

NeoCon



The glossy red Igloo Chair from Beaufurn shows that stacking chairs don't have to be boring. Red continues to be a popular accent color.

adopt it and work it into their space.

More than 50,000 attendees explored NeoCon (which encompasses several venues, including New Hospitality, TechnoCon™, Fine Design Residential Furnishings Show™, and Office Expo). The products they liked will become part of the design for a wide range of spaces, from hospitals to airport terminals to concert halls to executive offices to hotel lobbies, and many others.

Although there were new versions and configurations, many of the products at 2007 NeoCon were a continuation of the trends of the past couple of years. Stability is to be expected during the middle years of a decade, and also at times of international tensions. Still, there are shifts emerging in color and design, and they were evident at NeoCon.

NeoCon World's Trade Fair

at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago is regarded by many trend watchers and design professionals as the single most important industry event of the year for commercial interiors. Held this year from June 9-11, NeoCon offered more than 1,200 showrooms and exhibitors showcasing thousands of cutting-edge commercial products.

While shows like High Point Market or the Las Vegas World Market Center are great sources for identifying current color and design trends, NeoCon is the go-to show for emerging trends that are expected to grow strong over the next few years. This is because commercial decor is intended to last for years, and manufacturers of contract decor products must strive to be “trend forward,” creating products that will be in style for a decade or more. Sometimes this results in rooms that are ahead of their time, with color combinations that look a bit strange to the average consumer—for awhile—until that color combination becomes established and is generally regarded as trendy and current. Color trends evolve over a ten-year period. It takes quite a bit of time for people to become aware of it and then find it appealing then



The Aight modular system from Turnstone consists of three shapes that can be used to create various configurations. Bright colors like this yellow are being used for drama and excitement within neutral decor.

2007

By Vivian Kistler, CPF, GCF, CMG

Colors

In spite of popularity for several years already, brown with many types of blues—light blue, aqua, cobalt—remains a hot combination, creating a wide range of designs within this color pairing. Brown with brown, such as milk chocolate on dark chocolate, is also continuing. Brown pale green and gray with gold were seen on



Ceramic tiles become wall art in “Forest” from the Vernissage Collection made by Italian company Ceramiche Brennero, designed by artist Roberto Begnoni. Yellow-green is the only green that made a strong showing at NeoCon.



The Meet Chair from Harter offers numerous ergonomic features along with such contemporary colors of upholstery as Century Tropic, a yellow-green pattern with blue and brown accents.

several case goods intended for office use.

Gray has emerged as the most popular neutral, overtaking tan and white for the moment. Gray on gray monochromatic designs were prevalent at NeoCon, especially in upholstery fabrics and floor coverings. Gray is also being paired with other colors, including red, yellow, gold and blue.

Warm spice colors (like cinnamon, saffron, paprika, and nutmeg) are shown as accent colors, with bright orange or yellow used for a bold element of pizzazz, such as upholstery on sofas in a mostly gray room. Red remains a reliable accessory or accent color, used more often as a solid color such as an all-red chair rather than in color com-



The mixed media figurative art paintings of Charles J. Dwyer were shown in the Council Contract showroom at NeoCon. Dwyer combines classical and modern elements to create works that are traditional and contemporary at the same time. Note the use of the popular blue and brown color combination.



The Blue Morphique carpet from Blueridge is a good example of using texture to create interest. Multiple dimensions of pattern give Morphique a unique look depending on your position and the lighting.

binations. A strong bright or dark red is most popular.

Yellow-green is still holding on in medium to bright versions, but the only other green that had a significant presence was a grayish olive. Blue is growing in popularity, especially a strong, vibrant hue in the range of cobalt blue on the artist's palette. Also seen frequently at NeoCon were soft pastel blue with brown of course. Wood colors were warm and rich, with only occasional use of light or very dark brown. Wood panels are being installed horizontally rather than vertically providing a different look but lots of brown.

Designs

Lots and lots of patterns, from subtle speckles to bold shapes, with many retro geometrics, stripes, circles, tone-on-tone, and texture on texture. There was little distinct paisley, but many stylized variations. Nature patterns were widely used, including twigs, leaves, flowers, and undefined organic shapes. Silhouettes and line drawings along with swirls continue to get a lot of play—they can be sophisticated or playful depending on the size, color, and finish. Tone-on-tone, monotone and two color printing were also popular.

Green Is Everything and Everywhere

Along with the interest in yellow-greens most of the products shown at NeoCon, were Green—as in environmentally friendly. This was by far the biggest trend at the show. From carpeting to wall covering to countertops, the manufacturers of every product are eager to share their commitment to environmental responsibility. Along



