

Milan Design Week 2024 Report



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Approach

Our team was comprised of three members: Chris Kuang, Annie Wolfond, and Aashita Jain. All are students at Northeastern University completing studies in the College of Arts, Media, and Design. Thanks to the generous support of the university and the Center for Design, they visited Milan Design Week 2024. Over the course of the week, they collected images and observations of each of the design districts and the many exhibitions and showcases they visited.

Each design district was evaluated on the following criteria: **accessibility**, **relevance**, **engagement**, **the content/container relationship**, and **sustainability**. Track how the team evaluated the experience of each of these districts using the following color coding!



5ive

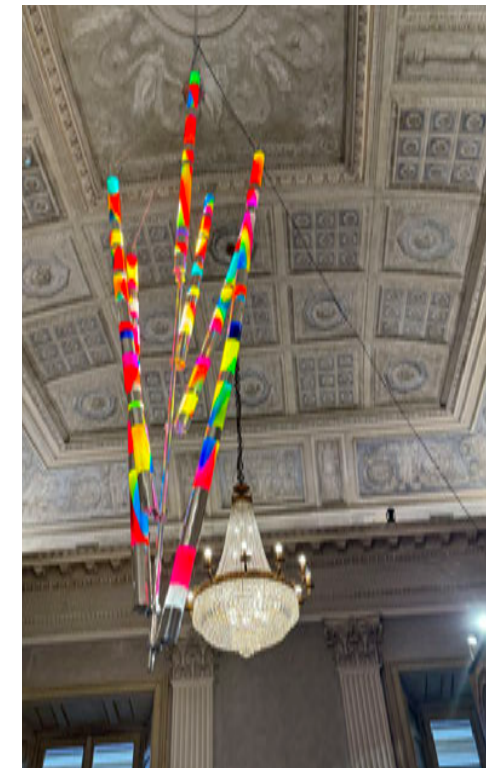
5ive's this year's theme "Unlimited Design Orchestra" aims to amplify its sense and significance, tracing in music and, specifically, in the elements of an orchestra, the models to be inspired by a design increasingly focused on an intrinsically human dimension and humanistic, in the wake of that cultural proposal and that vision of the world which, starting from the second half of the 1300s, thanks to Francesco Petrarca, had led to a revival of the studia humanitatis and to a repositioning of man at the center of every consideration, with the consequent birth of Humanism.



Top: 5ive exhibit space interiors

Bottom Left: Chair inspired by orchestra instruments

Bottom Right: Glass furniture elements





The 5ive space within the Milan Design Week exhibited certain challenges regarding **accessibility and flow**. Density was notably sparse, and navigational elements were limited, making it somewhat challenging for visitors to navigate the space efficiently. One notable observation was that the only discernible indication of a space belonging to the district was a sign in the window, suggesting a lack of clear demarcation or signage within the space itself.

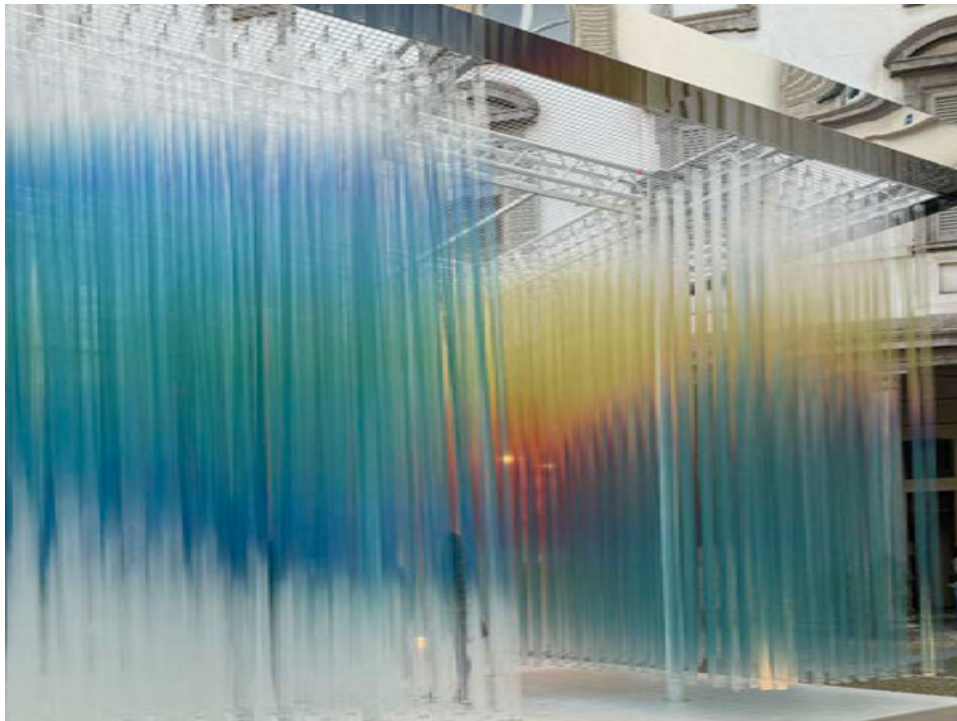
In terms of coherence and **relevance** with brand or product identity, the 5ive space presented a rather disjointed experience. The individual galleries seemed disconnected from one another, lacking a cohesive theme or narrative that would tie them together. Instead, there appeared to be more of a focus on decorative and historic elements rather than a unified brand or product identity. This resulted in a fragmented experience for visitors, with each gallery standing alone rather than contributing to a larger, cohesive whole.

The relationship between **content and container** within the 5ive space varied significantly across different venues. While some stores reflected a more historic or artisanal aesthetic that aligned with the products they were showcasing, others seemed to deviate from this theme. The larger venues, in particular, appeared to showcase a wider range of products that may not have been as closely aligned with the historical or artisanal aesthetic of the space. Overall, there was a lack of consistency in the content-container relationship, which may have contributed to the overall disjointed experience of the space.

La Bocca (Meaning mouth in Italian) by Gufam

One notable aspect that was missing within the 5ive space was a focus on **sustainability**. There were no discernible efforts or initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable practices or products, which is an increasingly important consideration within the design industry. This absence of focus on sustainability may have been a missed opportunity for the space to align itself with broader industry trends and values.

In conclusion, while the 5ive space within the Milan Design Week offered a diverse range of galleries and experiences, it faced challenges in terms of accessibility, coherence, and sustainability. Addressing these issues could enhance the overall visitor experience and better align the space with contemporary design trends and values.

