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Milan Design Week 2026

In Perspective

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Introduction

Milan Design Week returns for yet another year of experimentation, product launches, unique designs, and a collaboration of cross-industry players. Under the theme “Be the Project”, Fuorisalone foregrounded process over outcome, placing materials, making and intention at the centre of the conversation. Milan invited a pause, stripping back design to examine its purpose, capability and responsibility in a moment of global uncertainty.

Established global brands amplified the growing commercial gravity of the event, using Milan as a powerful platform for reach and relevance. At the same time, independent designers and studios pushed experimentation forward.

Materials emerged as a shared language across these worlds. Glass, mirror polish and stone took centre stage. Their presence spoke to a wider cultural desire for things that feel grounded in contrast to dematerialised experiences.

Rising geopolitical tension, economic instability, and digital saturation have fuelled a collective search for aliveness. Milan became a lens through which these desires surfaced, revealing how design is recalibrating its value proposition.

With exhibitions from new designers, industry leaders, and fashion houses, Milan transformed into a laboratory of creativity and design that pushes the boundaries of innovation.

Our team entered the festivities asking the following question:

What does design need to preserve and what must it reinvent to stay relevant now?

Here's what we found.



MDW

Trends

Crafted

Identity is being reconsidered, not as something fixed or defined, but as something slowly constructed through time. At Milan Design Week, this emerged through a renewed focus on craft, not as nostalgia, but as a way of embedding meaning, knowledge, and authorship into what's made.



When Apricots Blossom

“AI can never take away the craft.”

Edin Kjellvertz, Founder of Dusty Deco

In a landscape shaped by overproduction and increasingly homogenised aesthetics, value is shifting away from what can be endlessly replicated, and toward what carries provenance, cultural depth, and the visible trace of human involvement. Identity becomes less about consistency, and more about accumulation, shaped through materials, processes, and multiple cultural influences.

Rather than referencing craft, designers are embedding material knowledge directly into the outcome, linking form to place, people, and process.

At **When Apricots Blossom**, international designers collaborated with Uzbek artisans to reinterpret traditional materials and techniques

through a contemporary lens, connecting heritage to ecology, identity, and future narratives. Craft is positioned not as preservation, but as an evolving system shaped by environmental and cultural change.

Elsewhere, **Sapin-Sapin** demonstrated how authorship is being redefined through making, embedding collaboration directly into the object itself.

At the Chiostri di San Simpliciano, **Gucci Memoria** traced identity as an accumulation of cultural references, decisions, and reinterpretations.

Across these examples, craft becomes a means of constructing identity, not defining it.



Sapin-Sapin



Image credit: Carlos Alberto Guerriero

Adriana Siquiera, ALAGOAS PLURAL by Marco500



Gucci Memoria



Image credit: Tadeáš Podracký

Tadeáš Podracký x Heirloom Naga Centre

“Heritage in craft keeps stories, rituals and skills breathing across generations.”

Curator, Alagoas Plural

What’s next?

As value shifts upstream, differentiation will be rooted in origin, process, and authorship, rather than surface aesthetics. Brands will need to move beyond a single, globalised narrative and instead navigate multiple influences: local, global, traditional, and contemporary.

This opens an opportunity to design for plurality by collaborating across cultures, embedding regional knowledge, and enabling products to carry meaning depending on where and how they are used.

In this context, authenticity becomes something co-created, shaped through process, participation, and the ability to hold complexity.

Living

Products are no longer conceived as static objects, but as systems that respond and evolve through interaction. As digital intelligence becomes embedded into everyday life, value shifts from what a product does, to how it behaves.



Together, they rethink design as a practice of establishing relations between objects, spaces, bodies, and imaginations.

Curatorial Statement, House of Creatures

At **House of Creatures**, objects were presented not as tools, but as beings defined through behaviour, interaction, and presence rather than function.

Across Milan, we saw this shift move into application, as interaction becomes an exchange between user and system.

At Akuto Studio, the **Chord Machine** created a continuous feedback loop between gesture and sound, shaping the outcome through use.

This extended into more intangible systems. **Connexio** by Alessi positioned AI as a reflective layer rather than a directive one, where the object responded to behaviour and emotional cues, acting less as an assistant and more as a quiet mirror.

