First Look 2015 at NYDC

Many events celebrate the design community, but one of our favorites simply embodies the design community in New York for one night. Last week we attended the 11th annual First Look at the New York Design Center (NYDC) in Manhattan. The festive atmosphere and multitude of contract showrooms displaying new products inevitably draws comparisons to NeoCon. While NeoCon is much larger, First Look is where the rubber meets the road in the country's largest workplace furnishings market. And this year a very large concentration of industry newbies and lifers all came out to evaluate, discuss and scrutinize the latest product introductions.

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Born & Raised at Bentley

A whole gaggle of outcomes are possible when a major rebranding campaign is realized, but one company that currently embodies a successful rebrand in the industry is commercial carpeting manufacturer Bentley. Since embarking on its rebranding journey two years ago, Bentley has purposefully returned to its roots – primarily by taking a wide-angle, big picture view of Los Angeles’ influence on its people and products through the lens of music and fashion, and immersing itself within the city center. The company has placed an admirably equal emphasis on exploring a return to heritage and seeking the next evolution of its brand.

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Being Smart about Textiles – Part II

In the second installment of a three-part series, we continue our coverage of the NeoCon 2015 “Smart Textiles for Modern Environments” seminar led by Deb Barrett, a leading window fashion design expert, trend strategist, and principal of Window Dressings. Part I focused on the basics of fabric and fabric selection. For Part II, we present a comprehensive guide to the newest cutting edge technologies being applied to create “smart” textiles, as well as examples of these new “smart” textiles.

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Concurrents - Environmental Psychology: Home at Work

Recently, there has been a lot of useful discussion of the workplace “home bases” people make for themselves and the psychological value of those nests. We invest a lot of psychic energy in the care and management of the places where we work, even temporary worksites. We customize them to our professional needs and personalize them with objects that send silent messages to others and ourselves about our goals and strengths. Designers and managers should aim to provide people with a home that aligns with their personal values and their view of self-worth within an organization.

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Companies of all sizes, shapes and cultures naturally rely on their history and brand legacy in ways that will hopefully guide and inform their futures in a positive manner. A whole gaggle of outcomes are possible when a major rebranding campaign is realized. Some efforts fall flat because they rely too heavily on legacy and fail to innovate; others swing in the opposite direction by straying too far from the existing culture and shoot down a path that ultimately doesn’t make sense for the brand.

One company that seems to have found balance between the two is commercial carpeting manufacturer Bentley, officially incorporated as Bentley Mills, Inc.

Bentley has accomplished a lot of positive buzz within the industry as a result of two years of exuberant rejuve-nation efforts. Scooping up two Best of NeoCon – Small Showroom design awards and two Best of Competition for NeoCon Showrooms in the past two years (read: heating up!), Bentley is well on its way to developing an exhilarating future for itself.

Why the rebrand? Well, Bentley has certainly been through its share of transitions. Acquired by Interface, Inc. in 1993, it eventually merged in 2000 with Prince Street, also owned by Interface, and rebranded as Bentley Prince Street. Then in August 2012, the company returned to its private company status. Rebranded simply as Bentley, the company named Ralph Grogan as president and CEO and brought back Bentley veteran Jim Harley as COO, and here today we have perhaps the clearest depiction of what Bentley itself would like to be.
The company has placed an admirably equal emphasis on exploring a return to heritage and seeking the next evolution of its brand. Its people are fiercely proud of its history.

“When we entered into this industry in the late 1970s, early 80s, carpet in general was a very utilitarian type of product,” said Sherry Dreger, VP of Marketing for Bentley. “Bentley introduced a product with fashion, performance and luxury.”

The time and location for this type of product were both ripe for the picking. In 1979, Los Angeles culture was evolving, embracing the punk rock movement on both fashion runways (Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen, to name a few) and in music clubs and garages. When Bentley opened its doors in Los Angeles, it did so in the middle of a cultural exploration, leading the push to bring fashion to the floor.

“We bought different types of machinery than other companies to create our products,” said Ms. Dreger. “Our Velva Weave machine was a very slow-moving tool that could create these very high, plush textured patterns that almost looked carved. It gave us this patterning capability that allowed us
to move into a whole new direction. We’ve transitioned those patterns to the machinery we have today in order to extend that strength.”

Since embarking on its rebranding journey two years ago, the commercial carpeting manufacturer has purposefully returned to its roots – primarily by taking a wide-angle, big picture view of Los Angeles’ influence on its people and products through the lens of music and fashion, and immersing itself within the city center. Bentley’s home in Los Angeles inspires everything the company does.

“We wanted to pay attention to legacy and history, but also take a modern look at what we want to accomplish in the future,” said Ms. Dreger. “At some
point, Bentley drifted and lost some of the things that made it special. We’re re-centering and bringing a lot of those qualities back.