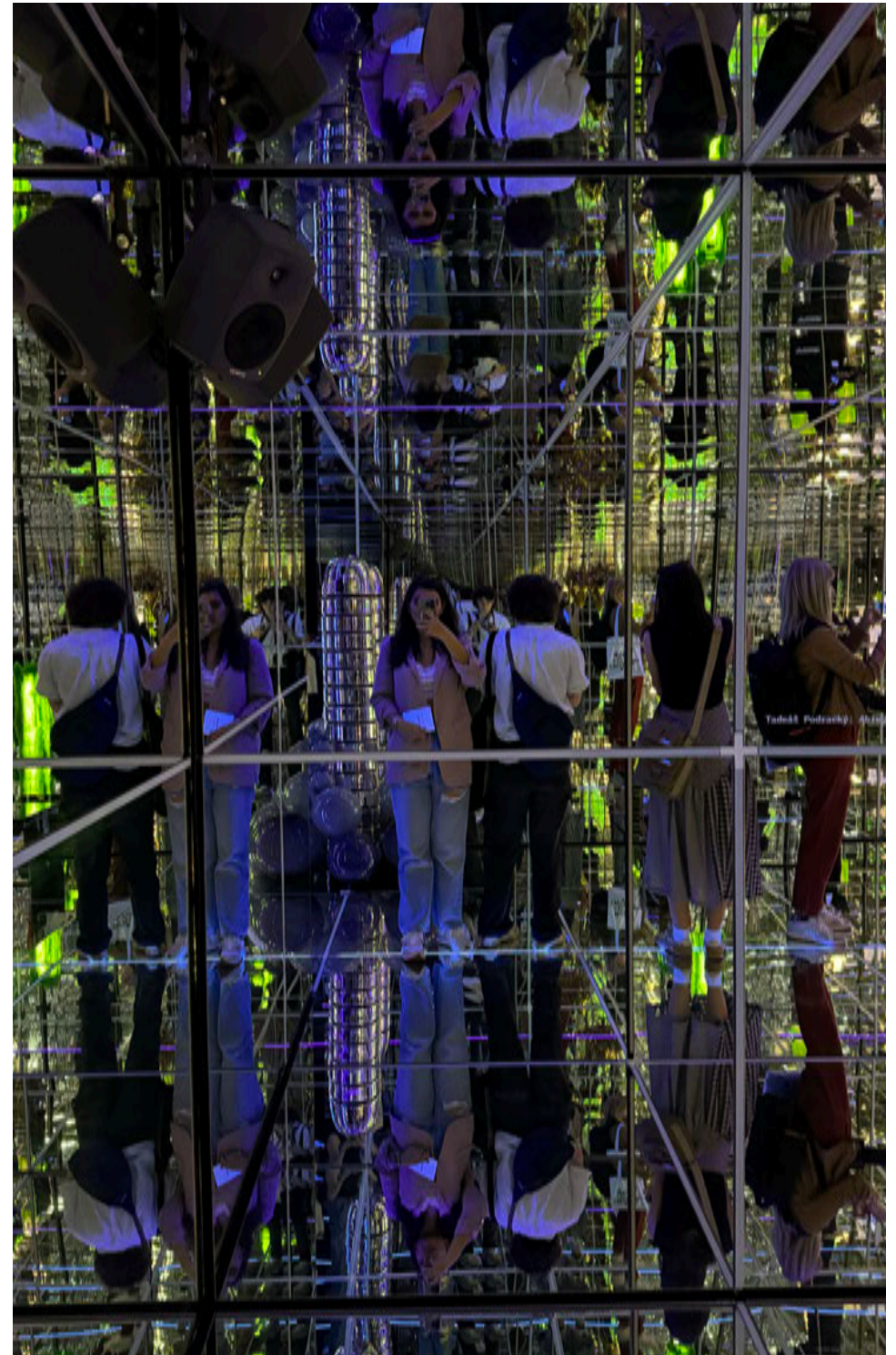


Tortona

Tortona Design Week 2024 is dedicated to forging a profound connection between its exhibition itinerary and the rich territorial context that has long been its home. Embracing the dynamic framework provided by its surroundings, exhibiting companies intertwine their installations with the local landscape, fostering a captivating dialogue between past, present, and future, between local heritage and international influences, and between tradition and innovation.

*Designblock Cosmos:
curated Jana Zielinski
and Jiří Macek*

*The showcase explores
craft, technology and
the idea of luminosity
while paying homage to
Czech tradition.*





Kitchen Design by Francis Kere



Exhibit by Lexus

The Superstudio+ exhibit in Tortona boasted excellent **accessibility and flows**, with venues conveniently close together, fostering a vibrant atmosphere due to its good density. Notably, a navigation kiosk near the train station facilitated ease of movement for visitors. The layout within SuperStudio itself, resembling a maze, subtly encouraged exploration, ensuring that attendees didn't miss any exhibits intentionally. Moreover, efforts were made to accommodate individuals who may have difficulties queuing, enhancing inclusivity within the space.

The district **exhibited** a diverse mix of commercial, experimental, and academic works. However, it leaned more towards the artistic and experimental spectrum, particularly evident in venues like Base and SuperStudio, where conceptual and avant-garde pieces took precedence. This emphasis on artistic expression often blurred the lines between art and design, with some installations leaning more towards the realm of artistry than conventional design.

In Tortona's Superstudio+, the relationship between **content and container** was notably harmonious, reflecting a forward-thinking ethos focused on design for the future. The flexibility of the SuperStudio space allowed for curated exhibitions that seamlessly integrated with the overarching theme of each event. As a large warehouse-like space, SuperStudio provided a blank canvas that could be molded and curated to align with the thematic focus, ensuring a cohesive experience for visitors disjointed experience of the space.

Similarly, **sustainability** was a notable aspect of Tortona's Superstudio+ district. While not explicitly emphasized in all exhibits, there was a growing awareness of sustainability within the design community. The flexible nature of SuperStudio allowed for the incorporation of sustainable practices and materials where relevant. Efforts to promote sustainable design principles, although not universal, were evident in select installations, reflecting an evolving commitment to environmental responsibility within the design industry.

In summary, Tortona's Superstudio+ district provided a dynamic and immersive experience, characterized by its accessibility, artistic expression, and forward-thinking approach to design. While maintaining a strong emphasis on experimentation and artistic exploration, the district also demonstrated a growing awareness of sustainability and inclusivity, positioning itself at the forefront of contemporary design discourse.



