

# MILAN DESIGN WEEK

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# Introduction

**Milan Design Week 2024 stands as a cornerstone event in the global design calendar, tracing its roots back to the 1960s when it first emerged under the Salone del Mobile Design Exhibition.**

Over the years, it has evolved into a sprawling showcase of creativity, attracting designers, architects, and enthusiasts from around the world. This year, we were part of the twelve selected students who had the privilege of participating in this renowned event. Prior to our arrival in Milan, we engaged in preparatory activities aimed at familiarizing ourselves with the scope and expectations of the week. Each day started with group excursions into various districts of the city, commencing at approximately 9 am. These expeditions provided us with firsthand exposure to the diverse array of exhibitions and installations on display.

Navigating Milan Design Week as tourists proved to be a captivating yet challenging endeavor for our group. Given the opportunity to explore each district independently in our groups of 3, we found ourselves confronted with the daunting task of sifting through over 1,000 events to curate our own personalized itinerary. This experience provided us with invaluable insights into the intricate process of attending such a prestigious event, particularly as visitors navigating a city where we were unfamiliar with the language and cultural nuances.

As newcomers to Milan, we embarked on this journey with a sense of anticipation and excitement, eager to immerse ourselves in the pulsating heart of the global design scene. However, we quickly realized the complexities of navigating the labyrinthine streets and deciphering the myriad of events scattered across the city. Each decision to attend a particular exhibition became a strategic choice, as we endeavored to prioritize those that aligned with our interests and passions.

In our quest to unravel the essence of Milan Design Week, we found ourselves relying on various tools and platforms, from social media platforms to meticulously crafted maps and brochures. Through this process, we gained a deeper appreciation for the meticulous planning and marketing efforts that underpin Milan





Design Week, as well as the crucial role that accessibility and communication play in shaping the attendee experience. Our journey as tourists navigating this dynamic landscape not only enriched our understanding of the event itself but also provided us with invaluable lessons in adaptability, resourcefulness, and the universal language of design.

An integral component of our experience was the opportunity to interact with designers and organizers, facilitating a deeper understanding of the conceptualization and execution behind the showcased works. It was a truly exhilarating experience to find that many designers were present at their own exhibitions, eagerly welcoming dialogue and sharing their stories with us. These interactions transcended mere admiration for their work; they provided us with a rare glimpse into the inner workings of the design process, fostering a deeper connection and appreciation for the craftsmanship and vision behind each masterpiece.

Moreover, the opportunity to converse with organizers added another layer of richness to our learning journey. These behind-the-scenes conversations offered invaluable insights into the logistical challenges, strategic planning, and collaborative efforts that culminated in the seamless execution of each exhibition. We were able to gain a holistic understanding of the event ecosystem, from conception to realization, thanks to the firsthand accounts shared by these industry insiders.

This immersive engagement with designers and organizers served as a cornerstone of our Milan Design Week experience, offering a profound educational opportunity that extended far beyond the confines of a traditional classroom. We found ourselves not only inspired by the innovative designs on display but also empowered by the knowledge and connections forged through our interactions. We are deeply grateful to Paolo, our esteemed professor, and CAMD, our college, for orchestrating this extraordinary opportunity. As students, we recognize that such privileged access to industry insiders and thought leaders is a rare privilege, one that afforded us a unique perspective and a wealth of invaluable lessons that will undoubtedly shape our future endeavors in the world of design.

Within this editorial reflection, we offer a comprehensive account of our immersion into Milan Design Week 2024—a compilation of observations, interviews, and insights garnered throughout our participation in this seminal event. We talk about our observations with Accessibility & Flow, Relevance with Brand Identity, Content/ Container Relationship and Sustainability of the exhibitions we visited, among other things.

# Fuorsialone As General Tourism: Brera

Brera, the largest Fuorisalone district, felt completely distinct from the other districts as part of Milan Design Week. Brera housed the displays from some of the most popular design companies in the world, including notable exhibits from Bottega Veneta, Kia, Porsche, Diesel, and Kohler. These events were strategically placed in Milan's most touristic center, near iconic landmarks like the Galleria and Duomo, seamlessly extending the city's tourism ecosystem. However, this location choice also inflated the already busy streets with more people, resulting in longer lines at exhibits and little respite from the crowds along sidewalks and streets. It was clear that the intentional placement of well-known brands in this tourist hub aimed to attract a broader audience, not just designers. Waiting in line for exhibits such as Porsche or Bottega Veneta, we observed many tourists who were already in the area for general sightseeing, stopping by out of curiosity to see what these beloved brands had to offer.