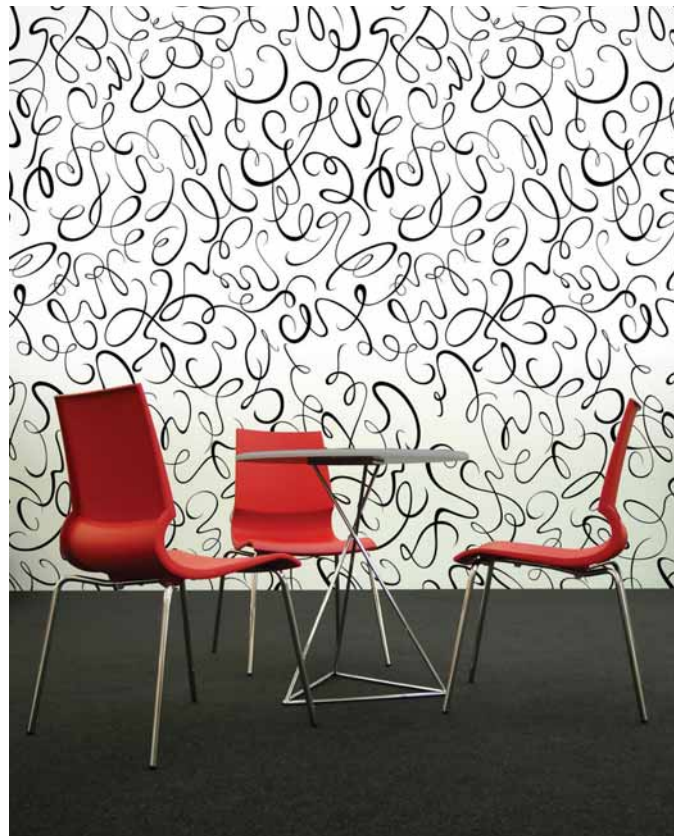
This neutral color decor is from Plynyl, featuring a durable woven-vinyl product that can be adapted to wall covering, upholstery and floor tiles. These patterns are from designer Sandy Chilewich, using a new take on faux bois (made to look like wood grain).

with the new colors and designs each company is introducing, every brochure and advertisement also includes the company's "green" efforts and achievements. And these are industries that can really make a difference, especially in terms of recycling, because massive amounts of materials from interiors were ending up in landfills, or were burned, releasing toxic fumes. In addition, many materials create waste during manufacturing, and some of the finished products continually emitted potentially harmful gases, prompting new standards for labeling products according to their Indoor Air Quality level. Building projects receive LEED credits (for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) from the U.S. Green Building Council for using environmentally friendly materials.

Even the "freebies" at NeoCon were part of the green movement: Steelcase handed out tote bags made



The spice-colored Functionality Collection is part of Mayer's "Everything's Green" Panache group of fabrics. These warm colors are among the limited range being used as accents in contract decor.



The "Uppercase" wallcovering from Source One finds flair using swirling random black script on a white background. Note the use of the red chairs with the black and white, a continuing popular color combination.



Babbette Holland, a frequent exhibitor at decor shows, hosted her first-time booth at NeoCon, displaying her light fixtures and mirrors. She was one of the few exhibitors that showed strong blue, as seen here in the round mirror and a couple of lamp bases.



The blue-and-brown color combination can incorporate a range from pale to dark and can be varied using different patterns and proportions. This is part of the Echo Collection from Kravet Contract.

from recycled vinyl billboards; Evolve Furniture Group's info packet included "seedsticks" that can be planted to grow wildflowers; another booth gave away clipboards made from recycled juice cartons. Some of this concern for a healthy indoor and outdoor environment is the result of government regulations, some is a result of concern from consumers, and some is a recognition of the good public relations buzz it generates. In the literature from NeoCon exhibitors, consumers are categorized as neutral, green, or deep green, with a prediction of rapid increases in the numbers that fall into the deep green group.

A key phrase in the green movement is "Cradle to Cradle," referring to products that are environmentally conscious from the first steps of construction to recycling into another product—thinking about the rebirth of the product before even beginning to make it. Another part of the green movement is longevity—making products that will last a long time. In the past, products for public spaces walked a fine line between being durable enough to last for a decade, yet perishable enough to need replacement every decade—due to wear and being out of style. The creation of products intended for a long life will impact color and design trends in ways that are already evident at NeoCon: lots of neutrals in carpeting and upholstery, with interest created by tone-on-tone patterns and textures. Accessories like lamps, pillows, and framed art will be used more than ever to update spaces, bringing current trend colors into the decor every few years.



Amisco, a Canadian company exhibiting for the first time at NeoCon, designs upholstered metal furniture. The orange Madrid accent chair is part of the Eclectik Collection. Although orange continues to appear as a bold accent, it has not gained ground as a mainstream trend color.



The Contour collection of carpet squares from Patcraft offers the opportunity for many pattern variations within a neutral gray tone-on-tone color range.

customized as needed.

Studio Q Furniture designs Healthscape furniture to accommodate various health care facilities—including Bariatric Chairs with wider seats (or armless benches as an alternative), and chairs designed for patients with hip problems.

Veritas™ makes large ResinArt™ Panels that can be used in many ways, from ceilings to room dividers to cabinet doors. These versatile panels (in sizes like 5' x 10") come in a huge variety of designs, because the resin can be embedded with real botanicals, film, printed patterns, textiles and other materials that let these panels serve as art. And never fear that the resin may cause dangerous outgassing—ResinArt is Greenguard indoor air quality certified.

With the continuing influence of the international market place and the unrest in the Mideastern countries we can expect to see corporate designs playing it safe as far as the design and the colors. Two main themes are neutral modern design with accents of color and a greater interest in how the product fits into the life of the earth. ■

Vivian Kistler, CMG is a 20-year member and senior chairholder of the Color Marketing Group. Kistler is the editor of the Color Names Reference book, which contains more than 37,000 names for commercial products.

Something New

In addition to the color and design trends on display at NeoCon, there are always interesting products as well.

VisionArt® is a system that houses flat panel televisions so they can be part of room decor when not in use. The system uses a fine art giclee on a motorized retracting canvas to conceal the TV. The art rolls up (operated by remote control) and disappears within the frame unit. With hundreds of art images to choose from (or you can select your own family portrait), and dozens of framing options (including full television encasements that use fans for managing the generated heat) this system can be