“We have seen an incredible amount of growth in the past two years. We’re working hard to develop strategies to maintain that growth because we have a huge opportunity to grow. The Born and Raised campaign talks a lot about the environment we work in and our company culture. But it’s not just about the company, but also about the city we choose to work in.”

One would think that after having gone through more than a few layers of restructuring, Bentley would have a tough, murky road ahead. But, one marked advantage the company had was the preservation of its talent throughout years of transition. Many of the people who began at Bentley are still with the company or have returned since the rebranding.

One such man is Bentley VP of Design Todd van der Kruik, who returned to the brand in December 2012 and worked previously with the company in its Bentley Prince Street days. Since the beginning of Bentley’s rebrand, Mr. van der Kruik and Ms. Dreger, a former Bentley employee who also returned in 2012, have guided the design and marketing of its products to great success.

Last year’s “New Bohemian” products and NeoCon showroom took a bold stab in a brand new cultural direction by way of new-age nomadic freedom, and if a ‘wow-factor’ was the goal, then it was definitely a success. This year’s “Born & Raised” theme embraced a more balanced exploration of past and future by juxtaposing grit and glamour in a ‘dive bar luxe’ theme. The 10th floor Merchandise Rough Idea at NeoCon 2015

Trance at NeoCon 2015

Trance at NeoCon 2015
Mart showroom, inspired by iconic New York City rock club CBGB, brings the juxtaposition of grit and glamour into a modern space.

This year, the Bentley design team launched a few products about a month prior to NeoCon. Trance™ and Magnetism™, Bentley’s signature 2015 product introductions, embody a classic-to-contemporary mantra. The newest addition to the company’s Curio Collection, the two highly textured styles embody beauty and sophistication.

With Trance and Magnetism, Bentley repurposed its legacy tufting equipment to create hearty, luxurious textures that are classic and contemporary. Through fiber innovation and looking at using the machines in a new way, they were able to create luxury at new ounce weights. The heavier weight products have a lush hand feel and feature innovative use of Antron® fibers by combining multiple dye and luster levels with varying yarn processing methods.

“We used the latest tufting technology to take a new aesthetic to more price points,” said Mr. van der Kruik. “This opens us up to much broader work, rather than just the conference room and executive suite.”

Trance and Magnetism’s soft geometrics radiate with a palette of sophisticated neutrals: complex, complementary blends of warm and cool saturations of taupes and browns, grounded with greys and blacks.

Designed for unique flexibility, the coordinating styles can be installed individually or together. Available in carpet tile and broadloom, Trance utilizes mixed denier yarns and luster levels to create a bouclé-style loop texture. Magnetism, a modular-only offering, combines two textures – a wide stripe of Trance with a lower profile companion stripe of a darker value that offers added dimension. The lower profile, level loop gives the appearance of a random, asymmetrical pattern.

The pre-NeoCon launch of Trance and Magnetism was a calculated exercise in bringing the discovery process back to the flooring industry.

“This industry used to have a very experimental quality to it, very mad scientist-like,” said Ms. Dreger. “A lot of that presence has been lost. People would pull out a suitcase of what they were working on and show it to designers. With these black books, we wanted to reinvigorate that experience of discovery.”
Other products in the pipeline that were on show at the NeoCon showroom are Subliminal and Anthem. Luxe and more limited in color, these textiles take on the qualities of a limited edition collection. Anthem may be available in November of this year, and Subliminal is scheduled to debut in 2016.

All along Bentley’s 30-year journey, a few notable consistencies have persisted in the brand’s culture. Bentley headquarters, located in a City of Industry, CA, building in Los Angeles County, has served as home to the company since its inception. The company is obviously proud of its California origins and considers itself a leader in the sustainability values that so many companies in the Golden State proudly champion.

The Bentley building itself has experienced transformation throughout the years; it is one of the first manufacturing facilities in the nation to achieve LEED certification, and was just recently upgraded to LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations and Maintenance (EBOM) Gold certification.

“This is important to us as a California company,” said Ms. Dreger. “The fact that our product is actually manufactured out of a LEED-EBOM Gold building is pretty amazing, because this is an old, old building. We want to continue retrofitting and continue seeking a competitive edge by expanding those capabilities.”

Leadership in sustainability has also been a constant in Bentley history. In addition to a steady stream of sustainability and environmental awards for both innovative products and processes, the company has a carpet reclamation program, was the first carpet manufacturer to install an on-site solar array to reduce carbon footprint in 1999, and produces its products to comply with many of the latest green certification systems.

At Bentley, we see a bright future ahead, if only simply for the well-rounded way they’ve woven their reinvention together. We can’t wait to see what’s next!