## Coherence/ Relevance with Brand/Product Identity

Many exhibits in Brera were hosted by companies with high brand recognition. The allure of these exhibits seemed more driven by an interest in seeing

what familiar brands would showcase rather than discovering new designs. This was particularly relevant given the district's over 200 showcases. Helpfully, Brera was one of the only places that had a guide to accompany the map, so we could read about each exhibit. But still, due to the overwhelming amount of displays we had to rely upon the selections the Brera organizers made. In the guidebook, only the top 20-30 exhibits were featured with photos, while the rest had only their company logo, name, and a brief description. Navigating such an extensive map required preconceived ideas about brand identity. As for smaller companies, a well-designed logo became crucial; a compelling logo could suggest that their designs were worth seeing, whether this was true or not.

Brera did not seem to have a consistent narrative or theme that tied all of the displays together. There was a large reliance on existing brand reputations to draw an audience. While this tactic was successful, and we saw some of the largest crowds in Brera, this left a lot of smaller companies unexplored. The smaller displays in Brera were spread out and harder to find, and had far less visitors. In their social media posts, they focused on emphasizing the work of smaller artists, as an attempt to gain more visitors. But in the press releases for Milan Design Week, which almost exclusively spoke about displays from Brera, only big name brands were discussed. along sidewalks and streets. It was clear that the intentional placement of well-known brands in this tourist hub aimed to attract a broader audience, not just designers. Waiting in line for exhibits such as Porsche or Bottega Veneta, we observed many tourists who were already in the area for general sightseeing, stopping by out of curiosity to see what these beloved brands had to offer.



# The Art of Dreams Milan 2024





Bottega Veneta, Brera

Porsche, Brera





## Content/ Container Relationship

For many well-known brands, the content of their exhibitions had little to do with their actual products. For instance, Bottega Veneta, known for high-end clothing, and Kia, a car manufacturer, presented exhibits that aimed to associate their brands with luxury and art, rather than showcasing their typical products. In our private tour of the Kia exhibit, Instead, the intention was to create an association of KIA with high luxury and art that a car manufacturer that specializes in standard sedans would otherwise not have. In this respect, many of the exhibits had nothing to do with selling actual products, only establishing brand identity. This felt true only with the exhibits of Brera.



House of Switzerland, Brera





This was not true for every exhibit however. Kohler, a plumbing fixture manufacturer, created an elaborate experiential sculpture of pipes within an old Milanese courtyard to promote a singular toilet “Formation O2” by Samuel Ross. A particular highlight for our group was the House of Switzerland, which highlighted the work of independent Swiss furniture and product designers, many of which are fresh out of school. The entire exhibit had an extremely cohesive design, with signage, business cards, and interactive elements such as colorful swings and seesaws interspersed between all of the exhibits.



## Sustainability

Brera’s exhibits were notable for the abundance of “swag” and complimentary items like posters, bags, keychains, and business cards. Visitors could take as many items as they wanted, leading to streets filled with people carrying an excess of branded items. Given that most Design Week visitors are travelers who likely won’t keep all these items, the sheer volume of giveaways seemed wasteful. Some items were notably large and impractical for travelers, like the oversized Bottega Veneta bag tube.





Miamimilano, Brera



Diesel, Brera





## Accessibility & Flow

In smaller districts like these, the exhibits felt more seamlessly integrated into the neighborhoods. In some ways this was an advantage; as first time visitors to Milan, we could appreciate the city in a more natural state than the altered and inflated landscape of Brera. However, this made navigation through Design Week exhibits more challenging. For instance, in Isola, even though we were intentionally seeking Design Week events, it was very difficult to locate different exhibitions. Signage was sparse, and storefronts or events were not clearly marked as part of the event. Entering the more concentrated Lampo exhibit in Isola required navigating through a poorly marked parking lot and walking for nearly a kilometer to enter the exhibit. Smaller districts also meant longer walks between exhibits, making maps and guides essential for planning visits.

