



Leading the world

Contemporary British furniture is unparalleled for design quality and after visiting the Arts & Crafts Legacy show Andrea Hargreaves says it is due a distinctive label

The 21st Century Furniture – the Arts & Crafts Legacy shows were originally intended to take place once every two years but such was the success of last year's inaugural event that Martin Grierson was asked to curate another in April.

And such was the excitement that this latest selling exhibition at The Millinery Works in Islington, London, provoked – and I use the word with purpose – that by the end of the first private view eight pieces were bearing red stickers. For makers who might design one showpiece item every one to two years and use it as a marketing vehicle rather than as something to sell, that is quite a result.

As David Savage put it in the catalogue: "We see here and now a period of furniture making being referred to as a 'Golden Period' and once again British furniture makers as a movement are leading the world."

Powerful show

The gallery has an open but homely look conducive to furniture display and the visitor was met by a roomful of tables, chairs and cabinets, each one of which is thought-provoking whether through material used, its form or its construction. It's very much a case of he – or she – who dares, wins.

And there were many winners here. At The Millinery Works Derek Rothera and Brian Thompson specialise in Arts & Crafts furniture, thus the Arts & Crafts Legacy part of the show's title. Surely, we mused, being able to put together such a powerful show indicated that the work of the 40 or so designer/makers featured should be accorded its own instant label, one that would be recognised by Joe Public as a reference point.

Brian observed that the "Old Masters" – the likes of John Makepeace, Martin Grierson, David Savage – were following on from the Arts & Crafts line but making it their own through innovative use of material and organic design.

Derek said they were bringing on the next generation – many of whom were exhibiting – in their train, in effect constituting a new movement.

So what should it be called? Amid wonderful pieces boasting curves, textures, complexities and free-thinking design, executed in a myriad materials that the Cotswold Men would have shed their workshop neckties for, we struggled to find words to name a movement that is not so much nascent but a bawling and screaming adult that style-savvy collectors are buying into, no doubt

with an eye to the future themselves.

Brainstorming words like curvilinear, materials, native, organic, wave, form, elemental, nothing seemed to sum up the whole achievement of what is undoubtedly a movement until we started to play with the idea of wave forms – there was hardly a piece that did not have an element of curve in it – and Brian came back to Old Master John Makepeace and the Flow cabinet he designed for last year's show.

A new movement

Flow. Yes, that's it. The style has flowed from A&C so is British, with associations of quality and great craftsmanship, has pedigree in the Makepeace title and the word itself suggests a progression of ideas.

Add the word 'form' and you can encompass shape and materials. Is the time right to introduce Flow Form Furniture as a movement that will be as recognisable tomorrow as yesterday's Arts & Crafts, Biedermeier and Art Nouveau labels?

While I'm sure the name can be bettered – suggestions, please – I am certain that the market needs a label that would serve as an identifier for those who have yet to be introduced to the excitement that is British bespoke furniture. *See over page.* ▶

The Reveal, Williams & Cleal Furniture, £15,275 inc VAT

This sideboard was inspired by the idea of peeling back a layer to reveal a precious timber, this detail applying to the handle. The piece is made in burr brown oak with a brown oak interior and the doors are quarter-sawn oak



Vault, John Makepeace,
£59,925 inc VAT

The eye deceives with this table. Stroke its multi-laminated rippled ash surface and you are repaid with a tactile treat. Despite their bulk its refined boards sit delicately poised on legs curved to suit the title of the airy piece

“Once again British furniture makers as a movement are leading the world”

David Savage