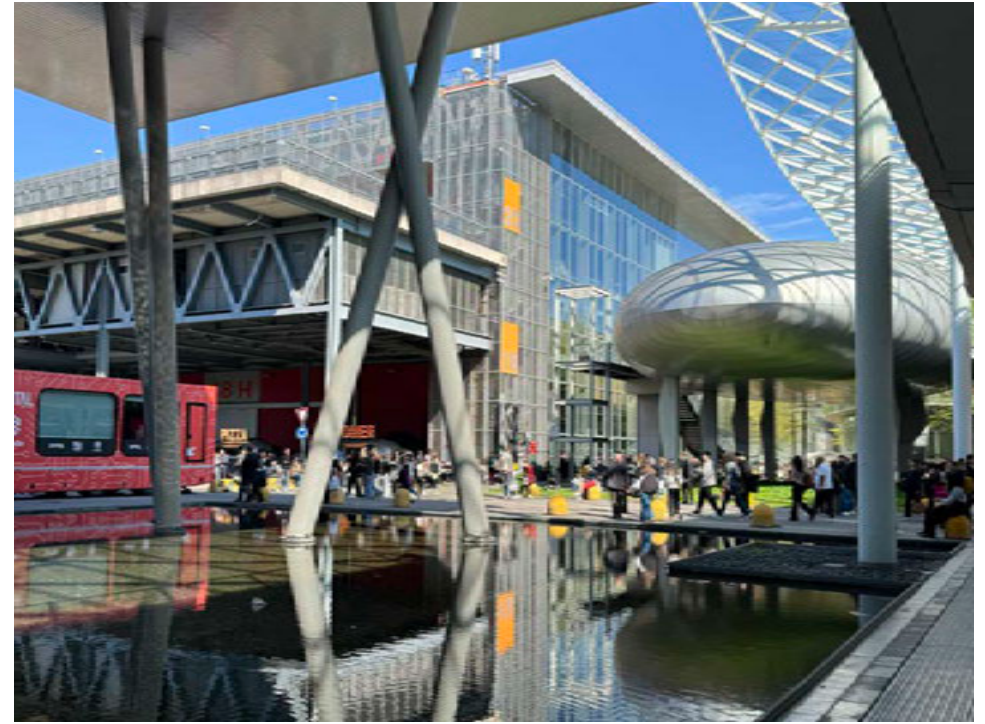
Top: Student Research about Biowood design



Bottom Left: Exhibit about importance of colors

Salone de Mobile

Salone del Mobile, held annually in Milan, is the world's foremost furniture and design fair, serving as the centerpiece of Milan Design Week. Established in 1961, it has grown into the most significant event on the global design calendar, drawing industry professionals, designers, and enthusiasts from around the world. The exhibition spans a vast array of furniture and design innovations, showcasing the latest trends and developments in the industry. With a **reputation** for excellence, Salone del Mobile provides a platform for both established brands and emerging talents to present their work, fostering a vibrant exchange of ideas and creativity.



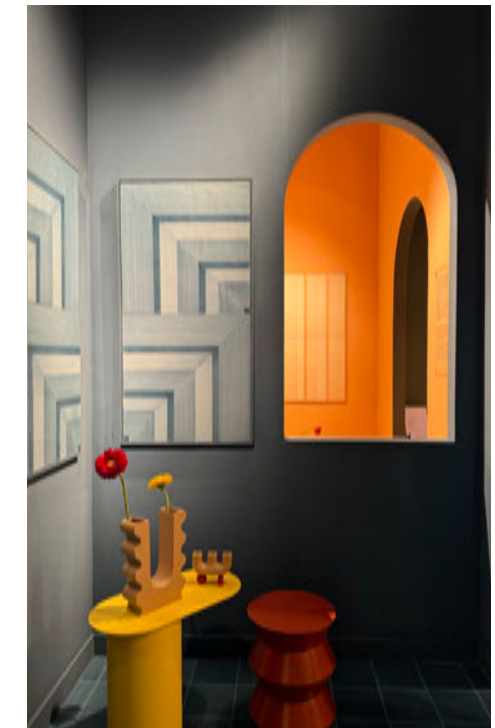
*Top: Salone de Mobile
Trade fair exteriors*

*Bottom: Exhibit by
Gufram at trade fair*

Salone del Mobile 2024 had several notable strengths that contributed to its reputation as a premier design event. One of the most commendable aspects was the diverse range of exhibitors, from established brands to emerging designers, providing a rich tapestry of innovation and creativity. The “white box” concept allowed for a clean, focused presentation of products, ensuring that the design itself took center stage. The student sections were particularly impressive, showcasing strong, experimental identities that highlighted the innovative potential of the next generation of designers. Furthermore, the event’s scale and the variety of exhibits offered something for every visitor, making it a comprehensive showcase of the latest trends and advancements in the design world.

However, the event also faced significant challenges, particularly regarding **accessibility and visitor flow**. The massive crowds and extensive layout made it difficult for attendees to find specific exhibits, despite the availability of comprehensive maps. The sheer size and complexity of the buildings often led to a sense of disorientation, and the overstimulating environment, compounded by a lack of open spaces for breaks and food, left many visitors feeling overwhelmed. This made navigating the space a daunting task and detracted from the overall visitor experience.

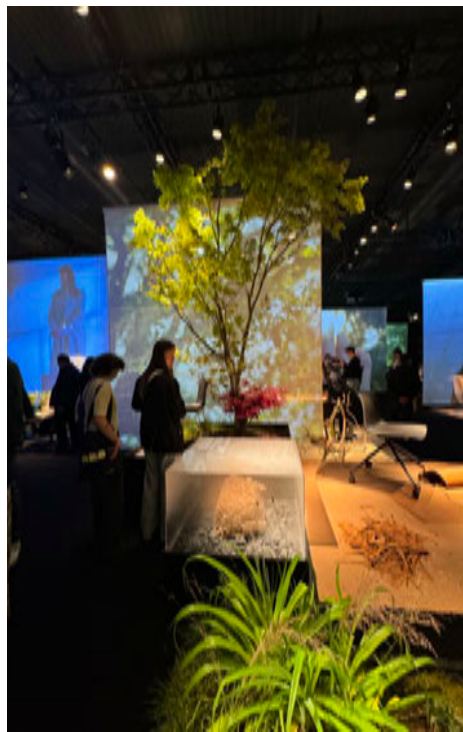
The **coherence and relevance** of brand and product identity also presented a mixed picture. While the standardized “white box” approach ensured a uniform presentation, it often made the event feel overly corporate and business-focused, detracting from the creativity and uniqueness of individual brands. This approach contrasted sharply with the vibrant and experimental student sections, highlighting a disparity in presentation styles within the same event.





In terms of the **content and container relationship**, the rigidity of the “white box” displays often limited the interactive potential of the exhibits. The focus on showcasing the products rather than encouraging visitors to engage with them resulted in a more static exhibition experience. This lack of interactivity may have reduced the overall impact and engagement of the exhibits.