Because these districts were smaller, it was also harder to navigate between exhibits. When visiting Porta Venezia, while all of the exhibits were extremely interesting to us, there was no easy way to travel between exhibits without a 10-15 minute walk between points of interest. This added another layer of difficulty, and made the map and guide designs even more imperative to our decision making for which exhibits to see. Similarly to the map in Brera, the maps in these smaller Fuorisalone districts used pictures and captions to highlight the “main” displays in their district, and only company names and labels on a map for the many other displays.



Emotions of the Sun, Porta Venezia





Capsule, 10 Corso Como

## Coherence/Relevance with Brand/Product Identity

These districts showcased a mix of well-known and emerging brands, targeting a design-savvy audience. Many venues hosted talks between designers about their processes and products, emphasizing actual products over brand image, unlike the more image-driven exhibits in Brera. In this respect, there was less of an overwhelming impression of creating a brand vision, and more about displaying particular products. Traveling through spaces like the Capsule Pavilion in Porta Venezia felt more like shopping than seeing an art exhibition such as in Brera. In these spaces, there was also an intersection of the product display with other programming, such as talks, performances, and food consumption. In this way, they are curating an overall impression for the district by promoting the image of each individual artist or company.

## Sustainability

The integration with the city allowed for more interesting ad hoc interventions that utilized Milan's unique infrastructure. Drop City, for example, transformed an old tunneling system beneath the central train lines into interconnected exhibit spaces with a generous street-facing entrance. Each district had its epicenters of activity, like Lampo for Isola and the highly sought-after Palazzo Litta in 5Vie. Smaller exhibitors also had interesting interactions with their built space. Oatly, the plant milk company, took over a cafe in Isola to have only drinks using their product, painting the facade a bright blue that made a splash on an otherwise quiet street. Similarly, Marimekko and Apartamento collaborated on Bar Marimekko in Porta Venezia, covering the floors, awnings, and foodware in their iconic floral print. Capsule took over an interesting adaptive reuse project in Porta Venezia, Spazio Maiocchi, using the building to display furniture and a car, and the pavilion to feature a cafe and modular gift shop pod.

Capsule Plaza, Porta Venezia





Bar Marimekko, Porta Venezia



Isola



5Vie







Superdesign Show, Tortona

Opificio 31, Tortona



# Design Destination: Alcova

As the newest district addition in the Design Week landscape, Alcova marketed itself as the edgiest and most exclusive design district, taking over two classic Milanese villas north of Milan, Villa Bagatti Valsecchi and Villa Borsani. Alcova, located 30 minutes outside Milan, felt distinct from the other exhibits in Fuorisalone because it required travel outside of Milan to reach, but took more care to become an explicit design destination. Alcova attracted a dedicated and passionate crowd, and in the end offered a more unique and exclusive experience than some of the other Fuorisalone events.



## Accessibility/Flow

As aforementioned, Alcova was one of the most challenging events to reach because it required significant travel outside of Milan. Because of this, it drew only a dedicated designer audience. The energy at Alcova buzzed, as you could feel that every person there was excited about design and could truly appreciate the work displayed, as opposed to some of the kitschier displays in Brera that appealed to a more popular audience. But despite the distance, Alcova still had some of the largest crowds we had seen at any Fuorisalone event. Villa Bagatti Valsecchi and Villa Borsani were both gated and controlled for crowds, which resulted in long lines and wait times at either event before the villas even opened. This seemed to cause frustration within visitors, who lost many hours of their Design Week to travel time and long waits. However,

once inside the event navigation within Alcova was orderly, working in a spiral through the villa, each room containing the work of a different artist, each telling a unique story. Because of the significant travel time needed to get to each place, people seemed to linger on the grounds and enjoy the space longer than the exhibits in Milan, where you are moving in and out quickly through many spaces. Alcova was one of the only places during Design Week where you are encouraged to slow down. It was a nice respite from the intense activity of some of the other events.









