

FURNITURE CONVERSATION

Looking at wallpapers while having a melange and a cheese strudel. Calculating the measurements of a new desk over a pint. Or buying a bag while drinking cold apple juice on a very hot summer day.

Visitors of “das moebel” come for three reasons: Either they want to spend some time in the café, buy the products exhibited there or – both. The story of how this unique concept originated and what is going to happen in the future is told by Lothar Trierenberg and Markus Luger.

Even if „moebel-friends” know the story behind it: What are the origins of “das moebel”?

ML: Actually, the first idea was to open up a furniture shop. But gradually the coffee house-idea came up, because it seemed more interesting and also offered decided advantages – the main advantage being obviously, that people can use the furniture and find themselves in a relaxed shopping atmosphere. You can come as often as you like, without having a sales assistant sneaking up on you and asking if you want to buy something.

What do potential customers of „das moebel” look like? Who shops at “das moebel”?

LT: Well, the customers are also purchasers, to be sure, but there is a certain difference. The majority of guests in the café doesn't buy the furniture or doesn't buy it yet. On the other side, there are typical customers who only come to the café because they want to buy something. We have always defined our target group as “Second- or Third-furnishing”-people – not young people who furnish their apartment for the first time and don't have a lot of money, but people who want furniture for life. Furniture that can endure a lot and therefore may also cost a bit more.

„das moebel” also cares about young, non-established designers and manufacturers; what are the advantages for them?

LT: I think that was the second and most important impulse to put this idea into practice – to offer a platform for the non-established young scene, most of all to reach the public; not only for selling products but to have a chance of being on exhibition. To assert themselves on the market in a way and see the reactions of the public.

Probably also to see if the products are functional...

ML: A performance test, yes. As a matter of fact, designers did that time and again: exhibiting their products, not only because they wanted to sell them but to see if they go down well with the public and, of course, if they are durable.

How do you usually come in contact with the designers in the first place? Is there a difference to your previous approach?

LT: Well, in the beginning, usually the designers made contact with us; they got to know our concept, were interested and wanted to participate. That has changed a bit, as we are also approaching designers by ourselves now – telling them that we are interested in their products and would like to include them in our program. But easily 50% of the designers still get to know us somehow and offer us their products.

Are these designers primarily Viennese or Austrian?

LT: Generally, yes. But we have also very successful cooperations with Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Denmark. From the beginning on, our main concern has been to operate in the local area – however you want to define it: Vienna, Austria, Central Europe – and to maintain international, but not necessarily worldwide exchange.

Rather stay in Central Europe, then?

LT: Yes. Austria alone is too small, but bringing the things that are produced here into the Central European area makes more sense to me than manufacturing in the Far East and selling in America.

[...]

What are your plans for the future? – As of November 2006, you will open up a new shop. Do you think that customers might rather buy something there than going to the café?

LT: It's all about making use of the advantages of the „moebel“-idea and decreasing the disadvantages. Good about the café is the accessible presentation platform where you can approach the products and test them without much inhibition. Detrimental to it is the frequent usage of the products in the coffee house. The café is quite established by now and it's very busy; therefore, the furniture is not as visible as it would be in an exhibition.

ML: Sooner or later you reach the limit where the symbiosis doesn't work anymore.

So you have to break it up, to give both parts the room they had from the beginning on.

ML: Right. As long as they are balancing each other, the design part and the café part, there is a symbiosis. But if one part of the concept starts to predominate – in this case the café –, then it is at the expense of the other.

Would you like to talk a little bit about the new shop?

LT: Come and see!... Well, principally the shop is the obvious extension of the café's showroom possibilities with the same product mix we have been exhibiting there – with the main emphasis on Austria and Central Europe regarding production, but with the possibility to show more products that can't be integrated in the coffee house. This is really a great chance: Liveliness, experimental activity and the performance test can take place in the café. The ideal case, meaning the things that stand the test in the café, can be sold over the next ten years with the certificate “six months coffee house usage” as a durable product in the shop.

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