

Evening Standard

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BUYERS & SELLERS

THE CONTEMPORARY
ART SUPERLEAGUE

DAY OF THE JACKAL

HOW LITERARY AGENT
ANDREW WYLIE WON
THE WAUGH

Hurley burley

Piglets, geese & bikinis
– down on the farm
with Elizabeth Hurley

INTRODUCING OUR NEW COLUMNISTS TOM AIKENS ON FOOD AND HELEN KIRWAN-TAYLOR ON DESIGN



HELEN KIRWAN-TAYLOR

DesignSpy

The British star turn in Milan, and the trouble with sofas

I recently returned from the Milan Furniture Fair, the design equivalent of all the fashion shows put together (and then some), so tapping into this autumn's home trends was easy. 'Soft and squidgy is what it's all about,' said an exhausted-looking James Mair of Viaduct. Boxy, minimal and masculine are out. Florals are still in.

The British can feel proud because they were the stars. Hot designers Doshi Levien (young London-based couple Jonathan Levien and Nipa Doshi, who create for everyone from John Lobb to Tefal) launched the whimsically feminine My Beautiful Backside sofa for Moroso (above), and Terence Woodgate, a design engineer turned furniture designer, produced a £25,000 skeletal Surface Table for Established & Sons which looked like it might collapse but was, in fact, rock solid thanks to FI engineering.

Everyone loves to hate Established & Sons, the company started by Stella McCartney's husband, but this year they couldn't. OK, Alasdair Willis may have more cash to throw at PR and parties than most, but he stole the show.

Milan also seemed full of crazy, one-off, uncomfortable pieces of furniture that nobody but the designer's mother could like. Designers can't be bothered with designing normal sofas, according to designer Tom Bartlett (whose friends include Jade Jagger), who was in Milan: 'Everyone wants to be like Marc Newson with a one-man show at Gagosian.'

DesignArt is the 'new new' as they say, mostly because if you call something 'art' and put it on a white plinth surrounded by cement floors you can charge a lot more.

The latest chap to jump on the DesignArt bandwagon is art dealer Tim Taylor, who has just signed up designer Ron Arad; the first show is scheduled for the autumn. If a designer wants to get from shabby Shoreditch to moneyed Mayfair in this life, DesignArt is definitely the way to go. Fortunately, machine-made is also what Milan is all about and the hi-tech plastic Lizz Chair by Kartell (the company that made Philippe Starck rich) by trendy Italian architect Piero Lissoni was a no-brainer. I would have one in every colour - there are eight - around my table.



Plastic fantastic: Lizz Chairs by Piero Lissoni for Kartell, £123 each

Did you know?

That therapy is coming into the home. In America couples are now hiring remodelling coaches (read: therapist) to step in between them and the architect. For up to £200 an hour, the coach's job is to make sure both sides get heard. This supposedly prevents resentment, misunderstandings, design differences and, of course, law suits. As someone whose architect simply said, 'No,' when asked (after her plans came in over the budget) to come up with something mortals might afford, I can see the appeal.



CHELSEA BOY

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which runs until tomorrow, is where scruffy and, let's face it, hunky male designers with their own TV shows, newspaper columns and publicists come to strut their stuff. Among them (though likely not fighting with them) is Philip Nixon, a charming 43-year-old ex-broker, who figured out that if you skip the bitchiness and write a business plan instead, the work comes flying in. Since he started his gardening firm in 2004, he has won no fewer than two Chelsea Golds. This year, his garden (left), sponsored by Savills, is also about art. 'I wanted to create a garden inspired by a gallery space,' says Nixon, who is using plants to create architectural forms.

The constant gardener: Philip Nixon in his studio in SW6



THE INSIDER Cushions

CASH

Update your sofa with cushions - use brights with uncomplicated upholstery. Swash from Habitat looks homemade, £35 (0870 411 5501).

CHEQUE

Thomas Paul's perky prints are available in different patterns, fabrics and colours. £70, at Supemice (020 7613 3890).

CREDIT

Hand-embroidered on a cotton-silk fabric, these Ottoman-inspired cushions by Persian interior designer Alidad look vintage. £121, at Mitra (020 7384 0121).