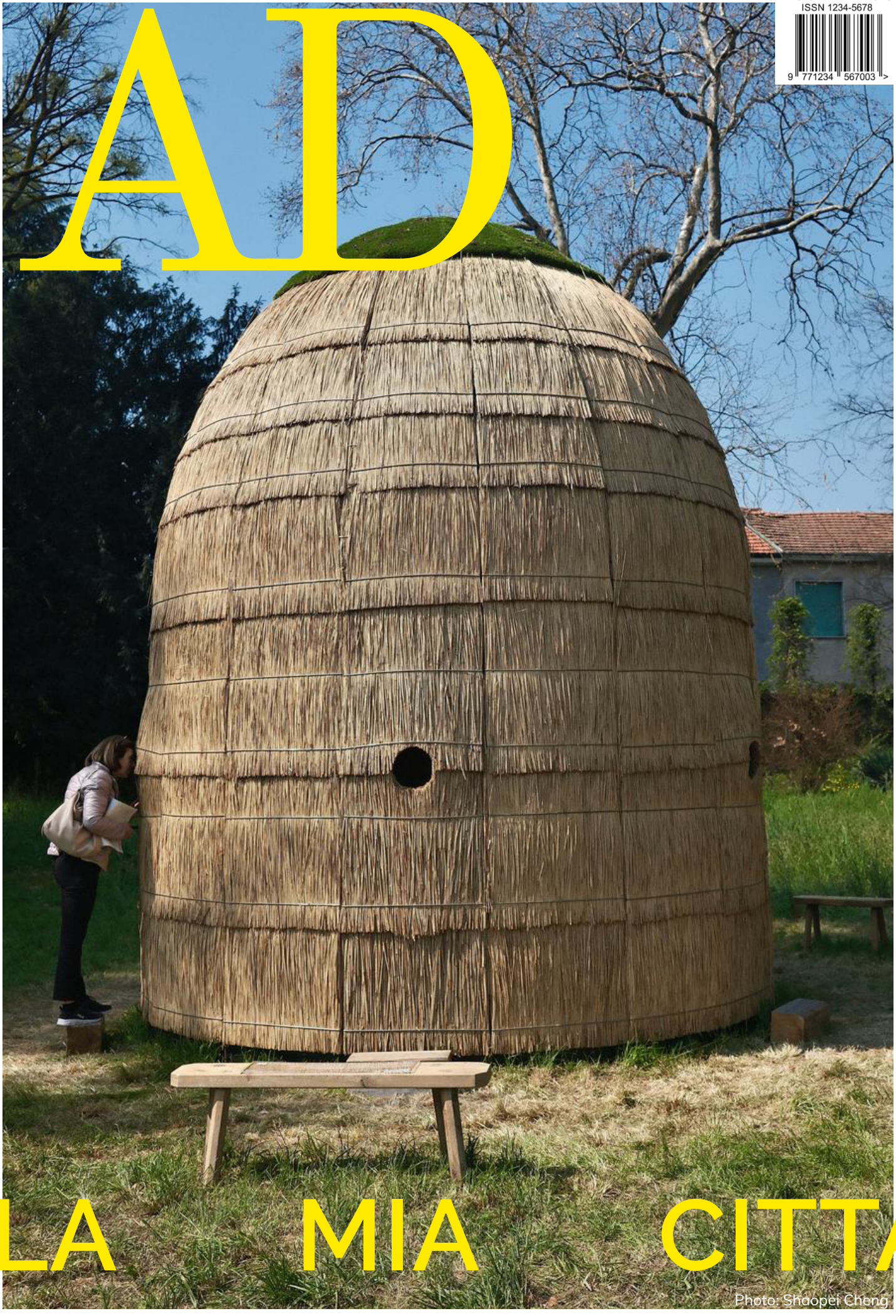
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

MILANO DESIGN WEEK 2025

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AD



LA MIA CITTÀ

Photo: Shaopei Cheng



DROPCITY

Photo: Ray Huang


Photo: Ray Huang

DROPCITY: Prison Times

In the forgotten vaults beneath Milan’s Central Station, design gets dirty, democratic, and radically alive.

Down beneath the humming tracks of Milan’s Central Station, in the skeletal ruins of the Magazzini Raccordati, Dropcity returns for Milan Design Week 2025, less an exhibition and more an excavation. Inside crumbling tunnels and echoing archways once used for railway logistics, the city’s most ambitious design lab is quietly redrawing the lines between material, method, and manifesto.

