

**DAREDEVIL WOMAN**

A wingsuit pilot's bid to jump off the highest peaks in the Alps

**WORDS OF COMFORT**

How writing helped Edward St Aubyn exorcise his demons

**DESIGN SPECIAL**

The shape of interiors to come

# The emperor's clothes

Ralph Lauren, the man behind the brand

**Cactuses** by Pierre Chameau, Martin Herzig and Pauline Lemberger at ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne (ecal.ch). Embedded sensors allow the artificial cacti to react by making noises when they are stroked. To see a video of the ECAL students' *Delirious Home* projects, visit [vimeo.com/90425702](http://vimeo.com/90425702)



## Welcome to the house of fun

Purring cacti, clever clocks and smoking cats gave visitors something to smile about at this year's Milan Design Week. By David Nicholls

**Feelgood factor** Every year designers and furniture brands from around the world present their latest creations during Milan Design Week, an event that is widely seen as a barometer for measuring the style and mood of the design world.

This year visitors were treated to a glorious, sunshine-filled week, and it was through a lens of fine weather, gelato and chilled prosecco that many will have noticed something that has been missing in recent years. Little by little 'design' is beginning to lighten up. A new-found sense of playfulness cropped up everywhere from the corporate atmosphere of the Salone del Mobile (the biggest event of the week) to the neo-classical palazzos that had been commandeered for pop-up exhibits. Pharrell Williams's *Happy* was the soundtrack to the week: colours were bright and bold, patterns were energetic and plentiful.

The Dutch designer Maarten Baas pitched himself as the ring-master of a circus-themed show that featured funhouse mirrors, chairs twirling on a carousel, and man-sized gumball machines made from bronze and crystal. In other places one could see a certain cartoon quality, most successfully in the upholstered

furniture made in collaboration between the designer Martino Gamper, the artist Peter McDonald and the Italian firm Moroso. Collections were peppered with elements of delight and whimsy that challenged visitors not to crack a smile.

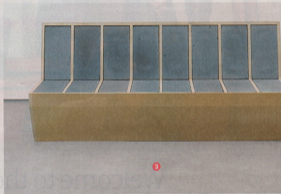
The students of the Swiss design school ECAL won the Milano Design Award, which recognises the best exhibition of the week. The charming and surreal show, entitled *Delirious Home*, featured designs for the home that were embedded with sensors and microcomputers that allowed users to interact with them. Realistic-looking potted cacti purred, sang or gurgled when they were petted or scratched. We were encouraged to 'play with time' by standing in front of a wall clock whose hour and minute hands imitated the position of our arms. Pendant lights could be switched on and off by touching the shadows they cast on the wall. Not only was this show a timely and witty parody of the 'smart home' and our relationship with technology, it captured the feelgood mood that helped jolly up an industry that can often take itself rather seriously, and has struggled to find much to smile about in recent years.



**Other highlights from the week**

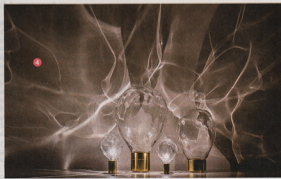
Milan Design Week has a reputation for being a place where new names come to the fore and established designers flex their creative muscles. This year the work of the Slovenian designer Nika Zupanc ([nikazupanc.com](http://nikazupanc.com)) stood out wherever it was shown. Zupanc has a distinctly glamorous style that calls to mind the Hollywood sirens of yore. She is clever enough to avoid the pitfalls of a Mae West-style pastiche, however. Her most notable presence was with *Sé* London where she was responsible for the entire furniture and lighting collection, which had a feminine, 1950s feel. So too did Zupanc's new fold-down Forever Bed (1), an enormous trinket box of a piece that was a highlight at Rossana Orlandi's curated exhibition at the historic Museo Bagatti Valsecchi.

Sarah Lucas, one of the Young British Artists who rose to fame in the 1990s alongside Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, was one of the more surprising names to pop up on the list of exhibitors.



Lucas is best known for her self-portraits and suggestive sculptures, but her show for the London gallery Sadie Coles HQ ([sadiccoles.com](http://sadiccoles.com)) featured a collection of austere chairs, benches and room dividers (3) made from MDF and breeze blocks. Equally brutal but with a richer exploration of materials was the Italian design team Formafantasma's *De Natura Fossilium* (2), presented by Gallery Libby Sellers ([libbysellers.com](http://libbysellers.com)). Basalt, volcanic glass, lava rock and obsidian, materials that found their genesis in the 2013 eruption of Mount Etna, were all used to make furniture, vessels, clocks and even textiles.

At the Salone Satellite exhibition of new talent, the London-based Taiwanese duo Poetic Lab ([poetic-lab.com](http://poetic-lab.com)) stood out for its innovative furniture and lighting collection, *Bamboo Forest*. Elsewhere in the city their *Ripple Lights* (4), produced by the Austrian crystal company J&L Lobmeyr, delighted viewers as they used movement and uneven surfaces to create the





shadowed impression of light dancing across the surface of rippling water.

Strong lighting dazzled throughout Milan. The best included the new lighting collection by Michele de Lucchi (5) for Hermès (hermes.com), the gloriously minimal Plane lights (6) by Tom Dixon (tomdixon.net), and the jagged Crystal Rock designs by Arik Levy (7) for Lasvit (lasvit.com).

The ubiquity of Patricia Urquiola shows no signs of waning. This is no bad thing, as the Milan-based Spanish designer continues to stand out for her warm, characterful designs. This could be seen in her pieces for the Botswana-based Mabeo Furniture and her first ever kitchen (10), for the Italian firm Boffi (boffi.com). Her Salinas concept suggested an organic and bohemian approach to kitchens with a modular design that features a mixture of materials and textures including wood, copper and zinc and unusual elements such as patterned lava work surfaces.

One of the stand-out brands at the Salone del



Mobile was Gebrüder Thonet Vienna, maker of the classic Thonet cafe chair. Making a 16-year-old brand look fresh and modern while still being true to its core identity is a tricky business. But it avoided any mutton-dressed-as-lamb accusations with a strong collection (8) made with a series of interesting designers, including the Swedish collective Front, and the British designer Nigel Coates. Each made good use of the company's rich heritage of bentwood production and brought their own sense of flair and style.

Heritage was also the key word at J Hill Standard (hillstandard.com), which made its debut in Milan. The company is based in Waterford in Ireland, which has a long tradition of crystal production, but as with Stoke-on-Trent's potteries and High Wycombe's furniture industry, it has certainly seen better times. In a bid to revive Waterford's fortunes, J Hill Standard has launched two impressive collections designed by Scholten & Baijings (9) and Martino Gamper.