

EMPIRE & CO.

Chicago Design Week

JULY 2026



INTRODUCTION

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Empire & Co.’s **2026 Chicago Design Week Report** is hot off the press. From insider interviews to major milestones, we scouted the scene to share how this year’s theme ‘*Where Design Connects*’ translated into immersive storytelling, unique color approach & people-centered furniture.

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Picks

PART 1:

Insider Access

PART 1: INSIDER ACCESS: BEHIND THE SCENES



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The Buzz of the Show

Beyond individual product launches, several themes had a repeating influence throughout the showrooms. Residential-inspired patterns brought softness and personality to workplace furniture, while retro influences resurfaced through bold upholstery, geometric textiles, rich textures, and familiar silhouettes reimagined for today's office. These nostalgic design cues added warmth and character, giving commercial spaces a more comfortable, lived-in feel.

Together, these recurring themes reflected a workplace that continues to draw inspiration from residential interiors. Rather than chasing bold statements, manufacturers focused on creating environments that feel welcoming, expressive, and designed for people to spend time in.





- 1. EIKUND - Fluffy Lounge Chair
- 2. MARTIN BRATTRUD - Anacapa
- 3. ERG - Maxwell
- 4. ETHNICRAFT - Elements Dining Table
- 5. ALLERUIR - Clo
- 6. ALLERUIR SHOWROOM
- 7. KEILHAUER SHOWROOM





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- 1. MOMENTUM - Shaped by Many
- 2. HÅG X Recouture - Capisco
- 3. ERG SHOWROOM
- 4. SOURCE SHOWROOM
- 5. MOMENTUM SHOWROOM
- 6. HBF - Hazel
- 7. HBF - Rhine

Lighting Leads the Way

Lighting continued to evolve beyond a functional necessity, becoming one of the most influential design elements throughout the show. From oversized pendants and sculptural fixtures to integrated lighting within furniture and architectural features, illumination was used to define spaces, create focal points, and enhance the overall user experience.

Across lounges, collaborative areas, cafés, and work settings, lighting helped establish atmosphere while reinforcing the hospitality-inspired direction of today's workplace. As designers place greater emphasis on comfort and well-being, thoughtful lighting is becoming an essential layer that adds warmth, character, and a more human-centered feel to commercial interiors.





- 1. RBW - Sequencer
- 2. MARSET - Ringo
- 3. ZINTRA - Taiko
- 4. STACKABL - Pendant Light



PART 2:

Micro Trends / Takeaways

The Power of Pairing

Material pairings became a defining characteristic of many workplace introductions, with wood, metal, and leather working together to bring warmth and sophistication to commercial environments. Rather than relying on a single dominant material, manufacturers combined natural wood finishes with metal frames and leather details to create pieces that felt both refined and highly functional.

These combinations appeared across task and lounge seating, conference and café tables, private office furniture, and collaborative spaces, reflecting the continued influence of hospitality on workplace design. By balancing the warmth of natural materials with the durability of metal, manufacturers created products that feel inviting without sacrificing performance, reinforcing a workplace aesthetic that is both timeless and thoughtfully crafted.

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- 1. ALLERMUIR - Aldo
- 2. ALLERMUIR - Sula
- 3. JSI - Henley
- 4. NARBUTUS - Botany
- 5. NUCRAFT - Grove
- 6. BERNHARDT - Marcel





Best of
NeoCon
2026

2



HP
2026 WINNER

- 1. HALCON - Ferra
- 2. ANDREU WORLD - Fusion Table
- 3. DAVIS - Capas Table
- 4. OFS - Riff Table
- 5. ETHNICRAFT - Jack Lounge Chair
- 6. SCANDINAVIAN SPACES - Villhem

