

Expo Milan 2015: Engaging, Exciting & Emotional

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“Feeding the planet, energy for life” - the theme of Expo Milan 2015. The latest instalment of the World Expo was an extravaganza of international architecture, technology and culinary specialties. Through captivating and interactive experiences, different countries showcased their commitment towards creating a sustainable future.

In all, 145 countries participated in Expo Milan 2015, which included 53 national pavilions. These pavilions incorporated an impressive array of architectural projects and unique landscapes that represented different cultural identities. Together, the combination of stunning landscapes, engaging and exciting content kept visitors entertained from start to end.

Engaging

Amidst a vast sea of pavilions, the ones that had aesthetic appeal usually displayed unconventional and bold designs with distinctive architectural features. Taking center stage at the recent Expo Milan 2015 were pavilions that had strong conceptual components accentuated through their design. Take for instance; the unique design of the United Kingdom’s pavilion was inspired by the role of honeybees in contributing to the world’s ecosystem and food supply. Their design enabled visitors to “follow the dance of a bee”, drawing them into the “hive” – a honeycomb aluminium structure. Composed of 169,300 pieces of aluminium and steel enhanced with audio-visual devices, the exhibit replicated the activity within a bee colony. At dusk, the hive came alive! Through the illumination of LED lights embedded within the structure creating an illusion of bees surrounding its hive.

While the World Expo plays host to beautifully designed pavilions, it is also

essentially an enormous stage for designers to create a meaningful yet engaging experience. The interactive use of technology was widespread as designers tackled the challenge of creating a compelling environment for the discerning crowd. Conveying messages beyond the use of text, a combination of technology and hands-on experiences helped streamline information for visitors. True to the German’s tech-savvy reputation, its pavilion entitled “Field of Ideas”, cleverly integrated content into the architecture through cutting-edge technology. Leaflet-like sheets of cardboard named “seed boards” were distributed to visitors at the entrance. They served as an interactive guide while visitors toured the exhibit as still and moving images were projected on them at designated areas.

Emotional

Occasionally, the intended message of the expo was overwhelmed by striking architecture and advanced technology. At the end of the day, those that stood out were countries that interpreted the complex theme by creating experiences that left a lasting and impactful impression. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Austrian pavilions successfully captured the attention of visitors, as they focused on building emotional connections. While all eyes were on World Expo 2020 host UAE’s sand dune-inspired architecture, it was the short film that stole the limelight with its impactful message on how everyone can make a change in the world. “The Family Tree”, a moving film, highlighted the importance of food safety and sustainability for the future. It was an artistic and emotional representation which stirred visitors’ emotions as they gained insights into the natural and social landscape of UAE and its sustainability efforts.

Austria took visitors on an immersive experience as the pavilion was temporarily transformed into a dense forest filled with clouds of mist. Visitors were reminded of the importance of oxygen to the environment as they navigated through the multisensory forest that consisted of ‘smell stations’, ‘sound clouds’ and art installations. The elements within the exhibit were simple yet effective in providing a tangible demonstration of the right balance between urban life and nature.

Exciting

Aside from the primary purpose of educating the public on important issues, World Expos are great opportunities to bring people together. Brazil’s pavilion proved to be a crowd favourite as it interpreted the expo theme in a fun way – a giant playground. Designed with the idea of a network in mind, the huge elastic mesh that was suspended over a garden explored the combination of elements that are crucial to Brazil’s food production industry. The “net” was also a fun way for visitors to sit and socialize. Joining Brazil in the fun, the Dutch team decided to defy the “traditional” set-up and opted for a festival format instead. The open-aired area was a reflection of festivals in Holland that eventually evolved into a tradition. With its surprising take on real-life festivities, the Dutch pavilion was a refreshing experience that piqued the interest of many visitors.

What’s next?

As World Expos continue to be the platform for breakthrough innovation, many await in eager anticipation of what’s to come. With increased emphasis on sustainable pavilions, many countries will begin to direct resources towards the use of eco-friendly materials. Designers are also headed towards a simplistic approach to convey a powerful message while actively engaging audiences with different content illustrations. However, one thing is certain - every country will spare no efforts to showcase their strengths in design and technology in their bid to be a cut above the rest. ☺