This year’s program, titled “Material Resistance,” spans over two dozen former train tunnels, each reclaimed by different studios, collectives, and research labs from across the globe.

There are no velvet ropes or product launches here. Instead, visitors descend into raw concrete vaults where piles of construction waste are sorted by type, where bioplastic bricks are made in real time, and where a Chilean team presents a sonic map of architectural debris collected from disaster zones.

“It’s a place where failure is visible,” says Cristina Rinaldi, an architect whose studio has turned one tunnel into a living materials archive.

“We don’t want to create another showroom. The city has plenty of those,” says Andrea Caputo, architect and founder of Dropcity, whose vision is equal parts archive, school, and construction site. “We want to build a place where architecture is lived, tested, debated.”

At a time when design weeks around the world often lean toward polished installations and photogenic surfaces, Dropcity offers a confrontation. It is elemental. It is imperfect. It is thrilling.


Photo: Ray Huang


Photo: Ray Huang

One tunnel houses a circular design workshop, where architecture students from the Politecnico di Milano crush glass and grind marble scraps to create terrazzo panels on-site. Another features a zero-carbon kitchen made from compressed mycelium, where daily meals are cooked over algae-fueled burners. Even the floors are political which are made of reclaimed concrete tiles, and left uneven on purpose.

This year, Dropcity also delves into the politics of confinement with a new exhibition focused on prison architecture, justice, and spatial control. Drawing on archival research, personal testimonies, and speculative design, the installation explores how space can both oppress and liberate. One tunnel becomes a timeline of incarceration, charting the evolution from panopticons to privatized supermaxes; another reimagines the prison as a site of healing and community care. The exhibition doesn't offer easy answers but in true Dropcity fashion, it refuses to look away.

Dropcity isn't beautiful in the conventional sense. It's urgent, unruly, and deeply in progress. It is a living laboratory of what architecture might be when stripped of polish and profit.

At night, the energy shifts. DJs play beneath the vaulted ceilings. Lecture screenings flicker on crumbling walls. Designers and thinkers cluster around makeshift tables, trading ideas and fermented drinks. It feels more like a student squat from 1970s Berlin than a Milanese design venue, but that's the point.

By reclaiming a dormant piece of the city's industrial skeleton and filling it with slow processes, unresolved ideas, and radical community, Dropcity isn't just participating in Design Week it's challenging it.

And as visitors resurface, blinking into the light at Stazione Centrale, the world above suddenly feels a little less solid and a lot more ready for change.

Text: Houda Jarkas


Photo: ArchDaily

Photo: Ray Huang

When the Sun Sets in Milan, Design Comes Out to Dance Inside VOCLA.

As the sun dipped behind Milan's historic rooftops and the city's daytime design pilgrims retreated to aperitivo hour, a different kind of creative pilgrimage began one that wound its way to the abandoned halls of the Ex Macello, where light flickered, bass pulsed, and shadows stretched across raw concrete. Welcome to VOCLA, the boundary-blurring nighttime initiative by Alcova, Milan's most experimental design platform.

"We wanted to explore what design becomes when you remove the daylight."

says Alcova co-founder Valentina Ciuffi, who, along with Joseph Grima, has built a reputation for curating design experiences that feel more like conceptual gestures than trade shows. "VOCLA is design unbound stripped of function, freed from formality."

Launched during Milan Design Week 2025, VOCLA is more than a party. It's a sensorial ecosystem where architecture, performance, and sound collide inside one of the city's most hauntingly beautiful industrial relics. By day, the sprawling slaughterhouse complex plays host to Alcova's signature showcase of radical design and material experimentation. By night, it morphs into something liminal, part exhibition, part rave, part ritual.

Each evening, different sectors of the Ex Macello come alive. In one chamber, a vaulted meat locker is transformed into a deep blue void, hosting a slow-motion light installation synced with ambient drone music. In another, dancers in sheer, sculptural garments, part performance art, part textile study sweep through a fog-drenched corridor as an audience sips natural wine on salvaged slabs of marble. Elsewhere, a disused refrigeration unit pulses with a Berlin-style DJ set, the curved walls reverberating with the rhythm of a thousand sneakers on cracked tile.

