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BAU, January 17-21, Munich

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BAU 2017, January 16-21, Munich

by Jim Roche



This bi-annual five-day event is one of the leading and biggest trade fairs of architecture, materials, building systems and craft skills in the world. Held in the huge Messe München Trade Fair Center in eastern Munich and stretching over 17 gigantic halls each the size of a football pitch, it offers a truly rich display of the latest innovations in building technology.

This year 250,000 people, 80,000 of those from abroad, explored the elaborate stalls of 2,120 exhibitors from 45 countries, researching, networking, exchanging ideas or sometimes just drooling at the magnificent technology innovation on display. 65,000 visitors were from architecture and planning offices alone.

Despite the international presence, German stalls predominated as BAU is essentially about German manufacturers and system providers targeting German specifiers, a commercial reality that was omnipresent with a huge financial investment by all companies involved, with some 2-storey stalls taking up one-eighth of a football pitch. Parallel daily forums - really mini conferences - that explored themes such as the dialogue between the architect and industry, intelligent buildings, building physics and BIM complemented the exhibition.

Four staff and forty-four architectural technology students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th years from the School of Architecture, DIT visited the fair for two full days with the helpful sponsorship of Messe Munich International, Pattern Ltd (UK) and Gretsch-Unitas. It is impossible to see everything in two days and benefit from the advice of the experts on the stalls so we tended to focus on façade and manufactured timber systems.

Heliobus specialise in collecting and reflecting daylight to where you need it inside buildings. Their systems range from the very public lighttubes installed outside Bahnhof Potsdamer Platz in Berlin to the super flush, frameless, horizontal rooflights so beloved of architects. Knapp offer a myriad range of stainless steel connectors, mostly hidden, for manufactured timber systems. The high-end Swiss based Sky-Frame offer the most incredibly slender floor to ceiling metallic section sliding glazing systems. Rhinezink demonstrated the latest

zinc cladding technology in a myriad of samples and one full-scale part roof and wall assembly displaying how to solve that tricky eaves detail while satisfying the requirements for insulation and ventilation and even supporting balustrades overhead. The Italian firm Secco displayed elegance par-excellence with their exquisite folded brass sheet windows.

Schöck, who brought us the innovative Isokorb thermal break system, displayed their new system for balconies fixed to timber structures using carbon fibre rather than stainless steel fixings and also a new innovative way of acoustically isolating internal concrete staircases from the surrounding walls. The Cobiax stall displayed its efficient and energy efficient way of making concrete slabs with air-filled plastic balls. And much more besides!

One striking aspect of all the products and systems viewed is the amount of testing done and the claims for compliance with the required EN codes. Experiencing BAU one wonders why German building technology is so innovative and is constantly pushing new boundaries? Think of all the products we specify, or of the development of Passive House in recent years? It surely goes back over 100 years to the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen) when artists, architects, designers and industrialists came together in a state-sponsored effort to integrate traditional craft techniques with industrial mass-production techniques, thus helping Germany to compete favourably against other industrial nations, and of course continued in the massive reconstruction programme following the destruction of WW2. That competitive ethos seems to still drive current innovations as seen here in BAU in what becomes, as evening draws near and weary visitors search for an exit, a phantasmagoria of German technological prowess.

BAU is an invaluable educational resource for students and a great interactive CPD for teachers and practitioners alike. Start saving for BAU 2019 and bring a small wheelee suitcase along for all the technological goodies!

bau-muenchen.com