Sustainability emerged as a significant concern at Salone del Mobile. As we have heard, setting up Salone del Mobile takes several months, but everything is completely dismantled within a week, highlighting the environmental impact of such a large-scale event. The temporary nature of the installations raises questions about what happens to the materials and structures after the event concludes. This process underscores a notable lack of transparency and clear practices regarding the disposal and recycling of exhibition materials, emphasizing the need for more sustainable approaches in future iterations of the event.



In summary, while Salone del Mobile 2024 showcased a remarkable array of design talent and innovation, it faced several challenges that impacted the overall visitor experience. Issues of accessibility, overwhelming stimulation, and a rigid presentation style, coupled with significant sustainability concerns, highlighted areas that require attention and improvement.

Alcova

For MDW 2024, Alcova was one of the farther destinations to reach—located in two villas in the commune of Varedo, about an hour train ride outside of Milan’s city center. Villa Bagatti Valsecchi was our first destination—a villa in the style of 19th century Lombardy architecture housing a plethora of exhibitors. Although there were long-lines for this space, the outdoor space increased **accessibility and flow** through the multiple exhibition spaces as well as opportunities for rest. However, since all of the Alcova exhibits were housed within these two villas, navigation was straight-forward and the density of exhibitors was unparalleled.

Villa Borsani was our second destination in Varedo—its architecture firmly cemented in the Modernist style. In contrast to the previous villa, this space was much more **congested** with long lines to get within both the yard and the house. A much smaller space with more modernist sensibilities than the prior villa, navigating Villa Borsani was much more difficult and mini-lines within the space began to form to see each exhibition.

Both the **content and the container** were clearly emphasized in Alcova’s exhibition philosophy. While the architecture captured the attention of visitors, exhibitors used their spaces in their own unique ways to fit their products. Notably, rooms within Villa Bagatti Valsecchi were filled with material—from sand to textiles. Moreover, each room within Villa Borsani was carefully curated to showcase the exhibitors’ work—for example, a kitchen propagated with a brand’s complete kitchenware catalog.

Top: Villa Bagatti Valsecchi from the exterior

Bottom Left: Alcova branded lights on the exterior of the villa

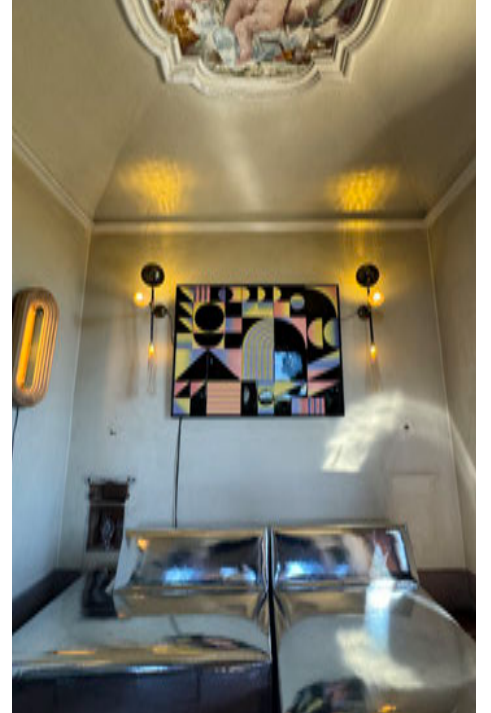
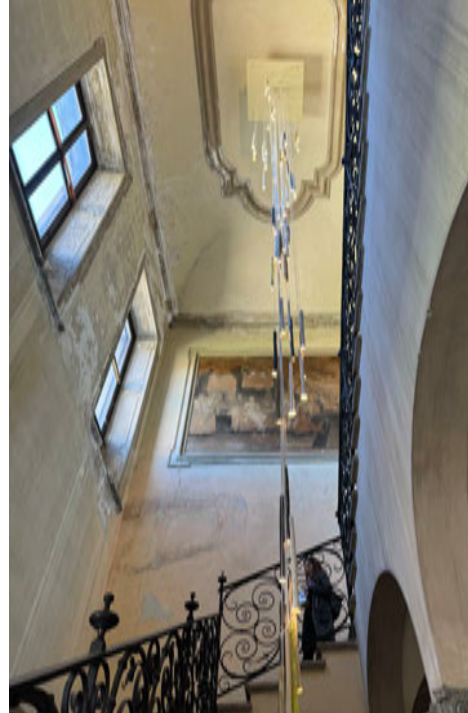
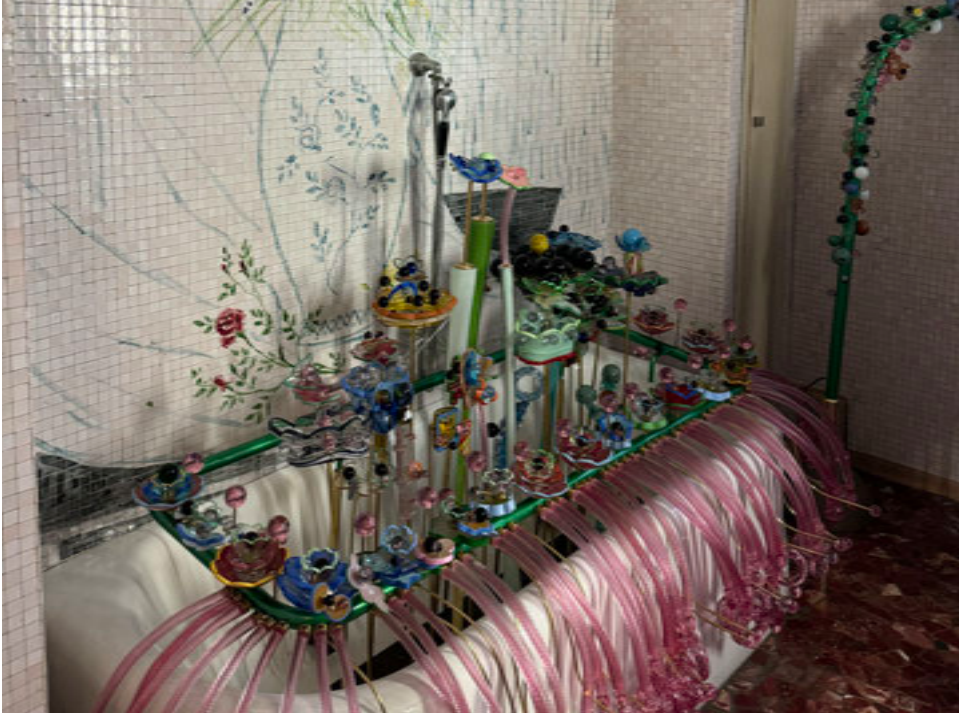
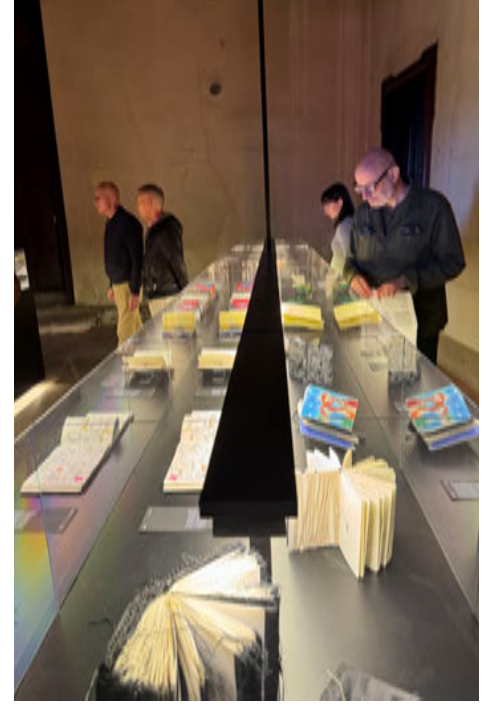
Bottom Right: Weaving exhibition in the cellar



