**Melbourne’s problem to a summer of Covid might be solved by architecture**

International architecture firm BVN has branched into a grass roots solution for Covid, bringing people together safely and supporting hospitality businesses that are re-opening after lockdown. The solution they found for New York, might just be the answer for Melbourne’s Covid summer.

Re-ply, the brainchild of BVN’s New York studio, capitalised on the plywood hoarding that shop fronts installed in the wake of Covid and nationwide protests. As the city slowly started to open up, and restaurants were allowed to have outdoor dining, BVN repurposed the redundant plywood to create outdoor furniture for the bars and cafes. Roads once full of cars became extensions of the sidewalk, and re-ply’s furniture started to populate the new alfresco spaces.

Local artists engaged to paint on the plywood added a level of community connection to a city that had faced harsh lockdown laws, riots and civil unrest, people wanting to reconnect with their community and find joy in the simple pleasures of life again.

Re-ply had enormous success in New York, embraced by well-known hospitality venues, the Wayan, Gramercy Tavern and most recently Tribeca Grill.

*“Thank you to the team at re-ply for their great initiative. We appreciate their attention to detail and creative approach in repurposing plywood and fabricating furniture to help restaurants with outdoor dining,” said Cedric Vongerichten, Chef + Owner, Wayan Restaurant*

*“When building Gramercy Tavern’s outdoor dining space, we were so glad to find a like-minded organisation in re-ply, whose commitment to both sustainability and community aligns so closely with ours. Not only did re-ply intercept raw material otherwise destined for a landfill, they transformed it to create a beautiful new way for our guests to experience Gramercy Tavern,” said Rani Yadav, Chief Marketing Officer, Gramercy Tavern*

Melbourne faces a similar challenge. Lord Mayor Sally Capp, is looking at replicating the same solution for Melbourne, applying New York’s idea of outdoor dining, taking up car laneways to implement extra outdoor dining space for a community re-emerging after Covid.

BVN sees the same solution being applied to Melbourne as it tentatively reopens during the summer. The re-ply furniture comes in a kit of parts, easily reconfigurable and utilised for street dinning. The product has evolved to create outdoor covered structures, to assist with visual demarcation and to cover the outdoor dining space. This enables wet weather options and protection from the sun. The kit of parts and structures are all resourced from recycled timber and materials. The plywood manufacturing process of the furniture is incredibly simple to assemble and is also environmentally recyclable.

Melbourne is a city of artist and art lovers. This opens an area of dialogue between re-ply and artists to bring life back to the once bustling city of Melbourne, celebrating Melbourne’s love of art and community.

As in New York, a portion of proceeds will go to charity. For Melbourne, this will be Beyond Blue. Calls from Victorians to mental health support services have been overwhelming, with Victorians making up half of all calls to mental health organisations, evidence that residents are under increased emotional and mental strain.

We all want to see Melbourne up and running again and the people of Melbourne feeling vital and energised. Bill Dowzer, founder of the re-ply project and Principal of BVN NYC, has just returned to Australia. Having successfully implemented this in New York he’s available to discuss the implementation process of both the product and NYC’s strategy for outdoor dining during COVID. Please reach out to Re-Ply to discuss our kit of parts to help regenerate your business. Likewise, as an artist we would love to hear from you. Hashtag: Let’s get Melbourne moving again!

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