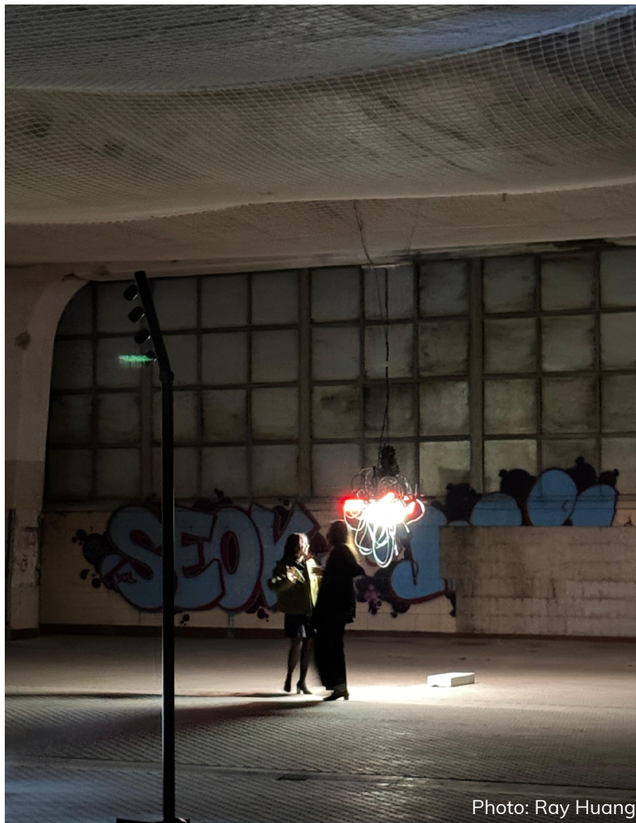


Photo: Ray Huang


Photo: Ray Huang

The crowd? A mix of fashion's edge-dwellers, young architects, curators, and international artists, many of whom had shown at Alcova earlier in the day and now found themselves fully immersed in the architecture's after-hours alter ego.

"It feels like a secret." one London-based furniture designer said "This is where design really happens off-script, embodied, alive."

Alcova has long been hailed for its ability to inject Milan Design Week with a sense of rebellion choosing forsaken venues over polished showrooms, emerging voices over global brands.

"It feels like a secret. This is where design really happens o f f - s c r i p t ,

With VOCLA, that ethos expands into the nocturnal. It's a celebration of design's potential to shape mood, behavior, and even memory. And in a city famous for venerating aesthetics, VOCLA offers something deeper: a felt experience of space, time, and meaning.

When dawn returns, the party ends, and the architecture remains. But for a few hours each night, Milan's most forgotten building becomes its most visionary.

Text: Houda Jarkas


Photo: Ray Huang



Photo: Ray Huang

Spazio Maiocchi Becomes the Beating Heart of Design Week Again

At Capsule Plaza, living spaces expand, brands transcend categories, and Milan’s most in-the-know crowd gathers to witness design’s next chapter.
If Alcova is where design rebels gather, Spazio Maiocchi is where the cool kids go to recalibrate. For Milan Design Week 2025, the iconic multidisciplinary venue in Porta Venezia once again played host to Capsule Plaza a curated collision of fashion, interiors, technology, and culture that turned a former industrial space into a pulsing, post-disciplinary agora.

“The domestic space is no longer just a site of rest, it’s a lab, a stage, a performance.”

Curated by Capsule founder Alessio Ascari and architect Paul Cournet, the third edition of the plaza expanded both spatially and conceptually. Beyond its home base at Spazio Maiocchi, the experience sprawled into a converted gym and pool across the street two perfectly Brutalist volumes that became unlikely temples for ambient sound, modular furniture, and design’s next frontier: the “expanded home.”


Photo: Ray Huang

Inside the pool hall, Georg Jensen launched the ethereal Gelateria Danese, a unique take on the Danish ice cream parlor. Guests sipped glacial espresso amid hand-polished silver and monolithic counters, proof that even dessert can be sculptural.

Throughout the week, Spazio Maiocchi remained a magnet for the design-literate and culturally restless. Industry insiders mingled with DJs and digital artists. Gallery directors debated post-functionalism over sake. Everyone looked effortlessly…curated.



“You come here to feel the weather of design.”

said one visitor, admiring a translucent resin console by Objects of Common Interest. “Not the forecast. The actual weather.”

With Capsule Plaza, Spazio Maiocchi continues to prove that good design isn’t just something to see it’s something to inhabit, to metabolize, to live through.

