

French Luxury Furniture Firms Unite for Milan Design Week

The number of French high-end furniture players pales in comparison to that of Italy, but a consortium of the nation's best firms are trying to change that. **BY SOFIA CELESTE**

MILAN – With its proximity and distinct savoir faire, France has a way of enchanting Italy.

Le Design Défilé, French for The Design Fashion Show, is a collective of luxury furniture firms that will showcase the best in high-end French design here with a selection of 13 French heritage and contemporary houses and 53 furniture pieces.

Opening Monday on Milan's Via Statuto, the exhibit was conceived as a scenographic journey by Paris-based architectural and design practice Jakob+MacFarlane. Organizers have put forth a singular vision of French design to boost the consortium's business to consumer potential on a global level.

"Milan is the city, the main city to show our innovation, our design... This is the place where we gather, we collaborate, we put money to have a huge visibility all together," Isabelle Hernio, international director at l'Aménagement Français, said in an interview.

The Design Défilé is being led by the French Living in Motion collective – of which l'Aménagement Français is a major pillar. Le French Design fosters collaborations between creators, designers, architects, scientists, artisans, manufacturers and publishers, breaking down barriers between disciplines to envision the living spaces of tomorrow.

Up until now, France's high-end potential has been overshadowed by its Italian counterparts.

Federlegno Arredo, the consortium of Italy's wood supply chain – of which most companies operate in the high end of the market – represents about 2,800 firms and 370,000 employees. In 2025, the value of sales from Italy's wood supply chain rose to \$2.2 billion euros, while that of France's furniture markets fell slightly to 13.6 billion euros, dragged down by the performance of its indoor and outdoor furniture sector. In terms of sales, specialty or collectible establishments were the only ones that registered growth of 1.6 percent year-over-year and representing 25.6 percent of the total. Larger scale distribution represents 38.4 percent of the market share and saw its sales fall 2.7 percent in 2025.

The Italian market is larger, more diverse, and heavily oriented toward high-end and luxury production. Italy also has a stronger business-to-consumer presence and a well organized distribution system.

The French market, while smaller, focuses more on ultra-luxury and draws deeply from its cultural heritage and savoir faire. However, it struggles with exports, middle-range market erosion, and gaps in commercialization and distribution, explained Hernio.

Building Business to Consumer Luxury Italy by far has the largest collection of high-end and luxury furniture brands in the world – among them, Molteni&C, Minotti, Rimadesio, Poliform, Cassina, Poltrona Frau and many more. France has more ultra-luxury businesses like design firms and interior design studios that make bespoke designs for the growing high-net-worth communities. Ligne Roset, which was founded in 1860, is among the French manufacturers that can compare to the global reach the aforementioned Italian firms have built. The main caveat is that France struggles to mobilize companies in the high-end and mid-sector.

"In France, we didn't integrate the trade or commercialization of goods for final consumers. We've been more B2B [focused] than B2C. The focus has been on being a good manufacturer – producing the best volume, the best value, being competitive – but they haven't taken care of distribution," she added.

Another main difference is that the French mass-market furniture segment is suffering from Chinese imports "invading" the European market, enlarging France's trade deficit, she said.

"The mass market is suffering because of fierce competition from countries like Poland, Romania, and especially China. Imports from China are booming," Hernio added, explaining that to compete with China's dominance in mass-market production, French manufacturers must differentiate through high-quality, innovative, design-focused, and luxury products.

What France and Italy do have in common is that their furniture design and practices flourished during the Neoclassical era, fuelled by the opulence made trendy by Marie Antoinette and her 18th century court. She employed top designers, notably cabinetmaker Jean-Henri Riesener and chair maker Georges Jacob, and imported Chinese-inspired styles referred to as

chinoiserie. While the furniture was largely manufactured in France, the techniques were derived from Italian antiquity discoveries that fuelled European design trends in the late 18th century.

During Design Week here, the French Living in Motion consortium is putting the focus on modern living with 15 furniture pieces by designers such as the legendary interior decorator Andrée Putman, Constance Guisset Studio, as well as Maisons that imbue heritage and contemporary such as Alki, Clen x Manade, Duvivier Canapé, Fermob, Franck Genser, Gautier, Lafuma Mobilier, Ligne Roset, Maison Sarah Lavoine, Merceur Édition, Objektor, Philippe Hurel, Sokoa – each presenting three emblematic pieces representative of its identity.

Hernio underscored the importance of working together. French manufacturers are often too small to succeed individually in the global market, so working collectively enables them to pool resources, gain visibility, and make a stronger impact – especially in a key venue like Milan.

"If they do separate, they are too small, they don't have the means to develop their visibility. Otherwise, we split throughout the city, and it's dead. So, let's be together."

Philippe Hurel, which was founded over a century ago, is a believer in the group exhibition model, said chief executive officer Philippe Courtois.

"Of course, we share everyone's contacts and networks, but also each person's energy, experience, and creativity. It's extremely stimulating and enriching," Courtois said, adding that Milan is crucial to build international business as distributors flock to the city from all over the world.

In 2026, the l'Aménagement Français said that the kitchen market is among the main drivers for the full year. In the near term, they are focused on pursuing action against unfair practices by foreign marketplaces like Temu which encourage ultra-fast consumption. The organization said a legal analysis by a specialized attorney claimed that Temu's commercial practices violated product safety standards, most importantly jeopardizing consumer safety, particularly that of children, and the environmental impact of disposable furniture.



The Hello chair made by Dugeot Manufacture and designed by Constance Guisset Studio.