

Serendipity

A surreal scene featuring large, textured geometric blocks in shades of teal, orange, and grey. A large sphere, split vertically into a textured orange half and a solid red half, is positioned behind the blocks. Several people are interacting with the scene: a child on the left holds a red balloon; a couple stands on a block in the middle right; a woman sits on a block at the bottom left with a child; and a girl points upwards at the bottom right.

➤ Is it possible
to design
spontaneity?

= il prisma =
DESIGN HUMAN LIFE

➤ The changing office: a platform for relationships and a new social destination

Today, the office – the so-called workplace – is increasingly becoming a relational platform and social destination, where connections are formed and a sense of belonging around a shared corporate culture is created and reinforced.

Following the widespread adoption of remote working, which has seen people begin to work from so-called “third places” (cafés, parks, co-working spaces, etc.), individuals have developed their own ways of working and learning. As a result, the work-learning experience has become increasingly diverse and complex to manage.

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The office, therefore, can no longer be just a mere place of work: it must become a meeting point for people, communities, and brands – seamlessly integrated into this constellation of “third places” scattered throughout the city. In this new scenario, the workspace can **reinvent itself as an attractive space** – one that **enhances and capitalizes** on what other environments cannot offer: authentic relationships, spontaneous exchange, a sense of belonging, and stimuli for **lifelong learning**.

From this perspective, the workplace transforms into a living relational system: a space designed to spark interactions, reinforce an organization’s values, and support its growth—not only professionally, but also on a human level.

Today, we are increasingly designing dynamic ecosystems where various stakeholders—people, teams, partners, and clients—operate, coexist, and interact. These interactions are not a “side effect,” but rather an integral part of the design itself. For this reason, **effective design must stem from a participatory and inclusive process, one that listens to and involves those who truly experience the space.**

When we enter an environment, we don’t just perceive it with our eyes – we absorb it with our entire body. It influences us, often without us realizing it, on multiple levels: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

On a cognitive level, for example, the design of the environment can either support or hinder our ability to concentrate, solve problems, or collaborate.

Take **color**, for instance – it is never just an aesthetic choice: it's a **powerful design tool** capable of influencing mental states and behaviors.

Blue and green help keep the mind clear and focused, making them ideal for concentration. Yellow, on the other hand, stimulates energy and creativity, making it perfect for collaboration or brainstorming. Softer tones, like blush pink or warm beige, promote calm and relaxation – ideal for decompression or breaks.

This goes far beyond perception: neuroscientific studies and industry research show that color has a real physiological impact – it can alter brain waves, heart rate, and hormone levels. A workplace that integrates color intelligently can reduce stress by up to 37% and increase memory and creativity by up to 15%.

(<https://www.allsteeloffice.com/effective-color-use-workspaces>)



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On an emotional level, space can evoke feelings and moods.

Natural light, ceiling height, and the presence of organic elements all influence our sense of comfort, safety, and openness. **Materials, too, speak their own language:** smooth, cold surfaces convey a sense of precision and modernity, while warmer materials like wood, which, with its texture, color, and even scent communicate warmth and authenticity. Just stepping into a wood-clad room can create an immediate shift in mood: you relax, slow down, and feel more at ease. **Biophilic design** – using greenery and natural materials – when well implemented can boost productivity by up to 6% and lead to a perceived increase in creativity of 15%, while also naturally reducing stress.

(https://greenplantsforgreenbuildings.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Human-Spaces-Report-Biophilic-Global_Impact_Biophilic_Design.pdf).



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Space can also have a direct impact on behavior. The way it is organized can encourage movement or stillness, conversation or introspection. A circular seating arrangement, a staircase placed prominently, or an informal workstation by a window can act as **triggers for spontaneous encounters or restorative breaks.** Environments designed for sensory comfort – with particular attention to lighting, temperature, and air quality – have been shown to **increase perceived productivity by 25%.** In spaces where people feel psychologically safe, this perception rises by up to 35%.

(<https://arxiv.org/abs/2109.05930>)

Space, therefore, is neither neutral nor passive: it speaks to us, guides us, and shapes our behavior. Those who design work environments must start from this awareness: every detail is a choice that can either enhance or hinder the daily experience of the people who live it.