The strength of the **Alcova brand** was evident in its ability to move visitors all the way out of the city to view their exhibitions. Branding and wayfinding tied the two villas together in their consistency. The signage and branding were minimal in their graphics, typography, and form, but tastefully contrasted the historical nature of the villas. While themes of **sustainability and environmental awareness** revealed themselves as part of some of the exhibitors' work, it was not intrinsic or thematic to Alcova as a whole.

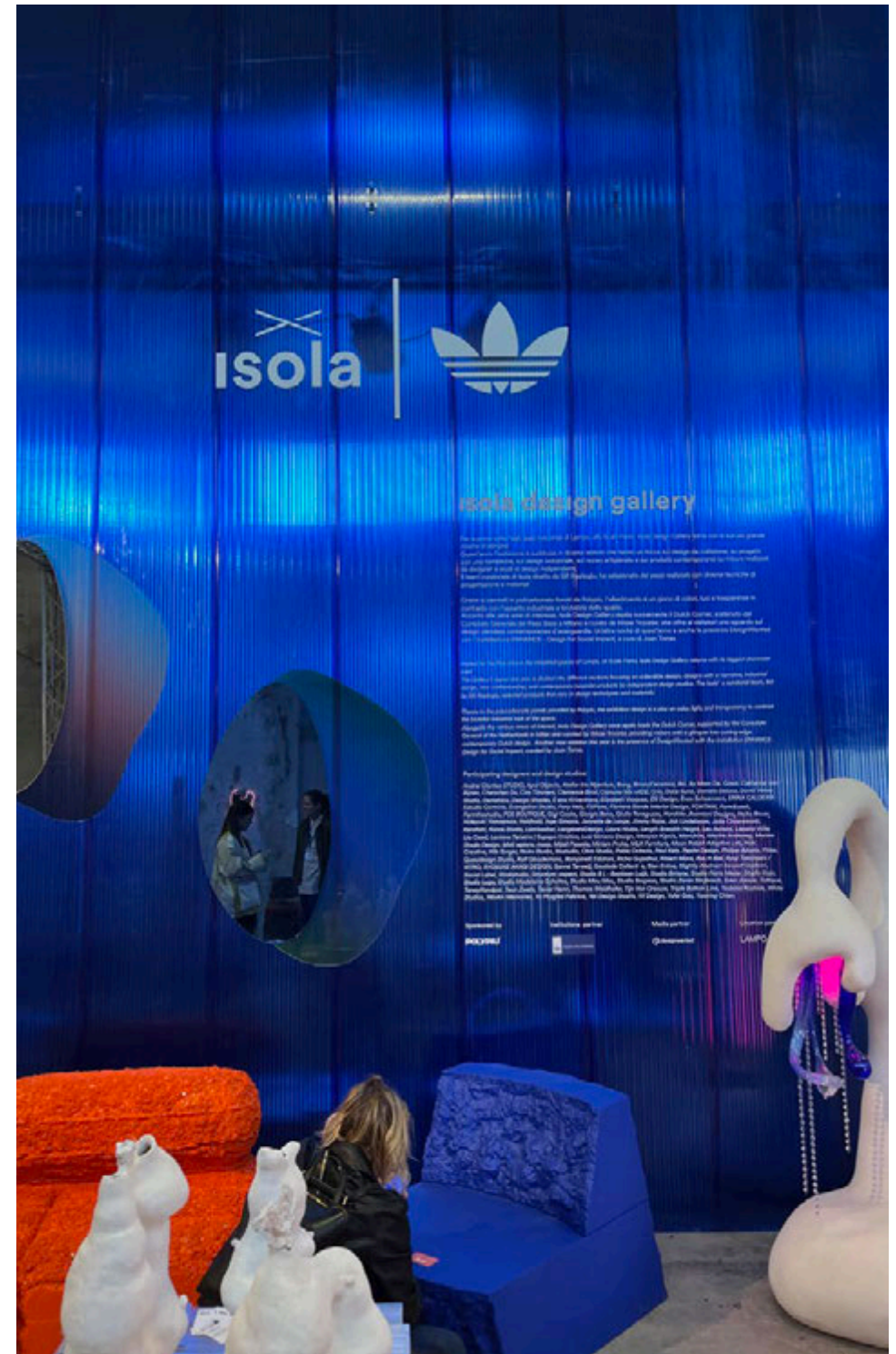
Textile exhibiton focusing on waste and reuse





Isola

The Isola Design Gallery was the main attraction of the Isola district. The Design Gallery was difficult to **access** with a long walk along a relatively undeveloped road to the space itself. However, upon arrival, the exhibition space was an intriguing reuse of an old train station. **Sustainability** was explicitly made a focus of the exhibition. The translucent polycarbonate space dividers were reused from event to event and the display stands made of old egg-cartons reflected this theme of sustainability. Furthermore, the exhibitors within the space had a focus on sustainability and material research as well—with additional themes of experimentation and play. Although the **container** was interesting architecturally, the **content** defined the gallery space alongside the Isola branding and signage.



Outside the Isola Design Gallery, the district had varying amounts of density. In terms of **accessibility**, some of the destinations marked on the map were either difficult to find or seemingly did not exist. However, one of the highlights of our time in Isola was an exhibition space housed in an underground parking garage that bled into the retail spaces above. This space **contained** a mixture of craft performances, material research, architectural VR, as well as more typical furniture exhibitions.