Slow Color

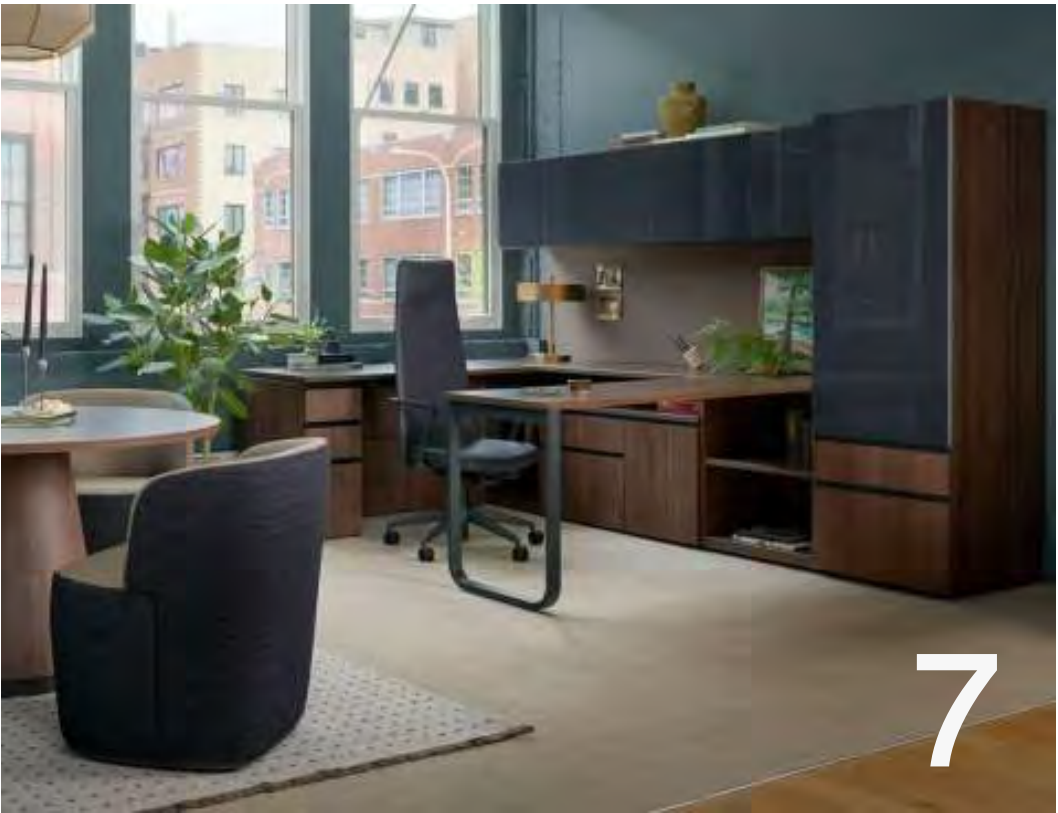
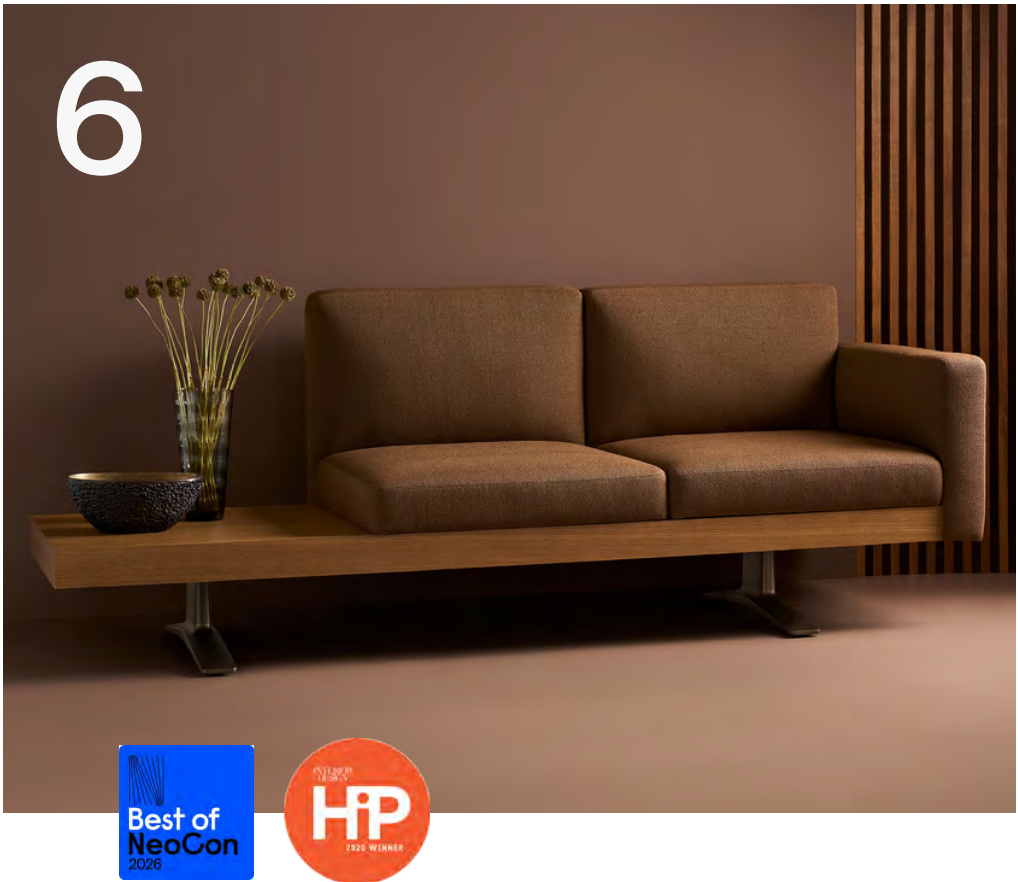
This year's color palette embraced what many are calling slow colors; rich, grounded hues inspired by nature that bring a sense of warmth and longevity to the workplace. Rather than bold statement shades or fleeting trends, designers favored earthy, muted tones like burgundy, terracotta, olive green, deep navy, blush, and warm browns, creating environments that feel calm, inviting, and enduring.