### Coherence/Relevance with Brand/Product Identity

Similar to the smaller Fuorisalone districts, there was less emphasis on individual artists and more on creating a cohesive district experience. In our opinion, Alcovia tackled this most successfully. Because Alcovia was in a small villan outside of Milan, it required additional infrastructure for food and recreation to operate as a self-sustaining attraction. This was unique to Alcovia, because all the other districts could draw upon the resources of Milan as a city to operate. The organizers used this as an opportunity to elevate Alcovia from simply a district with exhibits into a fully cohesive design destination. Like the avant garde furniture and products displayed throughout the exhibit, similar care was taken to have food and drink with unique ingredients and compositions, treating food as an avenue for design as well. There were additional attractions, such as a mini golf display, innovative garden furnishings, and night shows to transform the lawns of Al-

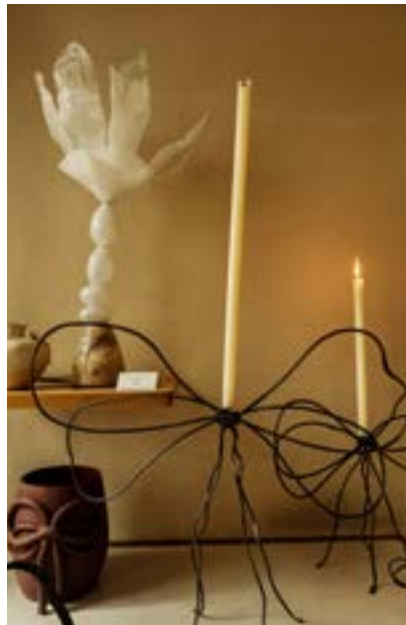


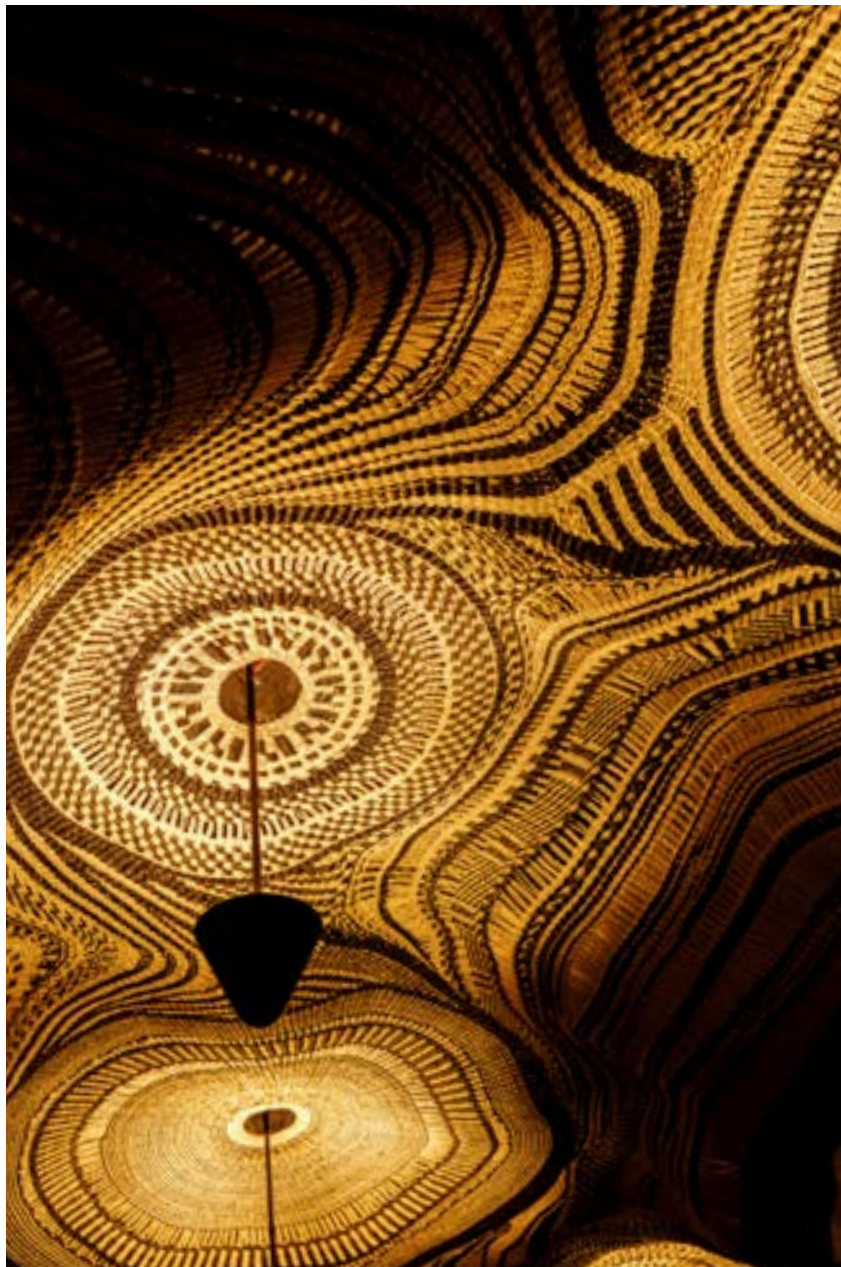
cova into a place to relax and interact with other like-minded designers. The experience at Alcova was controlled and designed at every level, and in the end felt the most thematically cohesive of any of the Fuorisalone events. It was well worth the trip to see. In fact, the travel built additional anticipation and excitement, and made the whole exhibit feel even more special.

