

R+T ASIA DRAWS GLOBAL AUDIENCE

R+T Asia has thrown off the shackles of being seen as just a show for the Chinese market and is now attracting a global audience with Australians leading the charge to find new products and suppliers.

James Boston reports

One Australian visitor described the corridors of the New Exposition Centre in Shanghai as “Kangaroo Valley” such were the numbers of Australian present at this year’s fair, and it was a reasonable moniker given the host of prominent Australian wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers streaming through the four halls.

The general consensus was that the standard of the show has lifted over the past few years, and despite a lot of similar product being displayed on the stands, most visitors reported finding quality scattered throughout.

Quality, professionalism up

Brendan Hall from Bradmill Outdoor Fabrics was one Australian visitor who was on the lookout for new product.

“This year I think the quality of the exhibitors has gone up a notch, the professionalism has lifted,” Hall said.

“The ranges on show are tight, they’re all showing a similar type of product, but there are key booths with some very interesting items which we’re pursuing.”

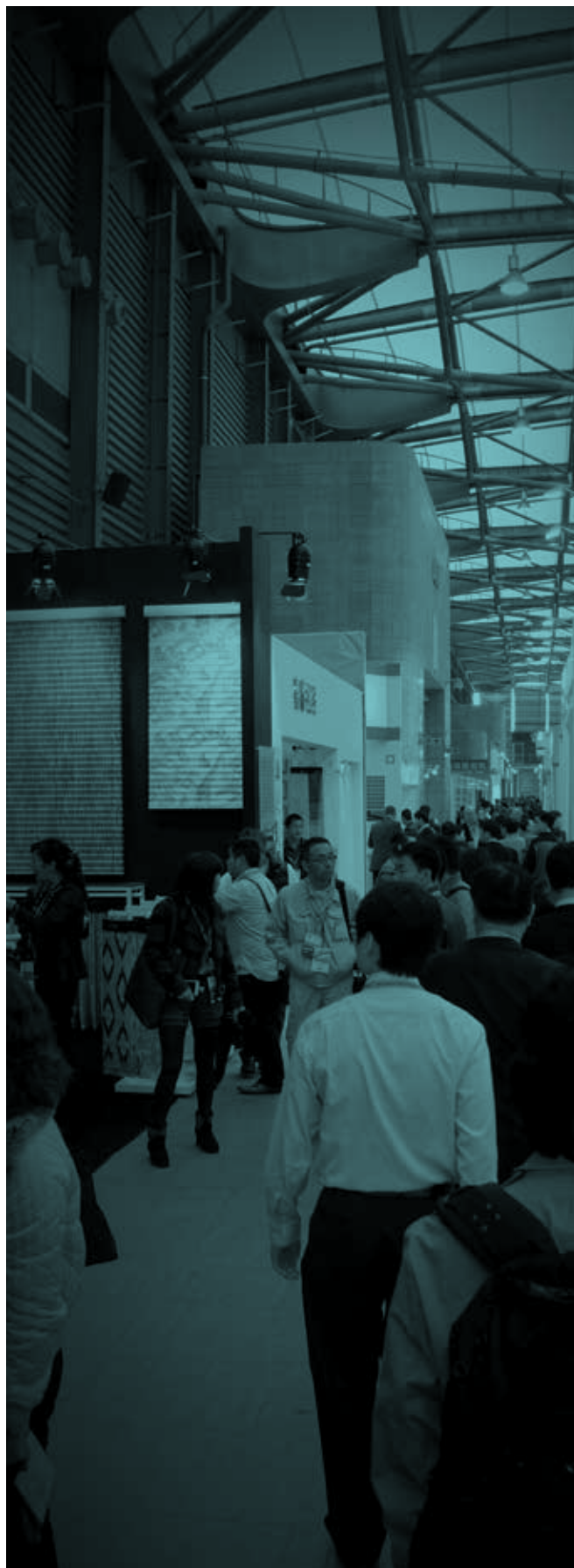
“It’s quieter than I thought but overall I think it’s a worthwhile visit.”

Hall said that although there was still a quality gap between much of the product on show and Australian-made the Chinese manufacturers were lifting their game.

“We’d like to think there is a big gap, but I’ve got to say in their defence they do it well and the variety is getting better.”

“I don’t see it as a bad thing as it keeps us on our toes.”

“The exterior business here is driven by acrylics and all the major players here, same with motorisation, they’re all here.”



"There's pretty much no canvas here at all."

"The interior sector is where the volume and the competition are, from verticals to roller blinds to sheers to curtains and curtain tracking. It's very diverse."

An improvement in the European and US markets has had a consequence for Australian companies looking to source from China with minimum orders going up.

"Many of the manufacturers are now quoting 800 metre minimums so again our minimums in Australia are a lot lower than that," Hall said.

"The companies showing here are definitely switched on to export, they understand how to do it, but pricing is still an issue, and now as the economy is getting better around the world, their minimums are getting higher and higher."



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Finding diamonds in the rough

Ian Frood, from Ian Frood Pty Ltd, was on his fourth visit to the show and was on the lookout for quality products with a point-of-difference.

"I'm looking for new textiles, innovative, creative textiles, anything that doesn't look like a screen and something more than \$2 a square metre."

"I'm on the lookout for companies who are doing research and development and trying to move the industry forward rather than in that fabulous spiral that we've got, [towards] the bottom for the cheaper, the nastier."

"Anybody who is looking upwards instead of downwards is what I'm interested in finding."

