

Creating the New Gathering Place

Introducing Coalesse Ensemble Lounge System

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Gathering is one of the great reasons to be at work — but how well do gathering places actually work for the people who use them? And what kind of design innovations would help make the experience of working together feel better — more natural, more delightful?

As one of the industry's original ancillary design brands, Coalesse has always studied these questions in order to create enduring modern furnishings for all the places where people connect and work. Building on years of research and studio experimentation, the Coalesse Design Group set out to examine where people want to be when doing social, informal work. Beyond another lounge system, and unique from other types of meeting spaces, designers Markus Marschall and Florian Schulz created a novel seating landscape that brings serious performance together with the emotive draw of beautiful, well-crafted furniture.

Markus and Florian joined us from the Coalesse Studio in Munich to discuss the process of creating Coalesse Ensemble — the new gathering place.

Markus Marschall

Florian Schulz

Work Better: How did the design process for Coalesse Ensemble begin? Was there a key insight that set you on a path?

Markus Marschall: We received Steelcase research that told us what people wanted of their time in the office, which included to meet friends, socialize, do some creative work...to gather. That got us thinking about this particular behavior and how spaces for meetings had changed. What would make it easier to enjoy that experience with comfort and high performance at the same time.

Florian Schulz: At Coalesse we start with the research. But then we bring people in. And that's what I like about the company. We always put the needs of people at the center of everything. Design decisions are often emotional – what will make you love a piece – but at the same time we ground our work in data, in research. And we put that all together into a physical design language.

MM: So we asked, what new behaviors happen when you take a meeting room or a standing-height café setting down to a lounge level? You'd get the feeling of conversations happening in your own home. But this seat has to be a bit more supportive, a bit higher than a casual sofa. And also, a bit firmer. That allows you to be in a lounge position for several hours of working, without slouching or sinking.

FS: Posture has such a big impact on conversation and the meeting itself. Lounges let you have a human conversation, not a stiff conversation.

WB: How did landscape and nature become part of the design concept in such a specific way?

FS: At Coalesse, we always consider biophilia and wondered if a lounge setting could be like a river winding through a space or rolling hills. That led to rounded shapes that can meander, both in length and height. From the beginning this was about removing sharp edges and angles and creating a natural escape or oasis with the furniture.

MM: Do we need to work in a grid? Can we loosen the grid? We wanted to break up all the strict lines, grids and straight surfaces in workspaces in a more organic or irregular way. And just like nature that's never the same, you can use these pieces in endless, unique ways.

FS: So, this is the logic behind the whole system. This notion of landscape gave us the scenery of a 360-degree view front and back, high and low, which helps create the rhythms of a more informal space. Softer geography replaces stiff geometry. And then we applied that as well to every detail and proportion of how the furniture fits bodies.

MM: We just kept making everything rounder and rounder...we wanted the furniture to feel unrestrained and happy.

WB: How do the design details deliver on this idea of gathering that works?

MM: It all starts with posture. We wanted to perfect a performance back that isn't limited to one or two positions. It's a continuous and seamless movement, like in a car. And we made the pull super intuitive to locate and use, with a very simple strap, nothing hard or mechanical.

FS: Same with the upholstery. It's very comfortable, but not as soft or deep as a residential lounge, so that you don't fall into it. And then the screens can be added anywhere, in any combination, to add privacy.

MM: First step is to look at a form and decide, "I like that." Then the second step is to ask, "Does it do this or that, does it have power, does it support good posture, does it fit into a lot of spaces?"

FS: It's not only looking nice, it's also working great.

WB: How does Coalesse Ensemble come together in different kinds of spaces?

FS: First, it's so incredibly modular. There's no standard configuration. It works in small spaces, and it scales to large spaces. Designers and companies can add components over time because everything fits universally. You can build a winding lounge but just as easily a booth or a nest and rebuild with any of the elements, as needs change.

Universal connectors allow you to gang lounge feet, tables or planter units together on an easy-to-scale rail system.

A simple piece fits seamlessly into any component, letting you grow and change your space over time.

MM: And then there's infinite expression, based on how many and which pieces you combine. There are nearly unlimited ways to apply color and highlight material. That's also part of the intention in the round forms, which are more compatible and easier to pair with other products and collections.

FS: We wanted to give designers an inspiring kit of parts that would allow them to create endless configurations. You can swap out the fabric panels of the screens to refresh a space. You can reorganize the modules.

WB: Ensemble means together. What does that imply for you?

MM: It isn't just the way the pieces work together. It's about how these pieces naturally create places where we love to drop in and be together, that also really work for us. It's how we think about giving designers a system that works - and allows them to have fun and create something original.

FS: Coalesse Ensemble is about building relationships, and that's what we're here to do.

MEET THE INGREDIENTS

Learn how, all from one system, you can choose any imaginable set of components, combinations and configurations to bring together gathering places that work, beautifully.