

WORKING TITLE

FOR THE OCCASION OF THE 2009 DESIGN PRIMA SHOW, LONDON

Here's to us

By Ian Atkins

It's easy to question the alcohol content of the show, but with retrospect the opening party is often the most productive time to visit. People let their guards down, salesmen patter less and the rich story behind every stand is proudly and confidently told, oh and business really does still get done.

With a show filled with UK based manufactures and designers, coming from companies far and wide, with rich heritages and painfully impressive client lists; who can blame them for having a little drink to celebrate, I just hope people weren't downing any credit crunch woe

I've been to my fair share of openings, and enjoyed many an affair with fair coloured and fruity tasting, continental, free flowing...beers. But I wasn't expecting Prima to put on such a spread.

In the spirit of the office jolly, sly glasses of wine could be spotted by the eager eye by eleveners, bearing in mind the show opened at eleven. As bottles of Stella started appearing in sweaty palms throughout the day, it seemed a stand essential was a mini fridge, perhaps also an office essential it would seem.

By the time the opening party officially kicked off at 6:30 the bars were stocked, and remained stocked until close. One poor soul had the unfortunate situation of a rapid toilet refresh and chewing gum freshen up, after redecorating the stair well with a fine year of Merlot.



RUB IT BETTER

By Ian Atkins

From a land where the traffic warden comes the second Tuesday of every month and there's only one traffic light, the business design centre in London must have been quite the change for the staff of Bute Fabrics.

Its shell scheme stand giving no hint of the rich heritage this small fabric production company has; founded over fifty years ago by the fifth Marquess of the Isle of Bute and originally established to provide jobs on the island for the service men and women returning from the second war world.

The company has evolved through the decades; producing fabrics for Haute Couture in the 70's, to working with Herman Miller in the 80's and to now collaborating with Mr Tom Dixon (there's no escaping him, even on an island on the Scottish West coast).

- QUOTE OF THE DAY -

"Were you designing, or err, sales?"

PRIMA STREET STYLE



A very simple but sexy look, can't go wrong with well fitting black and grey. With a healthy looking tan this lady had a glowing smile and a subtle elegance.

This fine chap was on the Rexite stand, coupling black tailored trousers with a soft beige single breasted jacket, the violet coloured shirt helping to bring it all together with a tie complimenting his Italian brown leather shoes. Couldn't quite work out if he was Gilbert or George.

An immaculately turned out gentleman, mixing a blue and white striped shirt with a sneaky bowtie, poking out from the lapels of a black denim tailored mid length jacket. Cleverly combined with some dark aubergine coloured trousers suitably big enough to prevent his super polished black leather marching shoes from taking over. I hope he is an architect and a granddad and an art teacher.

After talking to Douglas Graham, the softly spoken managing director, it became obvious there was a great amount of pride in the factory, the skills and the knowledge and the ability to never say no to a challenge. Their new product launched at Prima is a deceptively stretchy fabric called Galloway, achieved with a mix of wool and silk, and well suited to curvaceous applications.

The fabric is made to withstand one hundred thousand rubs, that's a lot of sitting down, even for lazy people. And its not even a silly made up fact, the fabric is actually rubbed one hundred thousand times by a quality control machine called a Martindale. In the test the fabric is rubbed against a worsted fabric to simulate wear and tear. When three threads on the fabric have worn to the extent of actually breaking, it's game over.

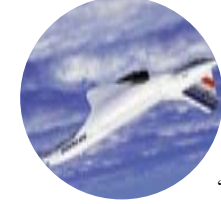
So next time you sit down, think of the quiet island of Bute, with its one traffic light and its infrequent traffic warden, where all is calm apart from the frantic machines rubbing away in the corner of the factory.

www.butefabrics.com

www.bowleather.co.uk

What do the Model T Ford, 1956 Eames lounge chair and Concorde have in common? A side from being historically monolithic design classics they were all upholstered using leather from Scottish leather company Bridge of Weir. With a heritage going back as far as 1758, their client list includes The Orient Express, The Lusitania, British Airways, the British Houses of Parliament, Gucel, the Buj Al Arab 7 star hotel in Dubai, Vertu phones and Jaguar to name but a few. They have provided leather for even claim to have helped save the world, their leather upholstering the interiors of James Bond's Aston Martin in Die Another Day, the De Lorean from Back To The Future and Lady Penelope's ghastly 6 wheeled pink limo in the Thunderbirds movie. That's quite a client list for a company based in the small Scottish town of Bridge of Weir from where it got its name. With a population of about 5,000, and Bridge of Weir leather able to output 3000 hides a day, they can produce roughly 235 times more hides a year than there are human hides in the town. And with the company being so important to the locals, many of the factory workers are following on in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, knowledge and skills being passed down through generations. Whilst they are extremely proud of their heritage, Bridge of Weir is also at the forefront of leather technology having developed the first nitrocellulose finish, fogging-free and chrome tanning processes for automotive leather. Other firsts include flame proofed leather for aircraft seats and pure aniline upholstery leather for furniture. This is a company who've been doing what they do for a long time, and as a result, know what they're doing.