These colors appeared across upholstery, architectural elements, and accessories, often layered with natural materials to enhance their depth and richness. As workplaces continue to prioritize comfort and well-being, this shift toward slower, more timeless color palettes reflects a broader movement away from stark neutrals and toward spaces that feel more residential, restorative, and connected to the natural world.





- 1. ARPER - Lepal
- 2. ANDREU WORLD - Forest Club
- 3. BERNHARDT - ArtCenter
- 4. STYLEX - SoftBrick
- 5. HBF - Paint By Numbers
- 6. DAVIS - Faba
- 7. OFS - Adler





SHOWROOMS

- 1. ALLERUIR
- 2. JSI
- 3. JSI
- 4. SHAW CONTRACT
- 5. HBF
- 6. ANDREU WORLD
- 7. SPACESTOR
- 8. BOSS DESIGN
- 9. KETTAL



PART 3:

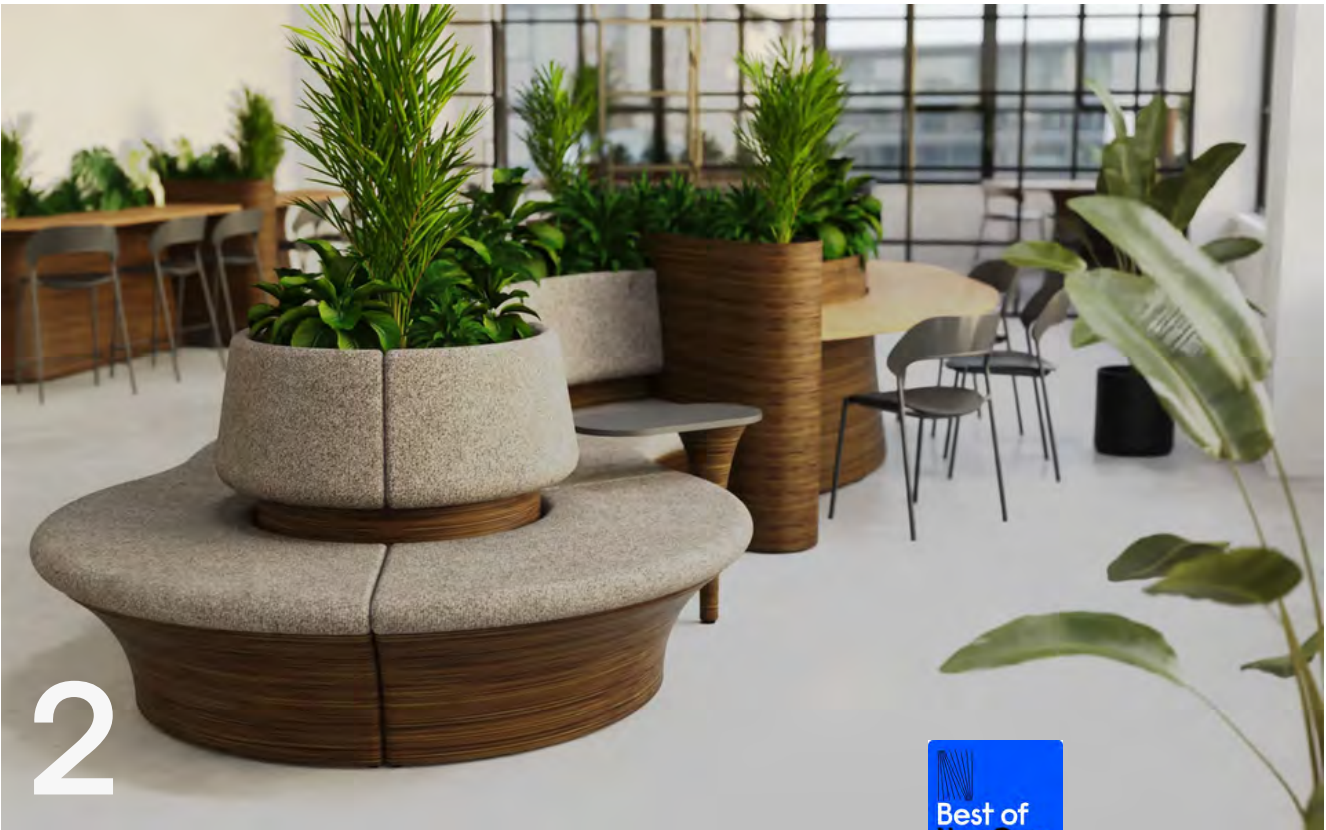
Macro Trends / Takeaways

Closing the Loop

Sustainability remained a key focus throughout the show, with manufacturers placing greater emphasis on circular design, responsible materials, and products built for longevity. Rather than treating sustainability as an added feature, many brands integrated it directly into the design and manufacturing process.

Model No.'s Onda collection showcased this approach through on-demand 3D printing using plant-based and recycled materials, reducing waste while supporting a circular production model. Boss Design's Lucy lounge chair was similarly designed with longevity in mind, featuring a modular construction that allows components to be repaired, replaced, or recycled at the end of the product's life. Together, these introductions demonstrated how thoughtful design is helping create a more sustainable future for the workplace.