In more personal, body-adjacent design, **Pulse Pack** translated the user's heartbeat into a tactile signal, making internal rhythms perceptible and integrating the body directly into the interaction loop.

At an environmental scale, **MAREA / TIDE** responded dynamically to human presence, its form shifting in real-time to create a shared, responsive space shaped by movement and proximity.

Across these examples, we saw a shift from fixed products to adaptive systems where responsiveness and feedback, define the experience over time.

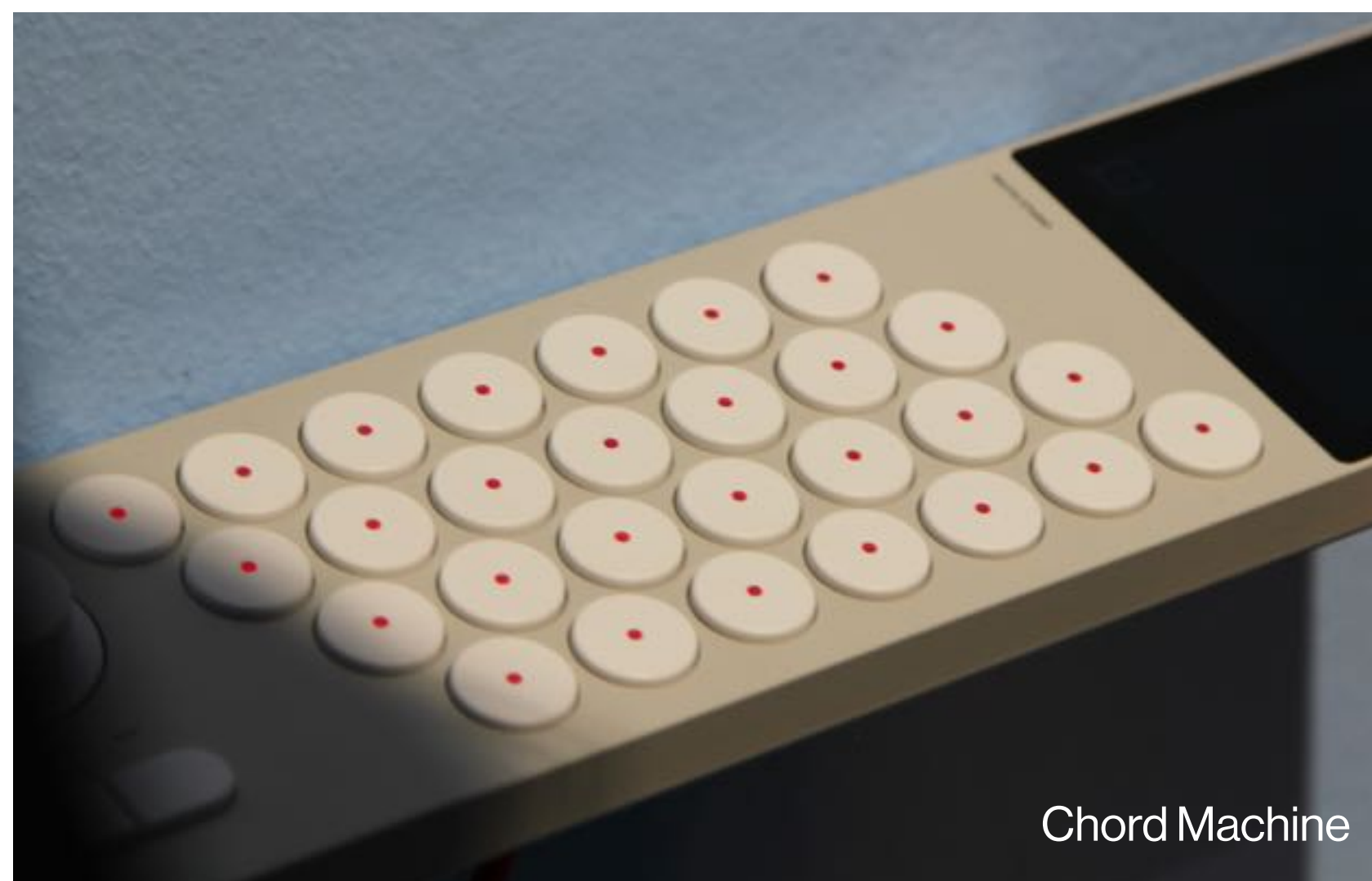
Image credit: Klemen Ilovar



By Dan Adlešič

“The idea was to use AI in a different way, not as something that tells you what to do, but as a reflective source that adds meaning.”