Top Left: Podiums made of reused egg cartons

Top Right: Parking garage repurposed as exhibition space

Bottom Right: Lighting exhibition

Bottom Left: Lighting and dining exhibition



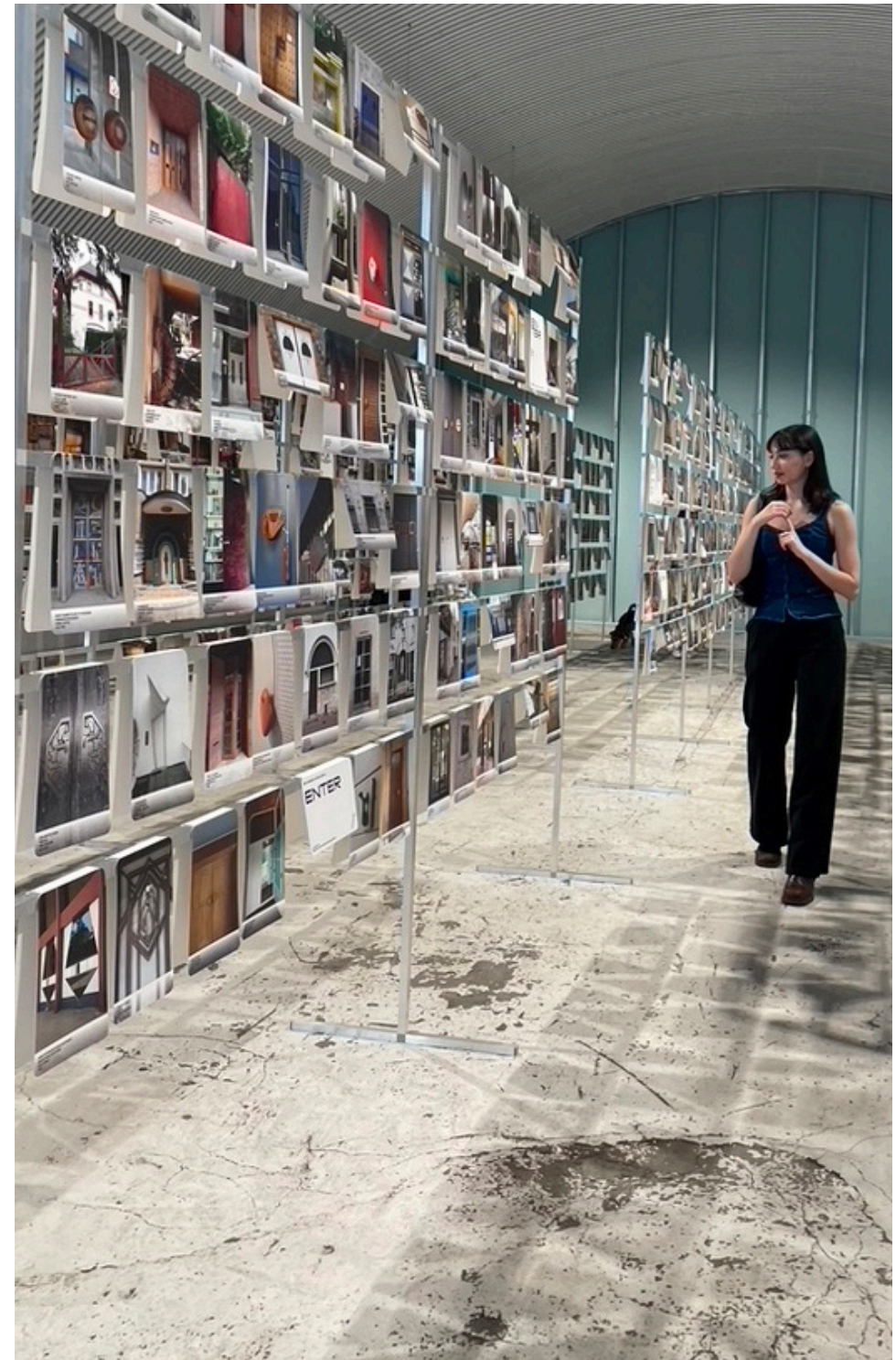
Drop City

The experience at Drop City invited visitors on a journey through an enigmatic space that explored the theme of “in process.” The exhibitions showcased projects at all stages of the creation process, including research, imagination, prototyping, and implementation.

The **allure** of Drop City was undeniable, and the exhibitions were all very eye-catching and inviting. However, understanding what they were looking at and its meaning seemed complex to outsiders. In an attempt to explain the exhibits under one umbrella, the language was sometimes vague, leaving too much space for uncertainty about what one was witnessing. This ambiguity, while intriguing, hindered the accessibility of the exhibit, underscoring the importance of clarity in presentation and navigation within immersive installations.

Photo from an exhibition hall within Drop City.

This exhibition featured photos of architectural details and sites hung along wires for visitors to walk through.



The precise alignment of the “In progress” theme with the **brand identity** was similarly vague. Graffiti art could be seen along the walls, although it was unclear whether this was a purposeful decision by the organizers or simply a product of the space itself. Each exhibition seemed to connect to itself, but it lacked the connection from one to the other, which would have created a much stronger overall identity.