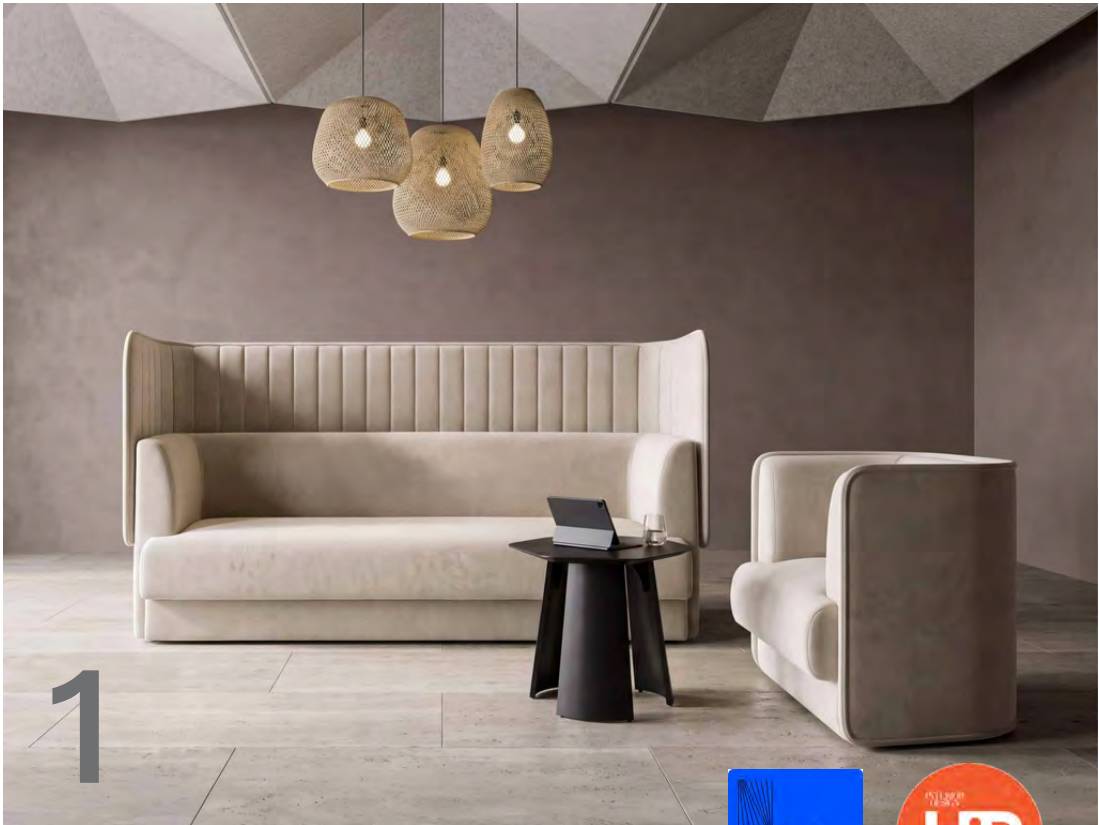
- 1. BOSS DESIGN - Lucy
- 2. MODEL NO. - Onda
- 3. OKAMURA - Muku
- 3. EMECO - 1006 Navy Chair
- 3. OFS - Noho Chair

Built to Adapt

Flexibility was at the core of many new workplace introductions, with manufacturers rethinking how furniture can support evolving teams, spaces, and workstyles. Modular solutions were evident in seating, tables, workstations, and collaborative environments, allowing spaces to be easily reconfigured as needs change.

This approach was evident in DARRAN's Limousine collection, which offers configurable lounge components for a variety of workplace settings, and Sandler Seating's Kawa collection, a modular seating system designed to create flexible layouts for collaboration, focus, and informal gathering. As organizations continue to seek more agile workplaces, modular furniture is proving to be a long-term solution that balances flexibility, functionality, and thoughtful design.





Best of
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2026



- 1. DARRAN - Limousine
- 2. ALLERUIR - Aura
- 3. SANDLER SEATING - Kawa
- 4. HBF - Kubi
- 5. STYLEX - SoftBrick
- 6. UHURU - Lam System



Designed for People

The line between workplace and hospitality continued to blur as manufacturers prioritized comfort, connection, and the overall user experience. Softer silhouettes, residential-inspired furnishings, and inviting lounge settings created environments that encourage people to gather, collaborate, and spend more time in the office.

Across workspaces, cafés, meeting areas, and social hubs, products were designed with people at the center—balancing functionality with the warmth and comfort typically found in hospitality settings. As the workplace continues to evolve, creating spaces that feel welcoming, flexible, and human-centered has become just as important as supporting productivity.





