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Fresh contemporary draws buyers to Cologne

By Furniture Today Staff -- Furniture Today, March 9, 2009

COLOGNE, Germany — A lackluster global economy kept some buyers away from the most recent IMM Cologne Furniture Fair.

Still, the Jan. 19 to 25 event saw an increase in international visitors as well as an increase in consumers who visited the event later in the week.

The annual show drew about 100,000 buyers, according to official show results. By comparison, last year's event drew 107,000, about 6.5% higher than this year's attendance.

The figure includes an estimated 23,000 consumers who attended the show during the two days it was open to the public, which is 2,000 more than were recorded last year.

Another 40%, or 40,000 of the visitors, were from nearly 100 overseas countries, up by an estimated 9,000 from 2008.

"I am convinced that under the prevailing circumstances, we have had a good furniture trade fair," said Gerald Bose, CEO of show organizer Koelnmesse, in a statement announcing the results.

"The high level of order activity and the many trade buyers from all parts of the globe confirm our optimistic forecasts to the effect that 2009 will be a good year for furnishings, despite the global crisis," said Dirk-Uwe Klaas, managing director of the Association of the German Furniture Industry.

The show featured 1,057 exhibitors from 49 countries, roughly the same as last year. These companies displayed a largely contemporary array of upholstery and case goods geared for European and other international markets.

For many, the market remained a platform for new product launches. This included Natuzzi division Italsofa, which introduced 20 models to its Tropea and Girasole collections of stationary, motion and sectional upholstery.

Other Italian leather or case goods companies showing at Cologne included Incanto Group, Nicoletti, Calligaris and Selva.

German leather producer Koinor showed an extensive line of dinner sofas. These clean-lined contemporary pieces were shown with counter-height and gathering-height tables to help buyers see how the pieces work in casual dining settings. The tables also are contemporary in design, featuring chrome legs and bases and sleek-lined wood tops.

The Singapore Furniture Inds. Council showcased 16 companies under its Singapore Mozaic umbrella. The showcase included well-known names such as wood producers Star Furniture, Home of Homes, Koda and Eurosa and leather producers HTL International, Univonna and Air Division.

These producers fit in well with the contemporary focus of the show, while their goods also featured creative use of mixed-media elements such as rattan, teak, hairhide fabrics and chrome.

The show also include a number of American furniture producers and importers, including American Leather, Kinwai USA, Stylution USA., Stanley and Ashley. Stanley and Ashley showed in an area

highlighting more traditional western designs, while American Leather showed in an area devoted to more contemporary furnishings.

This helped give more exposure and traffic for American Leather and representatives of the High Point Market Authority and the North Carolina Furniture Export Office, which also had booths in that area of the show.

“That is the first time we have been in that environment,” said Tom Crump, director of the N.C. Furniture Export Office. “The European market is slated more towards contemporary and the traffic in that location was higher.”

While traffic at the show was down, Crump said his export-oriented U.S. clients were pleased with the show overall.

“I would call it a successful show,” he said.