-like wooden board that folds open to become a chair, the head becoming the headrest, the arms the chair arms, and so on; Siren Elise Wilhelmsen's Blane room divider is a frame-hung textile akin to a half-finished piece of loom work; the Georgian designer Ia Kutateladze's lamps and tables archly mix forms, one side nodding to the industrial and contemporary, the other to the more decorative or even rococo.

This trend for playfulness is perhaps most directly expressed by Tania da Cruz's Playmobilia stools, inspired by the "wigs" worn by the figures produced by a certain unnamed (but obvious) toy company. The temptation to marginalise these as furniture for children is to miss the point.

SaloneSatellite's designers are not only mindful of the possibility of the products that we fill our homes with to prise out a smile – they're also concerned with our need for more space and, environmentally-driven or not, the possibility of using more humble materials in a smarter way.

Several designers up the ante on multifunctional pieces that allow the user a greater degree of control over them: Avandi's self-explanatory Adaptable is a triangular modular side table, multiples of which can



be slotted together in the user's preferred configuration to make a bigger table; LiqueenLav's Mas has a geometry that similarly allows it to be stacked or upturned to create tables, chairs or something between the two; while Tepfenhart's Fn:two is a more luxurious aluminium-and-bamboo-ply combination piece that morphs between desk, dining table and bench.

Bamboo, indeed, is the star example of designers using in a newly sophisticated way any number of materials that are more typically considered unappealingly basic or even disposable. The London-based Poetic Lab has conceived tables – classics in the making – comprising heavyweight glass tops seemingly precariously supported on spindly bamboo legs. The bamboo is actually very strong and bonded to the glass using a specially developed resin.

Other designers have similarly found potential in stereotypically cheap materials: Kristian Knobloch's 4+1 stool comprises four wooden boards held together with an industrial belt; Meike Harde uses fine wire mesh to create semi-transparent cabinets; EunMyung Soh's The Lines is a wooden shelving unit, the walls of which are made from a lattice work of heavy-duty, oversized elastic bands; while Nolii and Wishnya both produce striking forms for their lampshades using little more than, respectively, a single thin sheet of metal cut using

water jets and multiple, spiralling layers of cardboard.

Indeed, the exploration of materials for their untapped potential has even resulted in new processes that are likely to see many as-yet-unimagined uses in years to come: most impressively, the Basel-based Studio Colony has developed a method by which semi-transparent porcelain can be drilled with tiny capillaries that then absorb pigmented ink, much as a leaf does water. The result is the endless possibilities of pattern not printed on but actually embedded into the heart of the material.

Yet interior design's refresh button is not being pressed merely in the name of a new simplicity or even just of fun. Perhaps overwhelmed by a recent default position of easy-on-the-eye furnishing propositions – the interiors equivalent of the "greige" contemporary classicism that once captured the fashion imagination – some designers are ready to take the stripping back to new, maybe even challenging levels of graphic starkness. Guglielmo Poletti's Linescapes collection of bookcase, lounge chair and coffee table, for example, reduces form to the absolutely minimal, while curvy, high-gloss furniture by Jason Mizrahi – his Luna Lounge lounger in particular – is sculpture to sit on. Well, perhaps. These designers' offerings may not be the most comfortable on the behind, but at least they bring comfort to the eyes and mind.

Some of the most striking pieces from Milan's Salone del Mobile, showing off a new design language: clockwise from top, the Groove bookcase from Guglielmo Poletti's Linescapes; Hello Dude by Markus Johansson; the Light table lamp by Yoy Idea. Courtesy Guglielmo Poletti; courtesy Markus Johansson; photo by Yasuko Furukawa