Kothari Arihant, Alessi



What's next?

As products become more responsive, interaction shifts from transactional use to ongoing relationship.

This signals a move from designing functions to designing behaviours. Brands will need to create systems that evolve through interaction, rather than delivering fixed outcomes.

As this becomes expected, differentiation will come from how intuitively and meaningfully these systems respond. The most successful products will not just react, but adapt in ways that feel legible, human, and trustworthy.

Interiors are no longer conceived as finished compositions, but as environments shaped through everyday use. At Milan Design Week, the most resonant spaces weren't defined by visual impact alone, but by what they revealed about how people live over time, through the accumulation of objects, gestures, and routines that shape identity. This signals a shift from designing for static ideals of taste to designing for the rituals that underpin domestic life.

Habitual



Frame furniture and space as instruments within the ritual of becoming.

H&M Home x Kelly Wearstler

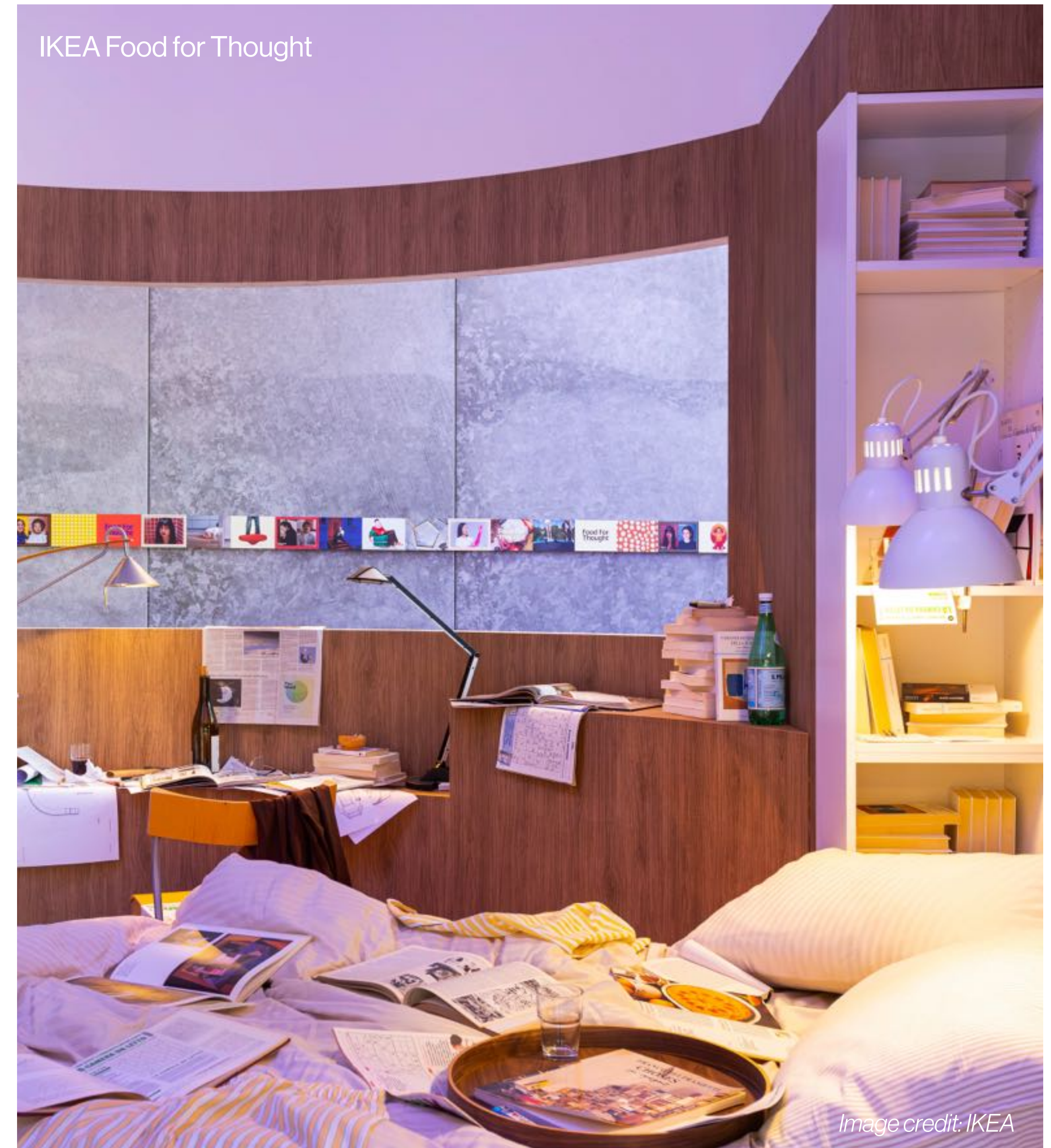
Rather than styling for appearance, brands are revisiting the behaviours that define everyday life - eating, resting, gathering, drifting.

