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 "THE MAN WHO
 DOESN'T READ
 HAS NO ADVANTAGE
 OVER THE MAN
 WHO CAN'T READ."
 —MARK TWAIN

Delights of NeoCon 2010

NeoCon WTF is this country's annual carnival of good will, good fun and good products for the workplace. Throw in a generous helping of learning, and a cornucopia of good restaurants, and who would not leap to attend. Folks were down-right lively. Attendance was up; hotel bookings were more than 3,000 rooms above last year. There was plenty to see. Here are some of our Delights of NeoCon. We'll have more next week.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 4...



Best of NeoCon

Eighty one awards were distributed in **The Best of NeoCon** competition during **NeoCon WTF 2010** at The Merchandise Mart. Seven Innovation Awards, three Editors' Choice Awards, and a Best of Competition Award were also selected among the 39 categories ranging from Architectural Products to Workplace Technologies. Here are the **Editors' Choice, Innovation, and Gold Winners**. Next week we'll have the Silver winners.

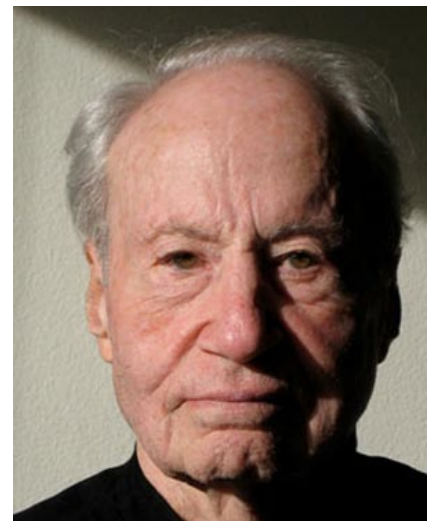
FULL STORY ON PAGE 20...



Cooper-Hewitt National Design Awards

The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum will celebrate outstanding achievement in design this fall with its 11th annual **National Design Awards** program. Cooper-Hewitt Director **Bill Moggridge** announced the winners and finalists of the 2010 National Design Awards, which recognize excellence across a variety of disciplines. Here are the 2010 National Design Award recipients

FULL STORY ON PAGE 32...





KNOLL: ANTENNA WORKSPACE

Delights of NeoCon 2010

by Brad Powell

NeoCon WTF is this country's annual carnival of good will, good fun and good products for the workplace. Throw in a generous helping of learning, and a cornucopia of good restaurants, and who would not leap to attend.

This was my 15th consecutive show – a paltry number compared to industry veterans, but well past my usual attention span. Yet, despite the hectic pace, I feel rather stoked by the event's aftertaste. With this in mind, it's difficult to understand the unprecedented level of pessimism

we received before the show, and even some afterward. Let me set the record straight: great show, a wealth of introductions, better than expected attendance (significantly better than last year, according to the Mart's data) and at least one learning experience that exceeded any I've heard in my years covering this industry.

The **Merchandise Mart** manages 85 shows yearly, of which NeoCon WTF is but one. In this context, we must appreciate their efforts on behalf of this industry – for which I assume they are as well compensated as economic conditions allow. Needless to say, the Mart's cumulative expertise and the cooperative efforts of the exhibitors and the A&D Community make for an ever-better exhibition, but oh, if we could just throw it open to the public for one day. (Yeah, I know. The cross-eyed exhausted communications folks and showroom staff doing all of the real work can barely make it through Wednesday as it is.)

The general mood this year was orange, with a good send off in the press room. If you wonder whether Steelcase's Coalesse can do anything for your work environment or comfort, you should have seen the NeoCon Press Room. Our correspondent *Kathleen Vick* reported: "Nearly every textile and carpet manufacturer had offerings in the most delightful variations of orange; some tiptoed to the edge of watermelon and some kicked-ass into the Chinese red zone. Some wove a sliver of it into the line (blushing bride fashion) and some let it play the role of dominatrix. Besides orange



PRESSROOM: COALESSE: WEGNER WING CHAIR

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products, there were orange flowers, orange accessories, orange-painted walls all over the Mart.

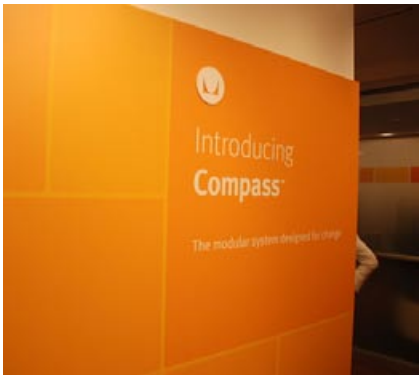
Haworth's take on orange was unexpected. Eschewing the striking, uplifting monotonic (with white) colors of past years, it went with a multicolored mosaic with a heavy orange disposition.

