Louise Bradley
Founder, Louise Bradley
Louise Bradley is regarded as a leading interior designer, internationally renowned for her contemporary styling, elegant lines and timeless appeal. Louise has a wealth of knowledge and informs her clients through her design studio and two showrooms on Walton Street and Kimbolton Court, London.
www.louisebradley.co.uk

Rebekah Caudwell
Founder, Rebekah Caudwell Design
Rebekah founded her design practice in 2009. Based in London and NYC, Rebekah has projects running simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic. Her design work is mainly residential with a primary focus on Greenwich Village townhouses.
rebekahcaudwelldesign.com

Anna-Grace Davidtson
Founder, Anna Casa
Anna-Grace Davidtson is the Founder of the pioneering Anna Casa design showroom, which exhibits exclusive, one-off pieces of luxury crafted furniture and lighting, scrupulously sourced from the world’s brightest design stars and expert artisans.
www.annacasa.net

Simone du Bois
Brand Director, Decorex International
Simone studied interior design in New Zealand, working for an interior design consultancy before moving to the trade side, working for a textile manufacturer and distributor. Simone has been at Decorex, working for UBM, for almost four years.
www.ubm.com

Helen Fewster and Rebecca Tucker, Co-Directors, Suna Interior Design
Suna Interior Design is an award-winning boutique interior design consultancy providing interior services for property developers and the hospitality industry. Helen Fewster and Rebecca Tucker head up the London-based studio ensuring that a high level of attention is dedicated to each client and project.
www.sunainteriordesign.com

Mark Gabbertas
Founder, Gabbertas Studio
Mark Gabbertas founded the Gabbertas Studio in 2002 following valuable years training as a cabinet maker and working as a designer-maker. Mark is considered one of the UK’s most sought after talents, and his emergence as an unofficial ‘paterfamilias’ of contemporary furniture design.
www.gabbertas.com
I should let you know that I am not particularly fond of the word trend. It suggests transience, last year’s model, the autumn/winter collection from yesteryear and most of all, fashion.

As a designer I have always resisted this notion’s siren call and instead hold dear the perhaps unfashionable idea that the role of the designer should be concerned primarily with trying to do something better than that which has gone before, rather than something that is merely different. Different for the sake of different is not really good enough, since it implicitly suggests it might be acceptable to replace a piece of furniture or indeed a whole interior scheme if it runs the risk of appearing old.

Over the last decade, The Gabbertas Studio has been quietly establishing itself as one of the leading design studios around and using the time to hone the design principles that define the practice’s approach and particularly, an intuitive belief that the objective is to create character through simplicity. Mark Gabbertas founded the Gabbertas Studio in 2002 following valuable years training as a cabinet maker and working as a designer-maker. His lack of formal design training has proved no obstacle to him becoming one of the UK’s most sought after talents, and his emergence as an unofficial ‘paterfamilias’ of contemporary furniture design. The studio has received an extraordinary number of awards, including two Red Dots, 11 Design Guild Marks, and the Good Design Award from The Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design; these for its work for leading international brands including Allermuir, Boss, Chorus, Gloster, Leland, Oasiq, and Oiside. Irrepressible and even modest, Gabbertas’ commitment to his role and vision is well known and here he lends his serious design expertise to our furniture chapter.
hat. Of course the furniture industry is predicated on the offering and purchase of new designs – it is the lifeblood of the process, but it is our belief that new doesn’t have to mean ‘on trend’; it can actually mean better.

I fear however that not every company that launches a new design is doing it better. Any casual observer of what is new in Milan will be swamped by the plethora of designs being presented for the first time, many of which never make it into production because the response to them is underwhelming. The designs that do survive the critical eye, when considered en-masse, are indicative and representative of gentle shifts in a collective consciousness that affects what designers design, what specifiers select and what consumers buy. This is what piques my interests. Yes, some of these are trends, but I would like to think that the many are in fact fundamentally more significant and are a response by designers to the changing patterns of their audiences’ behaviour and lifestyle – their needs if you like – in combination with truly visionary designers anticipating as yet uncharted demand.

One might have thought that following a number of lean years when the challenging economic climate has led manufacturers to tread cautiously, the promise of more buoyant times would bring with it a confidence that fostered greater experiment and boldness. Well, the picture seems mixed. A number of manufacturers are seemingly still playing safe by reissuing or refreshing existing collections and Milan this year had plenty of examples with some finding inspiration from the archives or ‘tweaking’ existing designs. Wonderful products, but not strictly innovative. This restraint is countered by an equal number of brands pushing boundaries and launching designs that are fresh and demonstrate truly innovative thinking. Brands like Kristalia, E15, Alias, Hay and Andreu World all extended their portfolio with impressive collections.