At Nilufar's **La Casa Magica**, the home is framed as a layered, protective environment built through colour, texture, and scale. Rejecting neutrality, the space leans into domestic archetypes, creating a sense of accumulation rather than composition.

This sense of atmosphere extends beyond the visual. In **L'Appartement** by L'Artisan Parfumeur, scent activates the interior, surfacing memory and imagined narratives tied to ritual. The space functions less as a display and more as an environment shaped through perception.

Elsewhere, everyday behaviours are brought to the foreground. IKEA's **Food For Thought** centres on the informal ritual of eating in bed, reframing mess as evidence of use, capturing the intimacy and imperfection of daily life.

Across these examples, interiors shift from finished spaces to lived environments, where meaning is built through repetition, habit, and time.





‘To design for the home is to honour these quiet but meaningful rituals, not by changing them but by making each moment feel easier more fluid, and more intuitive’

Samsung Video ‘Design Is an Act of Love’



What's next?

As brands revisit domestic rituals, value shifts toward objects and environments that support repeated use, emotional connection, and personal rhythm. Design moves from defining how a space should look to enabling how it is continuously lived.

The opportunity is to rethink everyday typologies, designing for real behaviours, real use, and real life as it unfolds.

Once treated as something to optimise, time is increasingly understood as something to experience, protect, and recover. As everything speeds up, value shifts to what cannot be accelerated. Time becomes less about efficiency, and more about how it is felt.

Valued

Time



AUDI x Zaha Hadid

“Time is the best feast we have in life.”

Salak Studio

Across Milan, designers are rethinking how time is shaped, not by increasing speed but by creating space for feeling and intention.

At Samsung’s **Design is an Act of Love**, time became the central proposition, not as efficiency gained, but as something given back. The concepts explored what becomes possible when people are afforded more time, positioning it as a resource for choice, reflection, and freedom.

This perspective continues through material and spatial design. **SolidNature x OMA/AMO** presents marble as a record of time itself, encouraging a slower engagement and reframing material longevity against systems driven by speed.

In contrast to environments designed for throughput, Audi’s exhibition, **Origin**, creates space to deliberately pause, using rhythm and atmosphere to slow movement and refocus attention. This allows time to notice materials, to finish conversations, and to choose rather than react.

Across these examples, we see a shift from progression to pause - where design gives time back, reframing it as a form of value rather than something to optimise.



Design is an Act of Love



Design is an Act of Love



“The human body activates the space not through movement, but through stillness.”

Objects of Common Interest

What's next?

The challenge is not to make everything slower, but to understand where speed creates value, and where it erodes it.

There is an opportunity to design systems that give time back, not just optimise efficiency. The next premium experience may not be the one that moves fastest, but the one that makes time feel like it belongs to us again.



Objects of Common Interest

Against the backdrop of an artificially digital world, our physical environments take on a renewed role. Across Milan, design moved away from passive spectatorship toward active participation. Rather than communicating through form alone, spaces drew people to collective moments of encounter through sound, materiality, scale, and light.

Physical



“All things that are not material are very important for design.”

Jan Agelink, Trends and Cocktails

This signals a broader move from siloed experience design to sensory choreography. Physical environments are no longer simply backdrops for interaction, but active agents in shaping attention and restoring aliveness.