Text: Houda Jarkas





Photo: Ray Huang

Inside Alcova's Haunting Takeover of the Ex-SNIA Viscosa Factory

It's not often that the most talked-about destination during Milan Design Week is neither a showroom nor a gallery, but a decaying textile factory. And yet, for those who ventured out to the eastern fringe of the city to Ex-SNIA Viscosa plant what they found wasn't abandonment. It was resurgence.

For its 2025 edition, Alcova expanded its reach to include this formidable relic of Milan's industrial past: a vast, concrete shell once used to produce viscose yarn, now reclaimed by wild vegetation and visionary design. Set within the Quartiere Ortica one of the city's last remaining industrial neighborhoods the factory became Alcova's most visceral venue yet.

"It's a space that refuses neutrality," says Alcova co-founder Joseph Grima. **"It's about memory, yes, but also transformation."**


Photo: Ray Huang

Inside, time feels elastic. Ivy coils through broken windows. Pools of standing water reflect projections of speculative architecture. Walls scorched by age now frame delicate material experiments: textile sculpture, bio-plastic furniture, audio-reactive ceramics. The contrast is startling and deeply intentional.



Photo: Ray Huang

The Ex-SNIA complex serves not just as backdrop but as co-author. Design doesn’t fill the void, it responds to it.

“We wanted to listen to what the space was already saying,” adds Alcova’s Valentina Ciuffi, “and then amplify it through

Among the standouts this year: a Polish collective turned a former loading bay into an immersive scent installation, distilling the smell of machines, sweat, and moss. A Dutch architecture firm rebuilt part of the collapsed roof using inflatable scaffolding. And deep within the factory’s darkest corridor, a Chilean studio presented ghostly lighting objects made from recycled construction dust.

The experience wasn’t linear. Visitors wandered, half-lost, often quiet caught between awe and unease. That emotional complexity is part of Alcova’s enduring appeal. It is not a fair. It is a mood. An atmosphere. A kind of urban archaeology, performed in real time.

“At SNIA, you don’t just view design, you feel it metabolize inside you,” said one visitor, brushing concrete dust from their coat.

In a city where most exhibitions are built to impress, Alcova at Ex-SNIA reminds us that decay can be a fertile ground and that the future of design might just be growing through the cracks.

Text: Shaopei Cheng

Edited by Houda Jarkas



Photo: Ray Huang



THE PRETTY FACES OF THE WORLD DESERVE WITNESSES

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MUJI

At the Japanese brand’s contemplative new installation, design becomes a ritual and simplicity becomes radical.

In a week defined by spectacle by high-gloss surfaces, AI-assisted furnishings, and immersive digital dreamscapes Muji made its return to Milan Design Week with a whisper. And somehow, that whisper became a kind of anthem.

Tucked away inside the hushed cloisters of the Chiostro del Bramante, the Japanese brand unveiled “Utsuroi: The Architecture of Impermanence,” an installation that reframed domestic design not as innovation, but as inhabitation. Named for a Japanese concept roughly translating to “the gentle transition of things,” the project invited guests not to observe, but to dwell.



Photo: Ray Huang

“It is not about presenting new products,” said Muji’s design director Takuo Nagahara **“It’s about proposing a new rhythm of living.”**

The installation unfolded as a series of threshold spaces: a covered engawa (veranda), a soft-lit bathing chamber, a paper-lined rest alcove. Nothing screamed for attention. Instead, it asked for stillness. Light filtered through shoji screens onto linen tatami. Each element was paired back to essence no branding, no labels, no overt messaging.
But it was far from empty.

Muji worked with local Italian artisans to source reclaimed terracotta, and with Kyoto-based joiners to create cedar joinery that required no nails or glue. At the heart of the space sat the Void Pavilion, a modular wooden structure designed for urban micro-dwellers compact, collapsible, and entirely off-grid.
“It’s not a house,” said project architect Kanae Ishii. **“It’s a vessel for presence.”**


Photo: Ray Huang

Unlike most exhibitions at Design Week, where form often outpaces function, Muji's pavilion was all use and no excess. A small washbasin invited you to cleanse your hands before entering. Each moment reinforced a central question: Can a home be both less and more at the same time?


Photo: Houda Jarkas

As Milan buzzed outside, the contrast was striking. In a week where brands projected future utopias and hybrid digital interiors, Muji made a case for the radical power of now a quiet, breathable now, where intention lives in the grain of wood and the pause before speech.

By the final day, visitors had begun removing their shoes without being asked. Conversations slowed. Phones were tucked away. In the absence of performance, Muji created ritual.

Text: Ray Huang

Edited by Houda Jarkas


Ray Huang



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