

feature | finishing touches

The Maison Objet design show, held twice a year in April, is one of a handful of directional European shows that profiles seasonal trend directions that inevitably appear in our markets. Some of the key themes and directions that were observed at the last show include:

Diaphanous: A softer, more tactile style of decorating with the emergence of a gentleness and calmness to our designs. Soft, pleated textiles and translucent shapes with a touch of whimsy and humour are appearing in the form of statement furniture pieces and innovative wall dividers. Oki Sato's Cabbage Chair is made from waste paper left over from fabric designs. This innovative chair allows you to peel back the layers of paper to transform a tube into a beautiful and perfectly shaped chair.

Futuristic in form and material, this trend looks towards the future with a positive attitude, embracing technological advancements. New materials are explored in ground-breaking ways, such as The Diamond Chair designed by Nendo (Tokyo) and inspired by the atomic structure of diamonds. This futuristic chair design absorbs pressure but remains flexible, similar to the organs and muscles of the human body. With the use of rapid prototyping, the chair was manufactured using only two single pieces of material.

Innovation has no anxiety or guilt associated with it. We are looking backwards less and have moved on from the nostalgic themes of the past few years. Materials include futuristic shapes and diaphanous finishes using techno science and soft technology through textiles and lighting techniques. The amalgamation of nature and technology is showcased in Lonneke Gordijn's Dandelight, which combines electronic systems and dandelions in a battery-powered LED light which is covered in Dandelion seeds.

Translucent finishes give us a perception of space and feature objects become a statement of beauty.

Animalia: A perennial favourite, the animal form continues to be celebrated as a decorative element in our interiors. The two most distinctive styles showcase first slightly sinister, mythological themes, and second quirky, oversized designs which are a new take on the "Chalet" trend that has infiltrated European design over the past few years.

The new "Wonderland" range from iBride uses a combination of fantasy, mythology and reality to create thought-provoking design pieces based on the dreams of Alice. The Martha and Madeleine trays juxtapose predator and prey using ornate illustration, while "Martin" the mule wall unit combines practical storage in a humorous and sculptural form.

The Chalet trend takes on a new life in the form of oversized sculptural pieces. Frederique Morel's life-size needlepoint-covered trophy head sculptures made from polyurethane taxidermy moulds and finished with real antlers add

a decorative element to the Chalet theme. Based on the needlepoint skills that her grandmother displayed, Frederique decided to recreate the look, with each piece telling a story.

Quirky oversized animal shapes are being used sculpturally as playful statement pieces and animal motifs remain a perennial favourite. Zebra and snakeskin designs in black and white will emerge strongly, as will a fresh new take on leopard spots using offbeat combinations of pop colours in electric blue and bold purples. Expect to see animal skin motifs moving into the bathroom in areas such as tiles, mirrors and bathroom furniture.

Ceramica Cielo recently launched its Jungle collection, made by blending natural hides with ceramic to reproduce a finish that looks and feels like the actual skins. Pony skin, python and crocodile skins have all been recreated in this haute couture accessories collection.

Human forms: Our fascination with the past is evident in the slightly confronting move towards using the human body as inspiration for design pieces. With a blend of surreal and pop art humour, human anatomy is being interpreted in ways that we have never seen before. Cell structure is recreated as a basis for porcelain plates, skeletal shapes become the basis for decorative lighting pieces, and our vascular system decorates a statement chair.

Designers are breaking down the intricate makeup of the human body to imitate the texture of human skin to use as upholstery fabric, with thumbprints employed as decorative ceramics.

The beauty of Thelermont Hupton's Hand Hooks, which grow from the wall in a series of familiar gestures, are in stark contrast to the Eye Clone lamp from Paris's 5.5 Designers. These lamps are cloned to your individual eye colour and are produced in hand-blown Murano glass. No body



part is sacred, with brain footstools and skull chairs sitting alongside fingerprinted ceramics.

Touchwood: Our love of natural timber has led to the imitation of wood patterns in quirky and fun ways. We are seeing wood and wood patterns used in wall coverings, floor rugs and innovative furniture pieces. Bodo Sperlein gained inspiration from the delicacy of twigs and branches in his Yauatcha collection of tea accessories commissioned by restaurateur Alan Yau. The products reflect not only the diverse heritage of tea culture, but also the sculptural forms of wood, with twig handles and detailing. On a quirkier note, Yvette Laduk's Woody Wood rug is a clever interpretation of a timber cross-section with textured rings and a burnt bark edge.

Timber panelling and flooring take on a new dimension with stacked log flooring and wall panels that emulate a rustic wood pile, or the Deesawat range of outdoor furniture that brings fun and function to outdoor essential pieces such as clothes lines and furniture.

Limed oak, white- and grey-washed timbers are making a resurgence in the marketplace; combined with glossy white lacquer or pop colour pieces, these timbers are becoming core decorating staples. Amerind has recently launched the Premio range of architectural panels into the Australian market in a range of cool grey timber tones and bright, primary Gloss colours.

While commentary on trends makes for fun and fascinating observation and debate, gone are the days when we slavishly follow them. These days we are more likely to select aspects of a trend that appeal to us and that fit within our own homes. Most trends are moving away from shades or tones of a specific colour and are more concerned with observing broader global and human issues and how we respond to them. Whether it is a reaction to the depressed financial market which stimulates the use of bright, vivid colour, or our love of technology that allows us to create fragile, diaphanous designs, each trend will have a small impact somewhere in our lives. ■