

Surprise and Delight

Driving the future of design through the magic of the unexpected

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By John Hamilton, Global Design Director, Coalesse

Why a person chooses one object over another will always be intriguing to me. There's something about a detail, a materiality, an unexpected resolution, that resonates above other options.

As designers we're always trying to understand this. What are those little points of differentiation in a room, a chair, a worktable, that can result in transporting, memorable, engaging experiences? What elements can we offer to help someone better connect with their colleagues and their space and their world? How can we help people stay healthy, happy, involved and passionate? How does the work of design help teams solve problems in ways that are truly inspired? The answer to these questions is constantly evolving.

It used to be that durability was the differentiator that set our products apart; now it's assumed. Sustainability is newly and widely expected. Likewise, ergonomics, adjustability, choice and availability are all givens. There's a myriad of foundational measures of a product's value that are simply the norm today.

So, in the work of creating furnishings that bring something more, that catch our attention above all the built-in traits we now expect, we look to the worlds of character and craft. When someone interacts with one of our products and says, "I didn't know I needed this," or "Wow, this made my day go better," we know we've cracked a little bit of that code. It's the satisfaction that comes from finding something that improves your experience, in ways you didn't even know you were looking for. It's the factor of delight and surprise.

This is the extra ingredient in what design is all about for us at Coalesse. It's how we move from the abstract challenge of any problem to the creation of furnishings with a distinctive voice and character, and this is what we've always done through our history as a design-driven brand.

As consumers consistently elevate and personalize what the new workplace will look and feel like, designers have to develop an almost sixth sense to identify what people will want when they arrive in the workplace tomorrow—the things that make a space feel right, feel better, that we realize we needed all along.

There's always something powerful when that extra spark or need in people's behavior is anticipated. With our LessThanFive carbon fiber chair, no matter how many times we tell people how lightweight it is, everyone is surprised when they pick it up. They just don't expect something so light to maintain its quality, and are visibly delighted at the result. And this response is what rises to make a memorable product.

These types of unexpected discoveries are often achieved with material innovation or sophisticated tools or new technology—the ingredients of what we call modern craft. Craft is how we translate ideas from the creative mind to the hand. Craft is how we make something better. It's a marker of worth, character, training and history. It adds a soul that we can tell is missing when it's not there. In the product development process, craft is a core part of that design solution that we want to build into each and every product we make.

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As we look to technology and hone our own craft to do entirely new things, we'll continue to expand what we can make. Some of those things are here even now in ways we couldn't have envisioned a decade ago when Coalesse was formed.

We use our knowledge of the workplace, proven design principles, and a lot of research and testing to guide the development of products and solutions that integrate and support the things that people are going to want and need when they get to work. We use our intuition and craft to elevate those things in their most creative, unique and emotional dimensions. That's the future we envision — design improving people's lives and assisting in transforming the workplace, from a space where people once had to go, to one full of unexpected surprise and delight where they choose to go.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF COALESSE

Recently celebrating its tenth anniversary as a design-driven brand, Coalesse marked the beginning of its next decade by relocating its design studio to Steelcase's Learning and Innovation Center (LINC) in Munich, Germany. "We are more of the world through this move, with greater centrality to ideas coming, not only out of the US, but also from Europe, the Middle East and across Asia Pacific," says Coalesse general manager Lew Epstein.

In Munich, the Coalesse Design Group has a global platform from which to explore the future of work and engage with other world-class designers to create thoughtfully crafted furnishings for the modern workplace that bring new life to work.