## Content/Container Relationship

While the other Fuorisalone events focused on the integration with the city, Alcova was all about integration with the building. Alcova's exhibits utilized the unique architecture of their settings to create immersive experiences. The dim lighting in the basement highlighted light fixtures and sculptures, and the tunnels had easily controlled one-directional flow. Existing fountains, landscaped yards, and driveways were filled with funky objects and furniture that overtook the classic Milanese designs. Even bathtubs, windows, and fireplaces were used as ways to display new products and artists. The contrast between classical and contemporary felt most fine-tuned in Alcova, because there was less distraction from the hustle of the working city.

However, because of how small the events were and the controlled crowds, there was very little distraction or alternative activities for the people who had to wait in long lines to enter the event. In other Fuorisalone districts, if one event had a long line you could leave, see another site or go to a restaurant, and return at a later time. At Alcova, all activities could only be accessed after standing in a long line that could take hours. This is one disadvantage of the remote location of the district. However, the treasures inside the villa gates were well worth the wait.





## Sustainability

Alcova emphasized sustainable practices, with fewer gratuitous items and a focus on meaningful, immersive experiences that engaged visitors without excessive waste. Instead of a lot of free products, Alcova had a gift shop where you could buy and ship items home. Because they controlled all of the food distribution as well, all foodware was biodegradable and collected on site, so there was no spillover of trash into the city, as was a problem in other Fuorisalone districts. Because the event was so contained, so was the mess it produced. However, as is consistent with every event, there was still a lot of paper and business card distribution.





# Design Business – Salone Del Mobile

Salone di Mobile, the genesis of Milan Design Week and the largest furniture exposition in the world, felt completely foreign to the ambitions of Fuorisalone. Whereas Fuorisalone featured experiential, curated events and emphasized integration with Milan, Salone felt entirely like a trade fair. Salone was a comprehensive showcase of design innovations and business-driven exhibitions that emphasized the intersection of design and commerce.





## Accessibility & Flow

Salone, similarly to Alcova, was not located in central Milan and needed to be accessed using public transportation. Unlike Fuorisalone, which were temporary exhibitions integrated into the city of Milan, Salone was hosted at a massive indoor facility that exists explicitly for the trade fair. The property was massive, with many hanger-sized buildings that each housed dozens of companies. At the time of our visit, there were thousands of visitors. Due to the scale of the event and the amount of visitors there, it was impossible to flow freely throughout the space without getting caught in large crowds. The event was easy to navigate in theory, but hard in practice. Each building within Salone was filled with exhibits arranged in a grid, which was clearly defined on a map. However, when actually moving throughout the buildings, signage was sparse and hard to

navigate. The spaces were massive and felt outside of the human scale, with completely oversized displays, as opposed to the extremely curated and local projects of Fuorisalone. Additionally, there were very few “landmarks” to place yourself within the space; it felt like a landscape of similar displays repeating themselves. Overall, the event required a lot of unpleasant walking. In the Fuorisalone, the walks between the exhibits were along charming Milan roads and we could tackle tourism and viewing displays at the same time. In Salone, it was mostly indoor travel through dark buildings or overly crowded pathways.