I think that the theme of colour, how it is used and the actual colours chosen is of significance. The principle of regarding colour as integral to a design’s DNA in my view was established in the recent past by companies like Muuto where the Visu chair range is almost unimaginable without its vibrant skin, and E15 with the Houdini chair range where the veneers used in its construction come alive when lacquered. Similarly, I find it difficult to imagine the Moroso collections in monochrome. It is also interesting to note that is not unusual now for a wooden chair or table range to be launched only in coloured or stained woods… take a look at a Ligne Roset catalogue for a mainstream take on this idea. Alternatively there are brands who have taken existing designs and reissued them using colour as the variable. Cassina did this recently with contrasting frame and upholstery colours for the

Above: Officina table range
famous LC2 chair and of course Hella Jongerius is working her magic on the Vitra catalogue including the iconic Eames Aluminium Group. Even Anglepoise is launching a take on its classic lamp by Paul Smith whereby individual elements are given his trademark colour treatment. In terms of the colours and palettes that are being used there are two clear trends it seems [yes these are trends], pastels continue to appeal in various soft hues of pink, blue and yellow. In contrast to this is an emergence of primary colours coming to the fore, strong blues, reds and yellows. Oh and black.

Much has been written about the emergence of craft as a major influence on contemporary furniture design, and I believe this is here to stay. It is indicative of a newly awoken interest in how things are made, a celebration of the beauty of technique and the value of process. The critical observation is that the process is rarely seen as an end in itself, but rather a way to express the provenance, intrinsic worth and emotional appeal of a design. The incorporation of craft techniques and finishes is evident in many new collections and results in designs that are entirely modern. The hand processing of fabrics, the weaving of cane and rush, traditional lacquer finishes, expressed wood joints and hand finished woodworking, intricate veneer inlay and sandblasted timber treatment are just some of the skills in evidence. What appeals about this approach is that the designs have a character that embraces notions of the hand made, tradition and longevity of appeal, all of which tick boxes for me.

Interesting also is that these ‘old fashioned’ techniques are often combined and contrasted with great effect with modern industrial processes and materials. A good example of this new aesthetic is the Officina table range by the Bouroullec brothers for Magis whose frame is created via the process of hand hammering and contrasted with simple graphic tabletops in resolutely modern materials.

Will this table system be used in an office or commercial environment? The answer is probably yes and the blurring of the boundaries between domestic and commercial environments continues apace with offices increasingly unbuttoned and employees expecting less formal workplaces. A cursory glance at any leading furniture brand’s portfolio in the commercial sector will include furniture that allows offices to look like living room sets and break out zones that resemble nightclub relaxation areas. Gone are the days when a desk was a requisite for work, instead this is replaced by a need for softer feel furniture that still incorporates the latest technology, and which meets the demand for the air charging of portable devises, integrated wifi and...
MARK GABBERTAS

Bluetooth connectivity, electronic booking and remote chair numbering systems. This is not to say that domestic and commercial furniture is interchangeable, but rather that designers including ourselves are tasked with designing items that are still highly functional, but less formal in their aesthetic.

One of the ways of achieving this has been through the use of a new palette of natural materials and particularly those of higher value and perceived rarity. It will have been difficult for the increase in the use of wood to go unnoticed as a mainstream replacement for steel and plastic components, and clearly this material allows for a more mellow ‘mass produced’ items. The Uncino collection by Mattiazzi is an interesting take on the central pedestal chair typology. Exposed wooden frames for sofas, storage units and tables are widely accepted now as viable alternatives to steel especially. I sense this is partly an expression of a subconscious desire for things unprocessed which also might explain the popularity of marble and stone for table tops in commercial environments. The interesting take on this welcome celebration of materials that last and age well is the mimicry of the natural material in a high tech form. This amalgam is seen in ceramic surfaces for tables textured and printed to look like wood and occasional tables that use plastic photorealistic representations of cross-sawn tree trunks.

This, the last theme is close to our hearts. The idea of designing furniture that is intended to facilitate the user doing a particular activity easier, more efficiently or simply more pleasurably. The key being understanding of how you want the user to feel to encourage this process. In commercial environments, the move towards areas within offices dedicated to specific types of activity, whether relaxing, presenting, informal meeting, thinking etc, continues to gain acceptance.

We as a studio spend a lot of time asking ourselves how to design furniture, which encourages and makes as effective as possible these activities. As a result we have designed a seating and table programme called Haven for Allermuir, which continues to set the standard for this type of furniture. The modular sofa comes in two heights and can be used to create informal meeting areas, private spaces or communal relaxation pods, and its inspiration came from watching how neighbours actually interact more when separated by a fence, which gives each a subconscious sense of security. This fence is mimicked in the sofa back height on which people lean and talk over freely. Buzzispace do this type of furniture well and are attuned into the fast changing requirements of the contemporary office.

www.gabbertas.com

Above: The Uncino collection for Mattiazzi