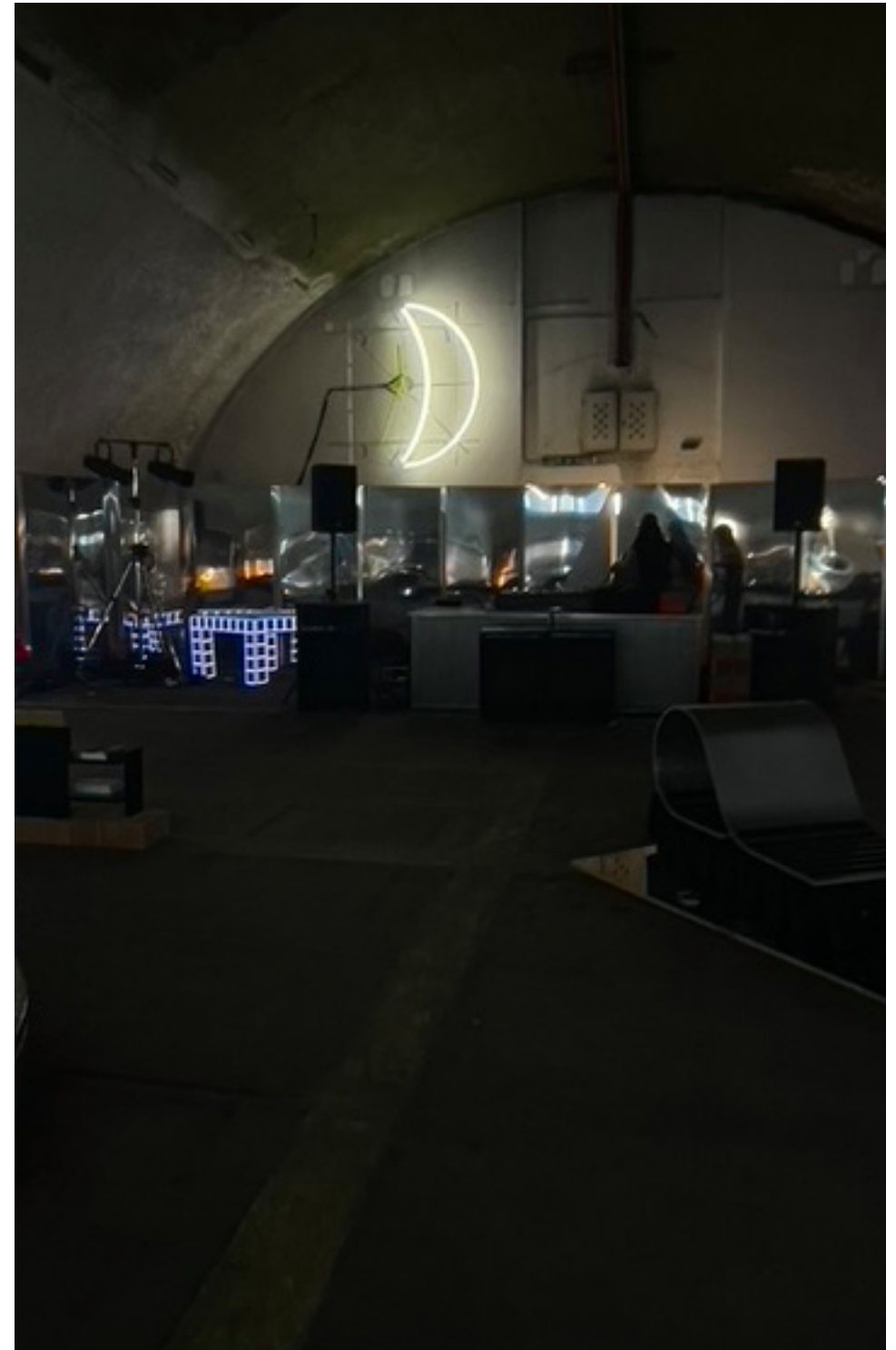
The **flow** of the space itself was thought out very intentionally. When talking to the organizer, they explained the interconnectivity of the tunnels and how they meant to emphasize the transitions from one space to the next. Each exhibitor transformed their allocated space within the tunnels, reshaping it to fit their show’s narrative and aesthetic.

However, despite efforts to optimize and customize conditions such as lighting and temperature, the inherent limitations of the environment persisted, serving as a reminder of the challenges inherent in **repurposing unconventional spaces** for creative endeavors.

This exhibition showed the process theme using a diagram approach.



Image of an exhibition hall where DJ events were set to be held.





At the heart of Drop City was a conversation about **sustainable innovation**. The utilization of abandoned space was an excellent example of a sustainable practice. They used an existing space to fulfill a need for an environment to conduct research and work. Since the space will continue to serve as a creative work environment in the future, this is an example of repurposing that does not need disassembly at the end of the week. The use of old station benches used for the talks further exemplified the repurposing of space and objects. By repurposing these benches, they avoided using new materials and stopped them from being wasted.

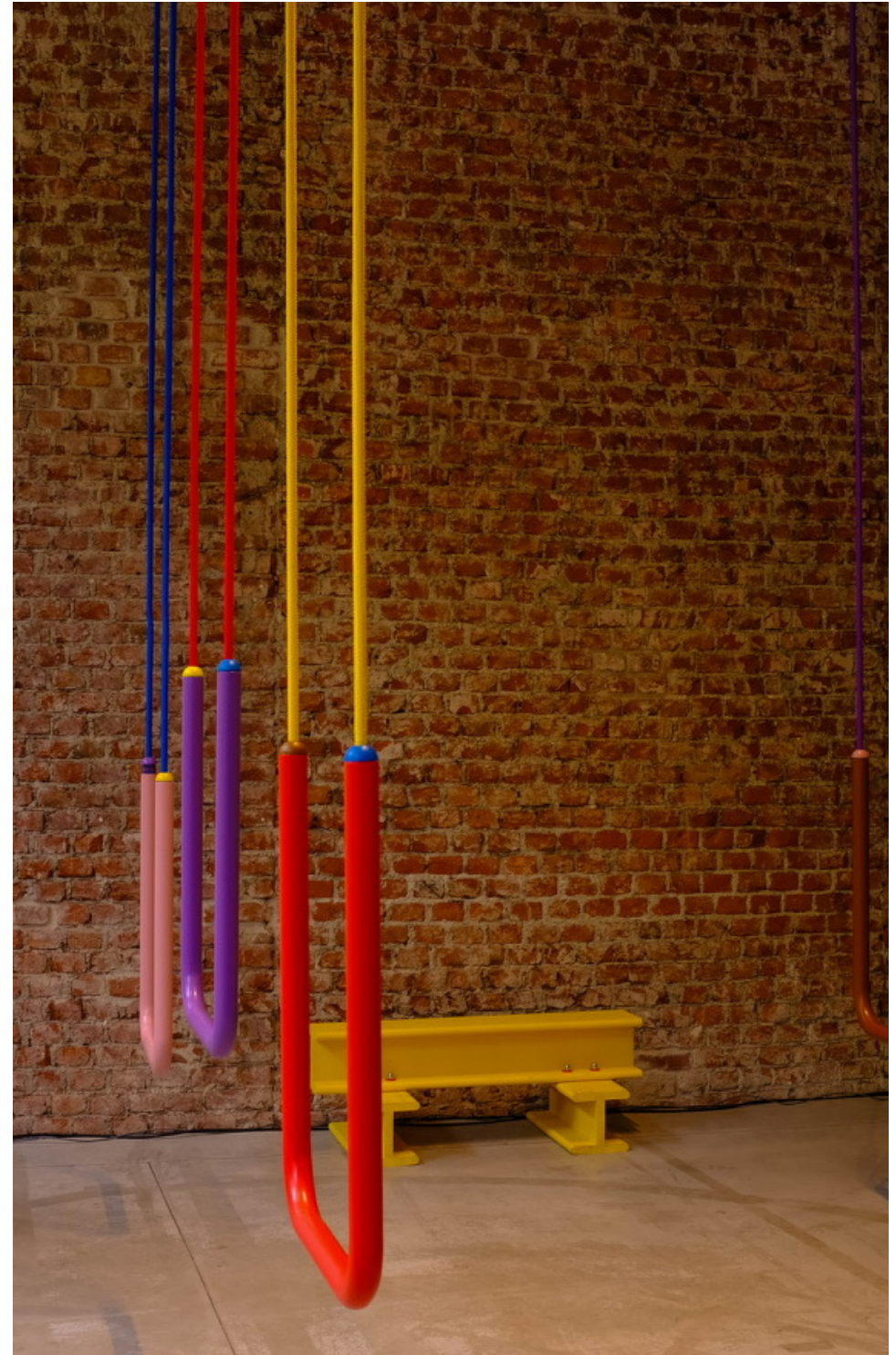
On the other hand, many of the exhibitions seemed very material-heavy, and when talking with the organizers, they seemed unsure about where all the materials would go once the event was over. This led to questions about whether/how the sustainability aspect that existed within the space translates into the curation of the exhibitors. It would have been interesting to see how the exhibitions would have shifted if that had been a criterion in the curation process.