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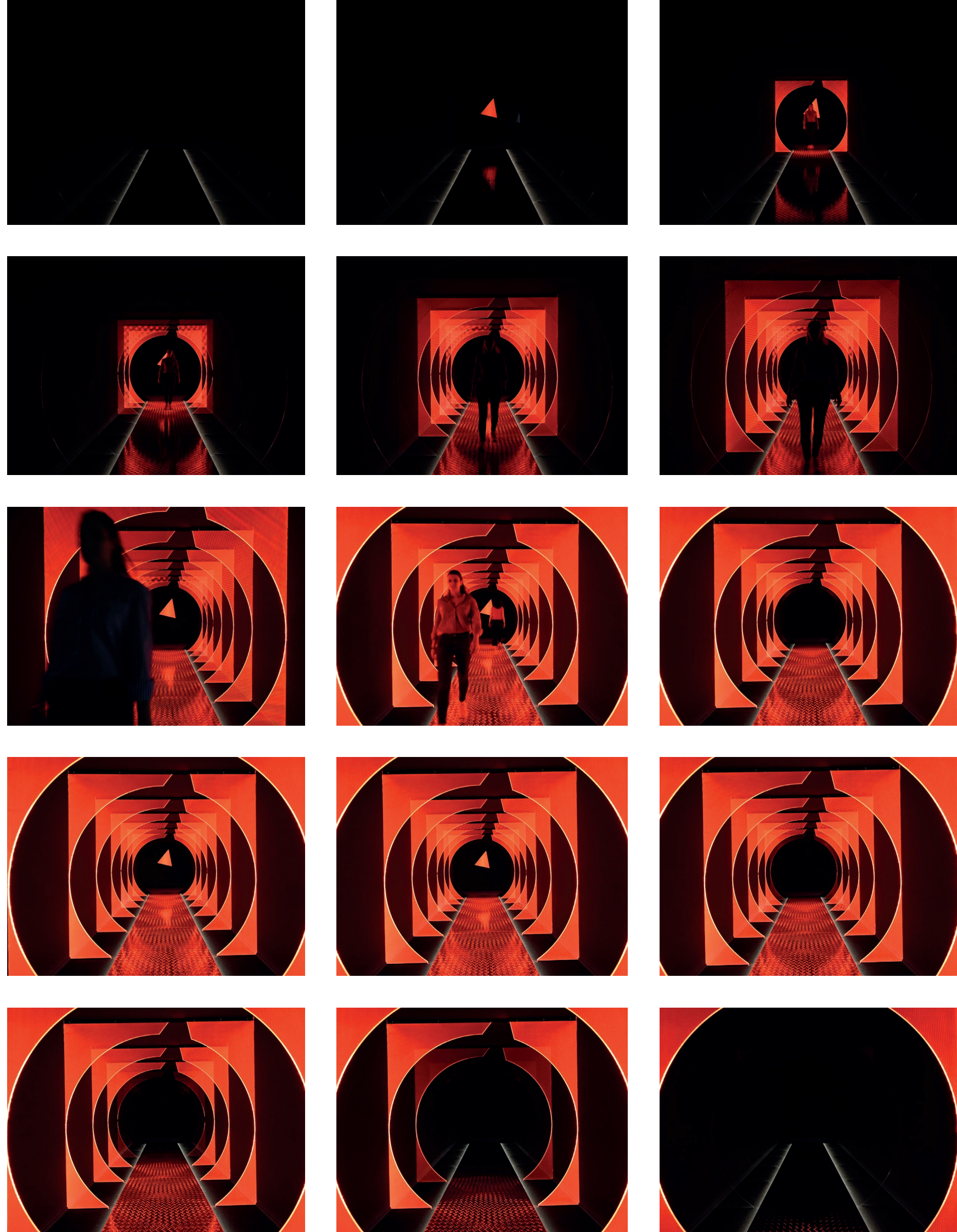
Only when space is able
to speak to our senses,
adapt to our rhythms,
and support our mental
states can something
even more valuable
occur: **the unexpected.**

In environments thoughtfully designed around the work-learning experience – where nothing is rigid but instead welcoming – serendipity can emerge: that unplanned moment when an idea is born from a chance encounter, a shift in perspective, or an unintended detour.

➤ So how can we design something that, by definition, is spontaneous?

Serendipity is not magic, nor is it luck. It is the result of a system that makes room for the unpredictable, for discovery, for intuition. We don't design *serendipity* itself – we design the *conditions* for it to happen. We build around it: spaces that encourage movement, break routines, and stimulate the eye and the imagination. Places where chance is welcomed, not shut out. It's a subtle, yet deeply intentional kind of design. It's not just about layout, but also about voids, transitions, visual and tactile stimuli—ambiguous spaces that don't serve a single function, but allow for multiple uses, encounters, and interpretations. This is where design steps in – in a new and highly strategic way.

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The first lever is the structure of the space. In fact, layouts that are too linear or too logical tend to generate equally predictable behaviors. If instead we introduce non-obvious pathways, diagonal routes, and connections between areas that are usually kept separate, we increase the chances for people and ideas to intersect spontaneously.

When an environment invites you to walk, to change perspective, to move through different areas throughout the day, the likelihood of more genuine interactions rises.

Walkable spaces not only support physical mobility, but also relational mobility: they encourage you to step out of your bubble and encounter people you wouldn't meet in a static layout. **Serendipity also thrives on design discontinuity.** Not everything needs to be perfectly symmetrical, homogeneous, or predictable.

Among the most effective tools is **environmental branding**. This goes beyond logos or corporate color palettes – it's about a **coherent visual narrative that flows through the space and communicates values**. Inspirational phrases, hidden symbols, subtle yet evocative graphics – these are elements that don't impose a message but suggest one.

This kind of quiet communication encourages those in the space to look around more attentively, to slow down, to tune in. Then there's the strategic use of **visual prompts**. A message on the wall inviting you to "try something new". An object placed in an unusual way. A texture that evokes a distant place. These small, seemingly marginal triggers prompt people to behave in unexpected ways. They push them out of "autopilot mode". And often, that's when something meaningful happens.





Let's not forget the importance of the **human** and social **dimension**. Spaces that reflect authentic values – such as inclusivity, sustainability, and diversity – foster a sense of belonging. A café run by people with disabilities, for example, becomes a symbol that sparks new conversations, opens minds, and builds empathy. That, too, is serendipity. There is also the theme of **anticipation**. **Space can prepare you for an experience; it can put you in the right frame of mind to discover something.** It does so through light, materials, the sequence of openings – but also through subtle perceptual, visual, and emotional cues that signal “something might happen”.

It's not about creating spectacle, but atmosphere: setting the mind in motion, without distracting it.

In the end, designing for serendipity means **embracing a paradox**: crafting a space that allows something to happen in spite of the design. It's a matter of trust – in people, in curiosity, in the potential of the unexpected. Every well-designed space always contains a margin of openness. It is in that margin that discovery happens – the unexpected conversation, the idea that wasn't there before. And it is often there that the greatest value is born.

↗ Contacts

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