"Bless you, NeoCon, we needed that! And the attitude was orange

too; folks were down-right lively. Attendance was up; hotel bookings were more than 3,000 rooms above last year. Many of the showrooms we visited said it was a very good show for them. While business is still, well, tentative, it is improving. Last year folks were in the "trying-to-stay-alive" mode. This year was different: Nearly every manufacturer claimed that it honestly

believed it had seen the worst and were in a "looking forward" state of mind. Yes, the true delight of Neocon this year was that it was very decisively an upbeat show."

And despite some evidence that R&D budgets had been cut, the product development results said otherwise. The Most Excellent product of the show was clearly **Knoll's**



HERMAN MILLER: HEALTHCARE: ORANGE



KNOLL: ANTENNA WORKSPACE



THREE H: ORANGE



HAWORTH SHOWROOM



KNOLL: ANTENNA WORKSPACE



TEKNION PANEL: MAXINE MANN, DEAN MATSUMOTO, KAY SERGEANT, CARLOS MARTINEZ, EILEEN JONES

Antenna Workspace. It won a Best of NeoCon Innovation award. Well, O.K., I guess, but more to the point, Knoll and designers **Masamichi Udagawa** and **Sigi Moeslinger** hit the sweet spot of the current trend toward benching/landscape systems, a trend begun in Europe and picked up by Herman Miller with **Abak** and **Vivos**, Knoll with **Dividend Horizons**, Kimball with **Hum** and **Fluent**, Allsteel with **Stride**, and a blossoming of variations on this theme at this year's NeoCon. But *Antenna Workspace* is a design achievement, the quintessential representative of this type of product, distilled to its essence, a true delight to behold in its many variations.

Decades later, you wouldn't think that Knoll's Reff product would be catching our eye, but it did. This time in the form of Brian Graham's enhancements, **Reff Profiles**. His superb job seems to us the best work he has done, and Reff should be a contender for some time to come.

Not far behind, but in a more traditional, but disappearing, vein, was **Halcon's** new casegoods **Proximus** by Gary Lee Partners, with **David Grout**

Teknion Panel: An Excerpt

Of the Teknion panelist, **Dean Matsumoto** gets a special prize for providing a new image of the interior designer and their contribution to the workplace. Noting that, while some interior designers rue the ceding of turf to others, he sees this as a natural progression in which the interior design profession will move to a more positive, revenue-enhancing role as the focus shifts from *functional based design* to *experienced based design*. Just as business are constantly repurposing themselves, so must interior designers. From the fine arts and a basic understanding of client needs, interior designers must move more toward what is largely now subsumed under the heading of **Workplace Strategy**, and become involved in functions that will help clients raise revenue (as opposed to saving money), leverage knowledge, and make innovation a daily outcome. Issues will include, according to Mr. Matsumoto, organizational design, financial stress modeling, demographics, social anthropology, interface facilitation, cybernetics, cognitive ergonomics. Add systems thinking to that and there are some well-grounded pointers to the future.

Mr. Matsumoto's thoughts reflect what has been happening in sophisticated interior design practices over the last decade – and the thinking that seems to naturally occur to many interior designers as they mature as professionals – but compare this to the more traditional definition of “interior design” provided by NCIDQ, <http://www.ncidq.org/AboutUs/AboutInteriorDesign/DefinitionofInteriorDesign.aspx>

When the panel was asked what the professional associations were doing to transition interior design professions from the old model to the new, Ms. Sergeant, who has been active in IIDA, responded saying that it is a matter of professional shame that the professional organizations have not responded forcefully in the recessionary years. The profession and its organizations, she said, are not about a series of awards, networking events and parties.

Well, more of this later, but suffice it to say that we were delighted to see interior designers as featured speakers talking about the profession during a major industry event. Teknion is conducting a tour of this panel. I'll publish the schedule later. ■

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and **Donna Corbat** as designers. While other casegoods manufacturers are scaling down and value engineering, Halcon is playing at the top end to very good effect (as are Tuohy and Decca). Proximus is beautiful to behold, while incorporating new ideas to facilitate work, such as large sliding

panels hiding complete portions of the workspace, and moving copious storage areas up for easy access, while avoiding the clunky aspects of the overhead storage approach.

Tuohy also have a very strong show, confirming again that fine woodworking thrives. **Prato** is Tuohy's new

casegoods system designed by **Mark Saffell** and **David Ritch** of **5D Studio**. It's minimalist appearance belies its highly functional design.

In addition to these paragons of taste and design insight, we found a Most Excellent event to add to Neo-Con's great delights. While the educa-



HALCON: PROXIMUS



KNOLL: REFF PROFILES

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HERMAN MILLER HEALTHCARE

tional portion of the NeoCon shows is an important and integral part of our event experience, **Teknion's** Special Event, a two hour panel presentation, **Design Does Matter**, with >**Maxine Mann**, Teknion, Moderator >**Dean Matsumoto**, Kasian, Toronto >**Kay Sergeant**, IA, Washington, D.C. >**Carlos Martinez**, Gensler, Chicago >**Eileen Jones**, Perkins+Will/Eva Maddox Branded Environments, Chicago ...all design and intellectual heavyweights.

