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Kortrijk Report | Design Without the Traffic Jams

By *FELIX BURRICHTER*

Courtesy of Junya Ishigama Junya Ishigama's Drop table for Living Divani.

“Like Milan without the ruffraff” is the way that a representative of an important European furniture manufacturer recently described *Intérieur*, the biannual contemporary design fair (which runs through Sunday) in Kortrijk, a Flemish town near the Franco-Belgian border. Kortrijk is small and friendly, the taxis are free (at least to and from the Expo fairground), and it's a mere 18 miles away from a Eurostar connection, which is music to the ears of any design editor who was grounded by the ash cloud in April.

But Kortrijk's real appeal is the roster of prestigious design companies that come to show their newest wares in a quieter, more manageable setting, far from the hectic wheelings and dealings alla Milanese. This year, they included *Tom Dixon*, *Moroso*, *e15*, *Flos*, *Established & Sons*, *Jan Kath*, *Moustache* and *Zanotta*, as well as more local players like the lighting manufacturer *tossB*, *Modular* and the Dutch firm *Oormerk*. Across the street from the main fairground is where the homegrown design hero *Arne Quinze* set up shop with *Supérieur*, in a mini-fair-cum-design exhibition that he initiated with an eclectic group of collaborators like the cutting-edge 3D-printing company *.MGX by Materialise*, the backpack giant *Eastpak* and the architectural materials bank *3form*.

Courtesy of Max Lipsey Max Lipsey's Acciaio Series seating.

Given that it was announced as the highlight of the fair, *Intérieur*'s big design competition and young designer showcase was surprisingly hard to find, tucked away in the basement of the main fairground building, with only a needle's eye of an entrance. One of the more promising entries was a design by *Max Lipsey*, an American graduate of Design Academy Eindhoven, who received an honorable mention for *Acciaio*, a lightweight lounge chair, dining chair and stool that are made of the tapered tubes used in steel racing bicycles. But overall, the young designer section seemed a tad unadventurous, as if inadvertently held back by the fair's more mercantile ambitions one flight up. It was left to the Japanese architect Junya Ishigami — fresh from receiving the Golden Lion award at the recent *Venice Architecture Biennale* — to add a slightly less pragmatic touch. As *Intérieur*'s guest of honor, he was given a pavilion in the main entrance hall, which he painted in his signature shades of blinding whites. It was outfitted with Ishigami's collection for the Italian company *Living Divani*, which includes a small family of wispy white chairs called, well, *Family*, and the *Drop table*, a wondrous object made of clear Perspex with an optically distorting, lens-shaped top. The installation, which Ishigami christened *Picnic*, was the *real* highlight of the fair, a perfect marriage between technological

experimentation and the architect's uncompromising aesthetic.

Intérieur Kortrijk is open to the public through Sunday.

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