Brera Design District

During Design Week, the Brera district of Milan was full of energy, offering a vibrant tapestry of exhibitions, events, and experiences. **Navigating** the Brera district during Milan Design Week proved both exhilarating and overwhelming. The streets were crowded, which was sometimes overwhelming, yet the abundance of wayfinding signage facilitated easy navigation.

Due to the **sheer number of events** occurring in the area, prioritizing among the multitude of events proved daunting. Identifying specific exhibitions to attend was challenging, as many of the descriptions lacked clarity in terms of what to expect at the event. Most of the events provided options for languages, and some even offered printed programs in several languages to aid understanding and accessibility.

Photo from the House Of Switzerland Exhibition, in Brera. The exhibition featured many interactive components, such as the swings pictured on the right.



The Brera district embodied a **corporate, commercial identity** punctuated by the presence of renowned brand names such as Kia, Hermes, Bottega, and Fendi. Exhibits like the House of Switzerland showcased a modern, engaging approach, fostering interaction and human-space connection with playful elements. Kia's exhibit focused on contrast and the human experience, while the Chiquita exhibit embraced gimmicky, interactive elements to captivate audiences.

Interactive experiences were a hallmark of many exhibits within the Brera district, blurring the boundaries between **content and container**. From engaging installations to immersive displays, the events invited visitors to participate actively in the narrative unfolding around them, fostering a deeper connection with the showcased brands and products. This connection created excitement and energy as if you were a part of something rather than simply observing.

Exhibits like the House of Switzerland integrated **sustainable products** into their displays, highlighting the importance of eco-consciousness in contemporary design. Additionally, initiatives such as the UPS exhibition underscored the role of sustainability in logistics and supply chain management, emphasizing the imperative for environmentally responsible practices across industries. However, many of the exhibits seemed to require a lot of material to set up, which must be removed after the event, leading to unnecessary waste.



Photo of the banana ball pit at the Chiquita exhibit in Brera.

UPS exhibition





The botanical garden was an interesting contrast within this district as it utilized a historical space to showcase art and design in combination with nature. The opportunity to immerse oneself in the garden space provided a nice break. It reset from the bustle of the district. The design showcased within the garden aligned well with the environment, borrowing its natural forms. Even though visitors couldn't interact with the exhibit, the space provided an interactive element, which heightened the experience.

Overall, The Brera district during Milan Design Week offered a captivating mix of accessibility challenges, corporate branding initiatives, and sustainability efforts. While navigating the crowds and prioritizing among numerous events presented hurdles, the interactive and engaging nature of the exhibits fostered a sense of connection and excitement among visitors. Although a prevalent theme, sustainability also highlighted the ongoing need for more environmentally conscious practices within design events. As visitors immersed themselves in the dynamic atmosphere of the Brera district, they were reminded of the multifaceted nature of design and its potential to shape both experiences and perceptions.

Photo taken in the botanical garden in Brera.

Porta Venezia

Porta Venezia's theme, "Made to be different," offered a unique experience during the week. The district boasted good signage, making **navigation** a breeze. Maps at entrances and banners marking the district's beginning facilitated easy exploration despite its spread-out layout. Thanks to the well-planned signage system, visitors found it convenient to traverse the area. The spread-out nature would make it more challenging for visitors who struggle with mobility or longer distances. Additionally, there were many events with long lines to enter, which would pose a problem for individuals who could only stand for a short period.



Photo of the wayfinding signage seen around the district.



Photo from inside the Google exhibition.



Photo from Vero's drop 5 collection.

While the district seemed to veer away from future-oriented themes, it still **exuded a sense of modernity**. Exhibits like Google's black warehouse, transformed into a funky space with lights, speakers, and eclectic decor, captured this contemporary vibe. Capsule, reminiscent of modern and modular design spaces with "Space X vibes," further exemplified the district's inclination toward modern aesthetics.

The exhibits within the Porta Venezia district demonstrated an intriguing relationship between **content and container**. Google's exhibition reflected its innovative approach to design, utilizing unconventional elements like rocks and boxes to create an engaging environment. However, much of the interactivity within the exhibit was minimal. At times, **interactivity** was suggested, such as when the organizers posed the question, "What does color taste like?" However, there was no opportunity for interactivity, i.e., nothing to taste. This disconnect provided a false sense of immersion and exploration within the corporate themes that the exhibitors could have strengthened. With its futuristic ambiance, the Capsule exhibition seamlessly integrated its content with the modular exhibit space, creating an immersive experience akin to stepping into the future.

Photo taken at the Capsule shops in the courtyard of the showroom.





Workstation within a furniture showroom in Porta Venezia.

The Porta Venezia district appeared to lack explicit initiatives in terms of **sustainability**. Exhibits focused more on modern aesthetics and innovative design rather than sustainability practices. While this may have been a missed opportunity to highlight eco-consciousness, it also showcased the district's diverse range of themes and focuses.

In conclusion, the Porta Venezia district at Milan Design Week offered a captivating blend of accessibility, brand identity, and spatial dynamics. Despite its distance from future-focused themes, the district's modern aesthetic and innovative exhibits give visitors a memorable and engaging experience. While sustainability may not have been prominently featured, the district's diverse offerings highlighted its versatility and appeal to a broad audience of design enthusiasts.



Bar Unikko, a pop up cafe created for Unikko's 60th anniversary

2024