## Coherence/Relevance with Brand/Product Identity

Exhibits at Salone were closely aligned with brand and product identity, focusing on the latest innovations and trends in design. Similar to Brera, an overwhelming amount of displays made the maps imperative to our time there. We also defaulted onto visiting well known brands because of issues of time and knowledge of scope.

Unlike Fuorisalone, where a lot of attention was paid to designing experiential displays and tourist attractions, Salone was unabashedly focused on commerce. The fair felt almost exclusively focused on making furniture sales, not promoting general brand image. This was evident in the way that company representatives spoke to us as students. Many companies seemed less interested in speaking to us once they learned we were students, and in one instance we were told we could not take flyers or business cards because we were not prospective buyers.

## Sustainability

Salone prioritized sustainability, showcasing eco-friendly designs and promoting sustainable practices within the design industry.

## Content/Container Relationship

The content of Salone's exhibits was directly related to the products on display, offering a cohesive experience that emphasized practical applications and industry relevance. Unlike Fuorisalone, Salone do Mobile had no relationship to the built space that the displays were in, but within the large event space each company created their own small ecosystems. Larger brands, such as Memphis and Knoll, opted for displays that felt more like exhibits, treating their furniture as art. In addition to showing new designs, they displayed some of their classic pieces as well. Many other companies created displays focused on placing their furniture in their desired environments, such as patio furniture in displays with sense greenery and warm lighting.





# Overall Reflection

Navigating Milan Design Week as first-time visitors and tourists was both challenging and exhilarating. Events like Drop City, visits to Accurat, and after-hours gatherings like DJ nights and garden parties provided opportunities for relaxation and socialization among designers, customers, and industry professionals. These informal events, such as the open DJ night at Arco Della Pace and Cartier's garden party, added a memorable dimension to the Design Week experience, blending design appreciation with vibrant social interactions.

Reflecting on our experience in Milan during Design Week 2024, we are struck by the dynamic blend of excitement, challenges, and invaluable insights that defined our journey. Milan, as the pulsating heart of the global design scene, provided an unparalleled backdrop for exploration, learning, and immersion into the world of creativity and innovation. As newcomers to the city, we were greeted with a sense of anticipation and eagerness to engage with the diverse array of exhibitions, installations, and events scattered across its labyrinthine streets. From the bustling district of Brera to the hidden gems of 5Vie, Isola, and beyond, each neighborhood offered a unique perspective and a wealth of design inspiration waiting to be discovered. Navigating Milan Design Week as tourists proved to be both captivating and challenging. The sheer magnitude of events, coupled with the need to curate our own personalized itinerary, required strategic planning and resourcefulness. Yet, amidst the chaos and excitement, we found ourselves drawn deeper into the rich tapestry of design, connecting with designers, organizers, and fellow enthusiasts from around the world.

One of the most enriching aspects of our

experience was the opportunity to interact with designers and organizers firsthand. These conversations offered invaluable insights into the conceptualization, execution, and challenges behind the showcased works, fostering a deeper appreciation for the craftsmanship and vision that underpins each masterpiece. From intimate discussions at smaller exhibits to engaging dialogues with industry insiders at larger venues, every interaction added layers of meaning and perspective to our Design Week journey.

