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PRESS RELEASE

CRA and Rhea unveil the concept of the Coffee Landscape, a reconfigurable installation that aims to rethink the experience of preparing and consuming coffee at the office.

The design, developed with Italo Rota, allows people to socialize around an expansive platform with reconfigurable seats arranged at different heights.

The first prototype will be showcased in the Milan Design Week in June 2022.

Milano, May 25th, 2022 - International design and innovation studio CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati and coffee vending machine manufacturer [Rhea](#), along with architect Italo Rota, have unveiled a prototype of the Coffee Landscape. The project is a composite coffee station for offices that transforms coffee making from a solitary activity – in which individuals gravitate away from people and towards the machine – into one where colleagues face each other and interact. In addition, an expansive platform lets people sit on modular poufs of different heights, and underlines the importance of physical space in facilitating social encounters. As a part of the Milan Design Week 2022, the first prototype will be on display from June 6th to 12th in BASE Milano, one of the city's primary creative hubs.

The Coffee Landscape takes shape as offices around the world undergo a pandemic-induced identity shift. While more companies have adopted a hybrid working scheme, the physical workplace remains an integral part of the work experience. A new approach to office design puts additional emphasis on in-person, serendipitous conversations, which are crucial for generating innovative and meaningful ideas.

“How can we rethink the social experience around coffee? This project experiments with new ways to increase what we might call the ‘coffee-machine effect’: bringing people together and letting them interact with each other,” says Carlo Ratti, founding partner of CRA and director of MIT Senseable City Lab. “In a traditional office pantry, making coffee is not a social experience. You attend to the machine and have your back against others. Here, we are trying to propose an

alternative. We believe that our rituals around coffee can play a fundamental role in fostering what twentieth-century American sociologist Mark Granovetter called ‘weak ties’, namely, casual relations that allow new ideas to pollinate.”

The Coffee Landscape is conceived as an open plan: a central coffee making station with three dispensing outlets is surrounded by modular triangular poufs of various heights from eight to 40 centimeters. Their organic arrangement echoes the ebbs and flows of natural terrains. Coffee preparation is turned into an interpersonal experience, distinct from that of traditional vending machines. Those waiting for their drinks to be brewed can see each other eye to eye, and converse with their colleagues sitting or lying down nearby. The seats can be easily reconfigured based on the occasion and office setting, which gives the workers a chance to unleash their creativity and design their own breakout area.

*“We are glad to be partnering with a like-minded design studio like CRA, which understands the value of craftsmanship,” **Andrea Pozzolini, CEO of Rhea**, said. “Our collaboration started by putting ourselves in the office workers’ shoes and asking ourselves, what would the ideal coffee break be like? With this in mind, we managed to harness Italy’s design legacy, and our 60 years of industrial experience, to realize a sound and forward-looking design.”*

In addition to the Coffee Landscape, CRA has designed spaces that epitomize the changing nature of food and beverage rituals. With Lavazza’s London flagship store, it investigates the role played by germicidal materials and disinfecting lights in the “post-pandemic cafe”. In Milan, the Trussardi Cafe offers shade and improves air quality with a suspended garden on the roof. Moreover, CRA’s research on reconfigurable seating includes Lift-Bit, a furniture project developed supported by Vitra, which allows users to digitally adjust the height of modular hexagonal stools to fit their changing needs.

Credits

The Coffee Landscape

A project by CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati with Italo Rota

Client: Rhea Vendors Group

Where: BASE Milano, 34 Via Bergognone, Milan, Italy

When: June 6th to 12th

CRA Team: Carlo Ratti, Antonio Atripaldi (partner in charge), Chiara Borghi, Mario Daudo, Aurora Maggio; Gary di Silvio, Pasquale Milieri, Gianluca Zimbardi

CRA Make: Mykola Murashko, Yasser Hariss, Carlo Turati

Italo Rota Building Office Team: Italo Rota, Francesca Grassi

ABOUT CRA

CRA-Carlo Ratti Associati is an international design and innovation practice based in Turin, Italy, and New York City. Drawing on Carlo Ratti’s research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the office is currently involved in many projects across the globe, embracing every scale of intervention – from furniture to urban planning. Among recent projects are the Italian Pavilion at Expo Dubai 2020, biophilic skyscraper CapitaSpring in Singapore, the curatorship of the Eyes of the City exhibition at the 2019 Bi-City Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism of Shenzhen, the redesign of the Agnelli Foundation HQ in Turin, and the masterplan for Milan Innovation District (MIND). CRA is the only design firm whose works have been featured three times in TIME Magazine’s “Best Inventions of the Year” list – respectively with the Digital Water Pavilion, the Copenhagen Wheel, and Scribit. In the last years, the office has been involved in the launch of Makr Shkr, a startup producing the world’s first robotic bar system, and Scribit, the write&erase robot.

www.carloratti.com

ABOUT ITALO ROTA

Italo Rota, architect and urban planner founder of IRBO Italo Rota Building Office, is the Scientific Director of NABA, New Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, lecturer at Shanghai Wusong International Art City Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Advisor at the Tsinghua University of Beijing, one of the most prestigious Chinese universities.

ABOUT RHEA VENDORS GROUP

Rhea Vendors Group, founded by Aldo Doglioni Majer in 1960, is one of the largest producers of customized vending machines in the world. For sixty years, Rhea has stood out for its wide international reach, high-level design, state-of-the-art technology, and 'Made in Italy' excellence. With headquarters and manufacturing based in the province of Varese and foreign branches in 9 countries, Rhea is proud of having spread coffee culture to over 90 countries around the world.

In the last twenty years, Rhea has laid the foundations for an important transformation: from a global player in vending to a pioneer in the introduction of vending to the new retail, hospitality and out-of-home sectors, confirming its mission to interpret and often anticipate a constantly evolving market. Rhea's new proposals revolutionize the very concept of hospitality, both in business and domestic contexts, with a value proposition that improves the quality of life. rheavendors.com

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