

# Forbes

## Design Studio Formafantasma Rethinks Waste And How We View Luxury Design

By Nargess Banks  
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Formafantasma founders, Italian designers Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin at their 'Earthic Lab' at Milan Design Week 2024. Formafantasma

Formafantasma questions the concept of luxury with “Earthic Lab.” Staged within the historic walls of Teatro Gerolamo during Fuorisalone as part of this year’s Milan Design Week, the dynamic installation challenges the viewer to look beyond mere surface beauty in design by instead turning the gaze to ethical and ecological modes of process and production.

Nargess Banks, “Design Studio Formafantasma Rethinks Waste and How We View Luxury Design,” *Forbes*, April 29, 2024.

Working with Cosentino, manufacturer of sustainable surfaces for design and architecture projects, Formafantasma has turned waste into something of beauty. The design studio has set about to intelligently rethink what we consider junk to be repurposed and reimaged within the design and production process.

For instance, debris collected from Cosentino's manufacturing processes are used in the production of surfaces featured in "Earthic Lab," while used cooking oil from the company's kitchen helps with making of the resin, and the white fragments on the surfaces—the aesthetic parts—are composed of recycled glass and PET, as in recycled plastics. Even the chosen color palette of restrained greys and dark green requires less resin than if the team had opted for lighter and brighter shades.

This isn't a vanity project either. The installation in Milan introduces a sub-brand and a research platform within Cosentino dedicated to investigating how the company could make their processes generally more sustainable.

Since founding Formafantasma in 2009, and with design studios in Milan and Rotterdam, designers Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin have been examining ways in which design can impact more positively on the world. With projects that range from furniture and lighting design, to installations and research-based initiatives, and collaborating with various global industries and institutions, Formafantasma's work continuously pushes the boundaries of design, and instigates critical thinking about the role design and objects play in our societies.

I caught up with Trimarchi and Farresin prior to their show in Milan to understand more about the Cosentino project, as well as get a feel for their approach to design now and in the future.

**Nargess Banks:** Earthic Lab offers a new perspective on the world of surfaces. Can you speak of the decisions you made using reclaimed and waste materials in process and production?

**Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin:** We started by looking back at Cosentino's waste streams. One component that is now fundamental for the development of surfaces is the use of debris from the company's production processes. We also introduced a resin which, whilst still synthetic for the majority, in part uses oil recovered from cooking oil. It has an organic component. Other components include recycled glass and PET, which is also used for the tiny fragments of white visible on the design aesthetic of the surface.

**Banks:** Can you speak of the design process?

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** The process of design here is designing from the inside out. We did not start from an aesthetic but from the idea of improving the sustainable

components within the surface. From this, the use of recycled materials, we have decreased the amount of materials that needed to be excavated or extracted from underground for the production of this surface. This is the general concept.



Production waste was used in the production of surfaces in Formafantasma's installation Earthic Lab for Cosentino at Milan Design Week 2024. Formafantasma

**Banks:** Your more restrained color choice also appears to have had a sustainable angle...

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** We realised, when talking to Cosentino's engineers, that the lighter and brighter the colour, the more resin was needed. Therefore, we decided to go in the direction of darker tones, which we also think fits into the context of where these materials would be used, especially in kitchen tops. But it was pertinent to go in this direction from a sustainable perspective.

**Banks:** What were your major challenges?

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** Finding materials that were as close as possible to the production facility. From the beginning, given we wanted to make the material more sustainable, it didn't make sense to source materials from the other the other side of the world, even if they are recycled, given the increased levels of CO2 emissions from transportation.

That's why we started from the factory—to see what's possible to recycle from inside the factory itself. Then we moved on with the recycled glass in the area and the PET. Of course, there have been materials and components used in the slabs that are coming from other areas, for instance Turkey, but we tried as much as possible to work from the site where Cosentino is based, and expand only to where it was necessary.



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"Understanding the reality of the product, its components, and that design is not only about aesthetics but also about how things are produced," Formafantasma. Formafantasma

**Banks:** Is this how you envisage the future of luxury surface design?

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** Yes, we see this as the future of surface design. It's not about luxury; it's about the world we live in. We can no longer only look at aesthetics but need to understand the importance of how things are made. Our collaboration with Cosentino is exactly this: an attempt to design a product from the inside out where the aesthetic choices also correspond to ethical and sustainable choices. Decision making from this perspective is what is relevant for design today at large.

If we really must talk about luxury, we don't believe that luxury can only be about the qualities based on the execution of something, but it has to correspond to the sustainable ways of producing.

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**Banks:** And do you see both industry and the consumer more open to embracing new concepts?

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** Who you call consumer, we prefer to call a user or citizens as we believe these objects shouldn't be consumed but used. We believe users are always ready to embrace something that makes sense and that still serves the functions that are important. We want to emphasize that we know this is not the final solution, but that we are on a journey towards improvement.

"Earthic" is a laboratory within Cosentino that aims to continue this research towards the improvement of material qualities. We think that the users are ready to apply this type of product in their homes, because it serves its purpose and the performance qualities are there, but additionally it has an added value, which is the attempt to make the surface more sustainable. So why shouldn't people be embracing this? Also, we are aware that the more we make improvements to help the environment the better our wellbeing will be.



Formafantasma founders, designers Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin at 'Earthic Lab' during Milan Design Week 2024.  
Formafantasma

**Banks:** You speak of the show's mission to address and challenge the climate crisis. What do you hope audiences will take away from Milan?

**Trimarchi and Farresin:** Understanding the reality of the product, its components, and that design is not only about aesthetics but also about how things are produced. Very often we talk about quality in production, which is about the performance of the product, and we talk about the aesthetic, but rarely we talk about the decision-making behind how they are made. This is extremely important to be able to make an informed decision, and this installation will help visitors see that.

***Cosentino Earthic Lab x Formafantasma at Fuorisalone took place from April 15 to 21 2024 at Teatro Gerolamo, Milan, Italy.***