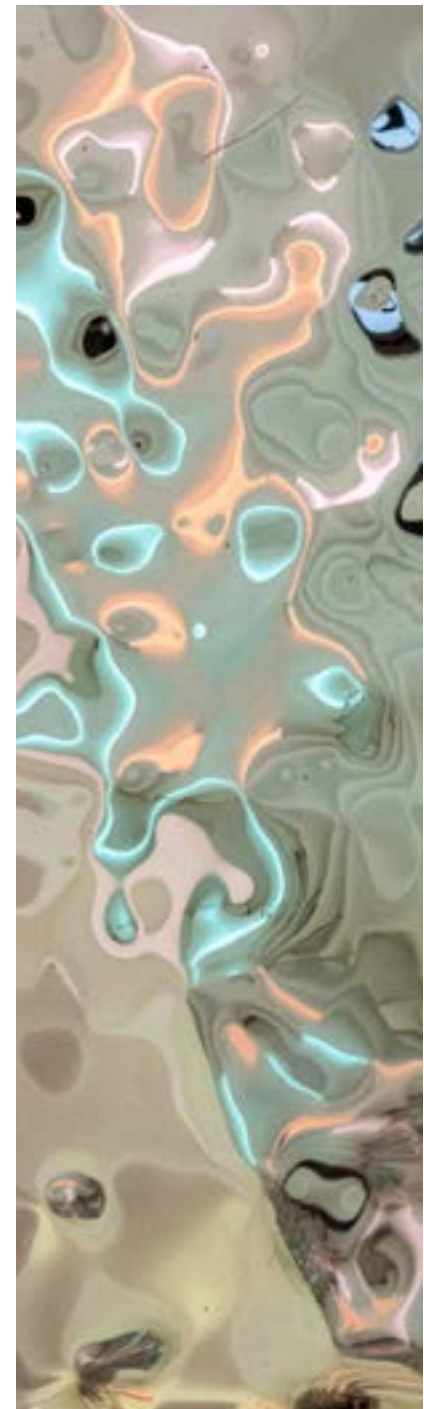
Moreover, our exploration of Milan extended beyond the confines of Design Week, allowing us to appreciate the city's rich history, culture, and architectural heritage. From iconic landmarks like the Duomo and Galleria to hidden gems tucked away in its winding streets, Milan offered a tapestry of experiences waiting to be unravelled. Reflecting on our experience in Milan during Design Week 2024, one of the key aspects that stood out was the accessibility, flow, and sustainability of the event. Each district presented its own set of strengths and areas for improvement, offering valuable lessons that could enhance future Design

Week experiences. In terms of accessibility and flow, we encountered both seamless integration and logistical challenges across the various districts. Larger districts like Brera and Salone di Mobile often felt overwhelming, with crowded streets and sparse signage making navigation a daunting task. Conversely, smaller districts like 5Vie and Isola offered a more intimate setting but suffered from limited signage and longer walks between exhibits. While maps and guides were essential tools for planning our visits, they often lacked the detail needed to navigate the sprawling event effectively. Sustainability emerged as a prominent theme throughout our exploration of Milan Design Week. While districts like Alcovia demonstrated a commitment to eco-friendly practices, offering biodegradable foodware and minimizing waste, others fell short with excessive giveaways and impractical swag. Finding a balance between promotional materials and sustainable practices remains a challenge for organizers and exhibitors alike.

Despite these challenges, our experience in Milan was undeniably enriching, offering a glimpse into the vibrant world of design and creativity. As we reflect on our journey, we recognize the value of returning to Milan with a deeper understanding of its intricacies and nuances. Armed with insights gained from our inaugural visit, we are better equipped to navigate the city's bustling streets and uncover hidden gems that align with our interests and passions.

As we bid farewell to Milan, we carry with us a treasure trove of memories, lessons, and inspirations that will undoubtedly shape our future endeavors in the world of design. From the vibrant energy of Alcovia to the business-driven atmosphere of Salone di Mobile, each district offered its own unique narrative, contributing to the rich tapestry of Milan Design Week 2024.

In the end, our experience in Milan transcended mere participation in a seminal event; it was a journey of discovery, connection, and growth that reaffirmed our passion for design and creativity. As we depart, we leave behind a piece of our hearts in this vibrant city, grateful for the opportunity to be part of its storied legacy in the world of design. Until we meet again, Milan. Grazie mille for an unforgettable experience.



# Our top 5 events from Milan Design Week



## 01. Alcova

For its unique container and immersive experiences.



## 02. House of Switzerland

For its cohesive design and focus on independent designers.

In selecting our top 5 events from Milan Design Week 2024, we sought out experiences that epitomized the essence of creativity, innovation, and immersive engagement. These events stood out not only for their exceptional designs and captivating locations but also for the unique experiences they offered. From tranquil oases to vibrant hubs of creativity, each event left a lasting impression, enriching our understanding of design and inspiring us in unexpected ways. Interacting with the passionate designers and workers in these spaces added depth to our exploration, providing valuable insights into their creative process and sparking meaningful conversations that lingered long after the event had ended.



## 03. Drop City

For its innovative use of Milan's infrastructure.



## 04. Capsule Plaza

For its engaging and thought-provoking exhibits.



## 05. Marimekko Bar

For its vibrant and interactive environment.

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