Frood admitted that this task was traditionally a challenge at the show, but added that it had become easier over his visits to the show.

"You have to look hard but there's always a gem somewhere so it's a matter of finding it, doing the hard work."

"They might be small or they might be a big company and without realising it have something that's absolutely gorgeous in the middle of their collection."

"I think a lot of people are stepping up to the plate and realising that after years of price and price and price, there are a lot of other people that are suddenly saying 'there has to be another direction as well' and they're putting research and development into trying to do it."

Frood also reported that Chinese companies are increasing their minimums.

"That's the general pattern. I think anybody who was looking for a 500 metre minimum is now looking for 800 or 1000, it's very much the case."

"But they're also improving their quality, they're doing more yarn dyed stuff and they're also doing better bluescale levels."

"So they're improving the quality of the product as well, that may be down to the improvement in the US as well."



Australian companies on global stage

Chinese companies made up the bulk of exhibitors at the show, however an entire hall was dedicated to international exhibitors or their Asian representatives. Two Australian companies took stands in this hall; Gale Pacific and Wintex, with both reporting strong interest, not just from China, but from around the world.

Demetrios Livissianis from Wintex said the global interest had been very encouraging.

"We have had a cross section of people from around the world from South America, North America, obviously Asia."

"I think a lot of the Chinese are curious about our system. They want to see what's around, they're visiting our stand because what they're actually seeing on

the stand is something different."

"So we'll chase up those leads and hopefully those leads will turn into some business."

Livissianis said that the company's clutch system was attracting the most interest.

"People that have seen it have never seen the interior working before, the gear operation and the middle core with the springs."

"Even with all the top systems this is the first time they have seen the inner workings and when they then physically try the system they're very impressed."

Livissianis said Chinese visitors were picking up on the quality nature of Wintex's products, despite the fact that they were manufactured in China.

"The Chinese want, I think like anyone else, quality and they're chasing price and we can offer both."

"We're optimistic that the balance is right."

"All you really need from a show like this, an expo like this, is to pick up one or two really strong customers and then you can take it from there."

Livissianis said that there are opportunities in China for Australian companies who are prepared to take a risk.

"It's a risk, but it's an opportunity to expose yourselves especially at this expo to the world because you've got people from all over the world coming to this expo."

"Depending on how successful this one is, we might return next year and maybe go all out to Germany next year."



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FOCUS SHIFTS TO R+T AUSTRALIA

Messe Stuttgart is turning its focus to the Australian market, with the R+T Australia trade fair now reportedly 60 per cent sold.

The show, set for the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from August 21-23, was being heavily promoted at R+T Asia, alongside the flagship event R+T Stuttgart to be held in February 2015.

The exhibition has already attracted a strong mix of Australian and international exhibitors across its target industry sectors, according to Thurain Aye, exhibition manager for the event.

"Now signed up with R+T Australia are some of the leading companies in their fields, including Croci, Gfa Electromaten and FAAC – all major suppliers who can see the value to their marketing and profile in participating in this inaugural show."

"We have been delighted with the response we have seen to date for R+T Australia 2014, and this is standing us in good stead for a highly successful show in August," Aye said.

"We have well over 200 expressions of interest in the show, and have already allocated more than 60 per cent of our gross floor space.

Local window furnishing companies to exhibit include: Buz Software, CW Products, Mardo, Ozroll and Evaya.

"Over the next few months, we will be completing the R+T Australia 2014 exhibitor line up, and also rolling out our seminar and educational program, to be run in conjunction with the exhibition."

"These elements will help ensure that R+T Australia 2014 is a must-attend event for anyone in the external building, window furnishings and sun protectionsystems sector," said Aye.

THE PENNY DROPS AS CHINA TURN TO QUALITY FOCUS

Chinese window furnishings companies are increasingly focusing on improving quality and innovation in order to grow product categories in their home market.

The industry is now looking to the creation of quality standards in order to avoid customers turning away from blinds, shutters and exterior shading.

At the International Window and Door Summit 2014, held in conjunction with R+T Asia, the topic of quality standards and energy efficiency was the focus of a roundtable discussion.

Wen Yin, the president of Chinese manufacturer Mingcheng said that the Chinese industry will not develop if it continues to copy product.

"Product innovation will come from a focus on our market differences," Yin said.

"In China we have many 20-30 story buildings, this is unique. So our focus is on developing windproof external products."

"However, we still need to work and learn off our European and US counterparts to make it a win-win."

Currently hard window furnishings only command around five per cent of the Chinese residential market, however they are the dominant product category in the commercial sector.

Quality issues have also hampered product category growth in China

Zhao Yue the president of Guangdong Wintom Sunshade Technology Co recounted a story about a customer who refused to purchase shutters, despite shutters being the best product for the job. The reason was a bad experience 10 years prior with a poor quality product.

"We must introduce industry standards, otherwise we will not be able to grow these markets," Yue said.

CHINA FOCUSES ON DYNAMIC SHADING

Energy price rises have seen an increased awareness of the importance of solar shading in energy management in China.

Zhun Xu from Wistar China said that the company had recently achieved successful application of smart controls and a number of projects focusing on active shading.

Xu said that in Shanghai there are subsidies for solar protection once energy savings have been met as well as national subsidies.

However, Xu added that the Chinese industry faces difficulties due to a lack of knowledge in the market about the effects of solar shading, both amongst consumers and at government levels.

China has made a commitment to global organisations to reduce energy usage but Xu said that in China this topic is not well known to the public.