This was the most thoughtful and meaningful conversation regarding interior design that I have heard during my 15 years of covering the industry, and I have heard many. Almost startling, this panel actually featured interior

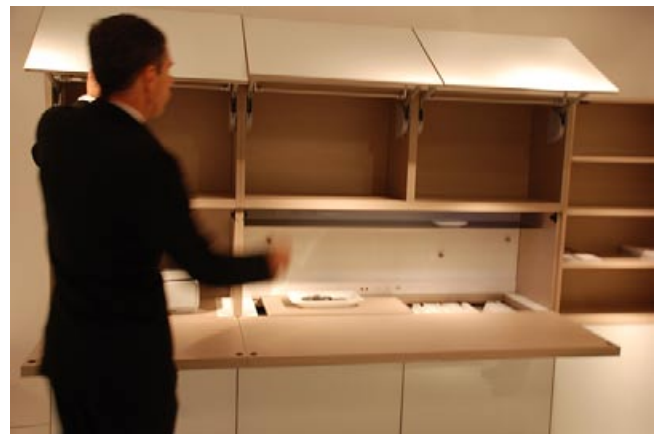
designers. For years I have been suggesting that one could draw some fairly negative conclusions about that fact that the IIDA-sponsored NeoCon events involve almost anyone other than an interior designer. If I had been wondering whether any interior designers had anything to say, this question was put to rest by the panel, and we must be grateful to Teknion that it recognized and believed in the interior design profession enough to sponsor its practitioners in a key presentation. Maybe the Merchandise Mart and IIDA will take a hint and start lining up NeoCon speakers who include someone other than architects, product designers, and various environmentalist and futurists?

Another big hit of NeoCon WTF 2010

was healthcare, with even a space allotted for it on Floor 8. The Mart is also working on a new venture, a Medical Mart to be located on the campus of the Cleveland Clinic. (That's a big deal.) But for this year, the biggest splash was **Herman Miller's** healthcare division, which includes **Nemschoff** and **Brandrud**. Finally CEO **Brian Walker** is beginning to realize his goal of attacking some vertical industries, with Beth Nichol's division taking the spotlight away from Steelcase's Nurture with its lauded **Compass** offering. I went Tuesday afternoon and still had to elbow my way in. Several designers I spoke with were highly complementary about the design and detailing of *Compass*. Given the crowd, it was



TUOHY: PRATO WALL, CLOSED



TUOHY: PRATO WALL, OPEN

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quite difficult to get photos, but I got a couple that will give you an idea.

Nurture by Steelcase, of course,

had the same sort of rush when it was introduced a couple of years ago.

While not drawing as much atten-

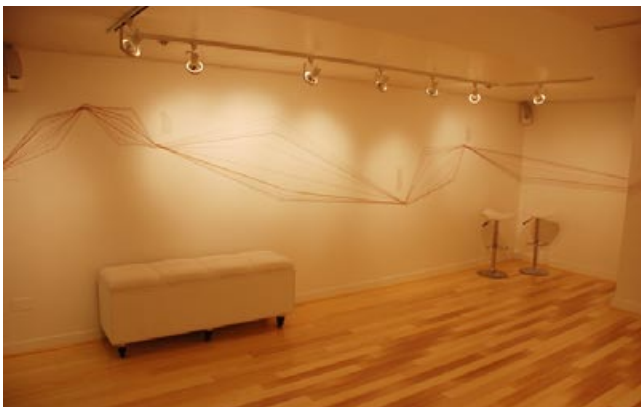
tion, Nurture's new General Manager, **Kyle Williams**, did bring the excellent media:scape technology over to Nurture, and this looked like wonderful synergy to me, for doctor-doctor conferences and for doctor-patient consultations.

DIRTT is making inroads into the healthcare market by incorporating technology into its walls for healthcare settings. You can connect or hang practically anything on to a DIRTT wall, so you'll find, for example, USB ports, iPod docks and flat panel technologies integrated into patient spaces, along with medical accessories and peripheral diagnostic equipment, all connected through the same cabling accommodation standard in the DIRTT walls. Electrical connections with DIRTT are a snap (literally). It's Spider subsidiary produces a wealth of modular electrical and data connections, making life a lot easier and less expensive (except for electrical connections in Chicago, of course).

I have more, but I'll leave some for next week. First, however, we have to give a delightful nod to True Textiles for its attention-getting showroom this year. It's design shows how minimalist you can be and still create a great impression, and no products either.



SPIDER MODULAR ELECTRICAL/DATA CONNECTION DISPLAY IN THE DIRTT SHOWROOM



TRUE TEXTILES SHOWROOM