By David Wilson



By Lorna Robertson

Forty Quid Chair In A Box

Making ourselves comfortable on Pledge's vivacious office chairs, I got chatting with Mike Arding, Design and Development Manager and Colin Mc Nair, Sales Manager of Pledge Office Chairs. Most engaging about Mike and Colin is their sound knowledge of the manufacturing process in relation to his design role. Mike himself is based at the factory in Leighton Buzzard and invited Working Title to visit.

In his endearing Glaswegian accent, Colin discussed the sales of high quality office seating in relation to everyday use: 'Employees sit on these chairs eight hours a day, for something that is used so much, why would you not spend the money on a high quality item?'

With this in mind, when arriving at the factory I was eager to see the type of chairs Pledge provided their employees with. When I ask Mike which brand of chair the employees sit on, he jokes "They get told off if they sit on anything else". In response to this I ask which chair he sits on, and discover the designer is the exception to this Pledge rule. "I have a hybrid chair" Mike explains, the back is a Swedish design attached to a seat which contains a type of mechanism and memory foam, responding to and supporting your derriere.

Leaving the show rooms I adorned a high visibility vest for the factory tour where I saw a Pledge chair from start to finish. Pledge is an old fashioned company in the sense that every part of the manufacturing happens in the Leighton Buzzard site. The factory used to be a Bread factory, there is a history of manufacturing engrained into the building. The skilled staff of 150 range from sales to metal bending to upholstery. The engineering department deal with the metal work of the frames and as I watch the morning batch get blasted in the oven, Millie Small's 'My Boy Lolly Pop' is chirping out of a nearby radio.

Pledge's key item is the swivel chair, still in their range is a design known as Pro Activ from 1995, the ultimate "Forty Quid Chair In A Box". At the other end of the spectrum is the Edge range where Mike is able to have the most fun. Less phone room, more foyer furniture. Clients come to Mike with colours in mind and other times Mike is allowed to add his tastes into the mix: "I get very excited about colours" he says in the chair showroom of apple green, royal purple and canary yellow. Describing office chairs as things "people get used to" we discussed the challenge of trying to inject excitement into the product just to have clients ask if it comes in grey.

If you go to Wimbledon this year you will be sitting on Pledge chairs, in a fetching shade of Wimbledon green. Not bad for a company that started back in 1970 with a team of seven, in a small two storey building in Leighton Buzzard.

www.pledgechairs.com



CURATED CASTORS

By Ed Vince

With this years Prima being my first, I didn't know quite what to expect. I hoped the exhibition would resemble a TV studio that specialised in office based programs, imagining all these different sets in one place, with furniture and purposefully positioned stationary all arranged with the intention of putting their product in context inside the vast space of the Business Design Centre. I wasn't disappointed.

Other than this, the thing I liked most about the show was the honesty and humble way in which the companies presented their products and their brand, perhaps this was because the show was primarily business to business so none of that frilly fancy PR free stuff was deemed necessary, but perhaps more likely it was due to credit crunch cutbacks. Either way, I would like to think it was because the majority of these exhibitors are trusted and respected traders within the industry, whose name and product speaks for itself.

One stand that particularly caught my attention was that of Guy-Raymond, a family run business who have specialised in the design, manufacture and supply of castor

wheels since 1948. Minimal is certainly a word I would use to describe the space, with a simple mid height shelf running around the walls, two glass display cabinets and a central table with 4 chairs. I particularly liked the signage which was attached using masking tape, wonderfully temporary looking.

The product was the focus, and when the product looks as good as this, why should it ever be anything else. The shelves were lined with carefully located collections of castor wheels and castor wheel paraphernalia, with all the available sizes in each range ordered to create a gradient from smallest to largest to smallest, perfectly symmetrical.

Removing these objects from their functional context, on the bottom of office chairs, meant I saw them in a new light with a new appreciation for the design and manufacturing quality of each one. The materials and colours helped to remove them further, with chrome and 24 carat gold inlays, brushed or polished, turning these humble castor wheels into objects of desire. I wanted a set, and I think Kanye West would too.

www.guy-raymond.com



lounging in a bed of nettles

If you have ever been unfortunate enough to experience the biting pain of a stinging nettle, you will know never to allow it to touch your skin. However, the textile company Camira, in association with De Monford University have produced an upholstery fabric out of the nasty weed, encouraging you to sit on the stuff. Sting Plus is the result of four years of research and development into using the common stinging nettle ("Urtica Diocia") as the raw material fibre input for this exciting textile. It may be unusual to imagine a farmer welcoming and harvesting this troublesome weed on his/her land but that is exactly what some are doing. Nettles are a

perennial crop, growing rapidly from the spring, often reaching 2.5 metres before harvesting. As you can imagine, they are incredibly easy to grow and look after (as I am sure any budding gardeners reading this will agree with bitterly), and can be grown on land otherwise unsuitable for crops. Also, interestingly, they have natural fire retardant properties which allow the fabric to meet UK flammability standards without chemical treatment. Sting Plus is just one of the many environmentally friendly fabrics in Camira's product range.

www.camirafabrics.com

By David Wilson



By David Wilson

- IMAGE OF THE DAY -