ANIMA MUNDI. A Visionary Impulse constructs an ecosystem where humans are no longer at the centre but rather have to listen to the elements around them. Across the city at Alcova, Design Hotels' **Designed to Stay** reintroduced the conversation pit, a simple spatial gesture that encouraged people to sit, linger, and engage with one another.

Molteni's **Responsive Nature** used sound and reflection to create a botanical oasis tucked inside an urban landscape. Across these moments, design operated less as a spectacle and more as a facilitator offering people spaces to gather and connect with themselves, nature, or each other. ASICS collaborated with NUOVA to create **A Kinetic Playscape** blurring the boundary between installation and play, inspiring emotional uplift.

What emerges is a new experiential paradigm: the full sensorium. Here, immersion is not about overload, but about depth. It is about creating environments that hold people in a mood, shift their perception and allow them to inhabit a feeling. In a world of artificial abundance, sensory richness will become the new marker of meaning.

Image credit: Lorenzo Palmieri



ANIMA MUNDI : A Visionary Impulse by Dotdotdot for Geeley Italia

“Creating more stories, more atmosphere. Creating wonderful moments and sharing that with people”

Susanna Björklund, Trends & Cocktails



What's next?

As sensory immersion becomes the baseline, differentiation will shift to longevity. Space is no longer neutral. It shapes how we think, feel and relate. The most valuable experiences will not just capture attention, but create connection establishing emotional relevance, encouraging return, and building lasting relationships.

The opportunity ahead is not just to design for connection, but to design for embodied presence.



CME

Spotlight



Colour

Oxide Red

Oxide Red brings warmth, emotion and grounded strength to the show. Shaped by the resilience of iron and the stability of rust, it feels enduring, authentic and commercially versatile. Less vivid than classic reds, it offers a settled richness that pairs easily with neutrals, browns and greens, adding depth without overpowering.

Material

Drifting lights by Preciosa Design

Glass

Glass appeared as a material that carries light rather than mass. Its translucency and shifting permanence allow light to pass, refract and transform, creating an ethereal, almost other-worldly quality. In **Drifting Lights**, suspended bubbles and illuminated glass panels turn stillness into movement, giving interiors a sense of suspension, fragility and quiet escape.

Image credit: Jean-Claude Etegnot, Preciosa Design

Material

The Wedding by Sten Studio

Marble

Marble shifts from backdrop to protagonist, reimagined through carved, sculptural forms that feel fluid yet still. In **The Wedding** by Sten Studio, marble becomes a vessel for time, holding a fleeting moment long enough for memory and meaning to settle. Material longevity stands in tension with systems shaped by speed.

Image credit: Romana Balaban, Sten Studio

Material

The Air Lab by Nike

Air

Air becomes a design material that is less about form than atmosphere, a fluid presence capable of slowly deforming. Though non-physical, it carries emotional and spatial weight, bringing softness, movement and a sense of release. In **Nike Air Lab**, this invisible material is made tangible, revealing air not simply as performance technology, but as a wider design language shaped by lightness, transformation and possibility.

Image credit: Nike

Finish

Flux Table by Daikan

Mirror polishing

Mirror polished brings precision and softness into balance. **Flux Table** explored metal as a living material, where technical precision meets natural spontaneity. Through structurally engineered aluminium, **DAIKAN** creates a surface that feels fluid, reflective and unexpectedly tactile. Shaped by both machine control and the artisan's hand, the piece reveals a quieter vision of innovation.

Image credit: DAIKAN x 130 (One Thirty) / FLUX TABLE

Conclusion

“We don’t need hundreds and hundreds of generic things anymore. We need something that is classical and good quality. And we need design that has a story to tell and is different.”

Susanna Björklund, Trends & Cocktails

Across all trends, there is a clear thread: we are going from speed, uniformity, and abstraction toward presence, tangibility and meaning. This reflects a wider recalibration of value in response to digital saturation, global instability and the growing influence of AI.

Design does not simply accelerate the world further, but helps us navigate it more consciously with purpose and empathy. Humans remain essential to process, form, and meaning as the ultimate enabler of design.

As the world continues to tell its story, design becomes a tool to help interpret and respond to it. A renewed sense of responsibility urges designers to act as advocates for human experience within systems driven by speed and efficiency.

The challenge for businesses is no longer just to keep up the change, but to shape it, creating systems that enable both meaning and momentum.

Get in touch For more insights

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