- 1. ALLERMUIR - Pedro
- 2. ETHNICRAFT - N701 Sofa
- 3. OFS - Kaleid
- 4. KEILHAUER - Etta Collection
- 5. KI - Kiaura Collection



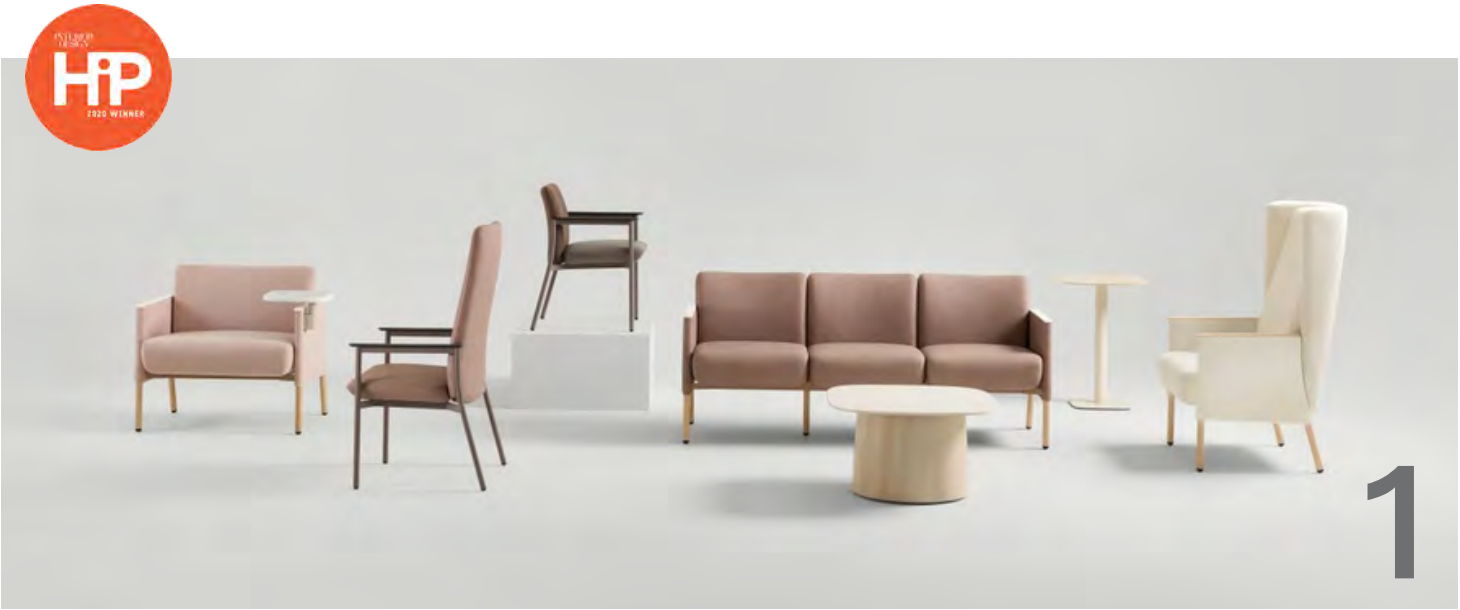
PART 4:

Across Vertical Markets



- 1. SPEC - Tailor Modular
- 2. HON - Confetti
- 3. ARCADIA- Flipside Kids





- 1. STEELCASE - Apprise Collection
- 2. GLOBAL FURNITURE GROUP - Dreme
- 3. JSI - Kindera
- 4. OFS - Bokeh
- 5. ARCADIA - Soa Tandem



Our Top 10 Picks



Studio TK
Radbill Table

1



Andreu World
Patin Chair

2



HBF
Cosme Collection

3



Nienkamper
Focus Collection

4



Prostoria
VR61 Lounge Chair

5



6

Kettal
Area



7

Steelcase
Ocular Shift



8

Model No.
Onda



9

Arcadia
TOO the POINT



10

BuzziSpace
BuzziTent

Closing the Loop. Insightful Storytelling. Emotional Color.
This year's themes emphasized '*Where Design Connects.*'

What do you anticipate for 2027?



Thank You.

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