It may have been the warm weather and clear skies, but in 2016 Milan Design Week felt more positive and upbeat than in recent years. New products were created that responded intelligently to gaps in the market and strong investment was made in technology.

Kartell confirmed their position as a global leader in manufacturing technology launching the Organic chair by Antonio Citterio. The chair is injection-moulded using BIODURA™, a new patented material developed by Kartell that uses organic and renewable raw materials.

Unexpected forms and shapes, as in Moooi's Compression sofa and Perch lights, contributed to the event's playful mood. Rocking horses were a light-hearted feature of Gebrüder Thonet Vienna's collection and also appeared within Kartell's inaugural kid's collection.

Milan Design Week continues to grow into a major design festival. This year, major fashion brands such as COS, Loewe, and Nike, plus automotive brands Audi, Mini, and Toyota, presented major installations as part of the Fuorisalone. So forget what you may have heard, Milan Design Week remains the number 1 destination for any company wanting to position their brand closest to the energy and innovation that is the business of design.

The heavy influence of fashion was felt in new finishes and fabrics and colour palettes defined by rich greens, bronzes, tones of liquorice or ink and royal blues.
Failure isn’t a word bandied about within the design community. But it is part of every designer’s process. When a concept is conceived as an initial sketch everything is possible. Then the real journey begins as an idea is explored and technical problems, limitations, and potential costs begin to surface.

The Failures exhibition at Milan Design Week explored this reality, bringing together historical products and contemporary work where failure was part of the outcome.

The exhibition showcased several unrealised designs by some of the biggest names in Italian design such as Alessandro Mendini, Aldo Rossi and Ettore Sottsass.

It revealed how Joe Colombo’s exceptionally fluid 4801 chair design went through extended design development in the early 1960s only to be relegated to the too hard basket. Designed to be produced in plastic, due to contemporary technical limitations it was manufactured for just two years in painted plywood. But in something of a happy ending, the 4801 chair was finally reissued by Kartell in 2012 in Colombo’s material of choice. What had once been something of a failure has become an unqualified success.

Failures also featured the work of contemporary designers who see ‘failure’ as a necessary part of the journey and precursor to a successful outcome. According to Riccardo Blumer from Atelier Blumer whose ‘Cuoio Cotto’ leather objects were exhibited, it’s sometimes necessary to follow a path to its natural conclusion before seeing a new way forward. In his case, the designer experimented with self-supporting leather chairs and stools. Although never realised commercially, his experimentations informed the design of other products.

Failures re-evaluated our concept of design success demonstrating how design is about finding opportunities in dead ends.

WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN SOMETHING OF A FAILURE HAS BECOME AN UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS

Originally designed by Joe Colombo in 1960, the 4801 armchair was initially intended to be manufactured in plastic, however, the technology was not yet exist – fast forward to 2011 and the chair was released in Kartell’s signature plastic. Followed above.

Left: Marco Zanuso with iconic super executive armchair is about to launch. Five years in making, the project required extensive experience in wood and metal, both in the traditional sense and form with polyethylene.

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OVERALL, COLLECTIONS WERE WELL-CONSIDERED AND LAUNCHED WITH A SENSE OF OPTIMISM.