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KABILA

The Journey Behind

An installation rooted in culture and storytelling.

Designed by

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FESTIVAL
DIVERCITY



At the heart of Kabila lies the **Eritrean Coffee Ceremony**, not simply as a performative element, but as a core cultural and spatial ritual that anchors the entire installation. Rooted in both Eritrean and Ethiopian traditions, the coffee ceremony is a deeply symbolic act, a communal ritual that embodies hospitality, storytelling, memory, and intergenerational connection. Its inclusion within Kabila serves as a living reminder of how space, culture, and ritual can come together to create a sense of belonging.

The Eritrean coffee ceremony, known locally as *bunna*, is an elaborate, slow, and intentional process. It typically begins with the roasting of green coffee beans over an open flame, filling the air with a rich, aromatic smoke, **a symbol of welcome and shared presence**. The beans are then ground, brewed in a traditional *jebena* (a clay coffee pot with a long neck), and served in small, handleless cups called finjal. This process is repeated three times : *awel*, *kale'i*, and *bereka* each round representing a deeper level of conversation, reflection, and spiritual intimacy.

This is not simply about drinking coffee. It is about slowing down, gathering, and participating in a collective moment that affirms social bonds. The ceremony often takes place on a bed of fresh grass, surrounded by burning incense, and accompanied by quiet conversation, poetry, or silence. **It is an act of presence, one that honors both community and continuity.**



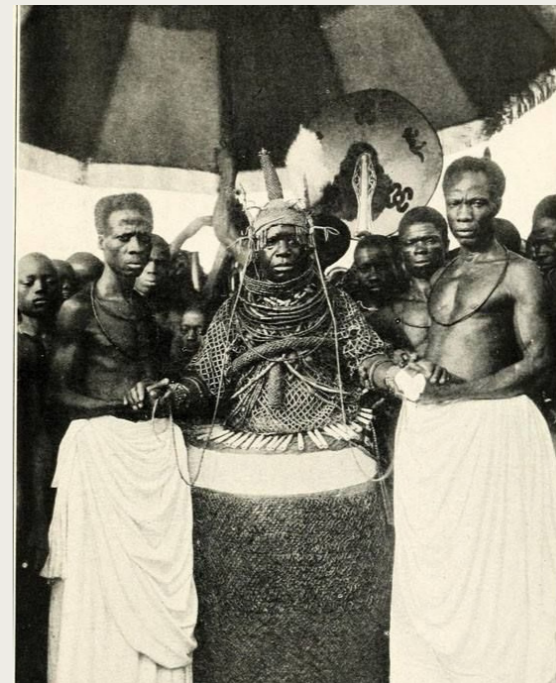
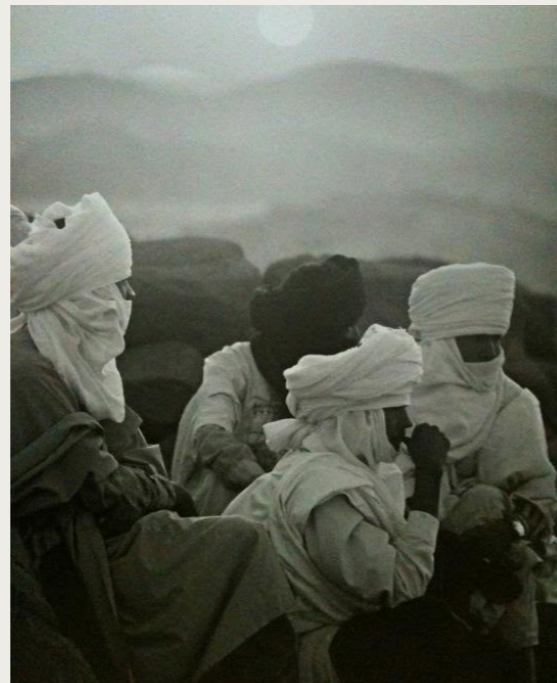
The ceremony is at once sacred and social. It is used to welcome guests, resolve conflicts, mourn, celebrate, and simply be together. In rural areas, it may occur outside the house under a tree; in cities, it might happen inside but still holds its symbolic function, it grounds the family in tradition and offers a safe space for dialogue.

It's often said in Eritrea that ***“to share coffee is to share life.”*** The act of preparing and drinking coffee together becomes a spiritual transaction, a silent reaffirmation of belonging and mutual care.

In the context of Kabila, the coffee ceremony represents the ritualistic soul of the installation. It brings life to the space not in static symbolism, but as a living, breathing practice. The installation becomes the hearth: a stage for this daily rite of community.

More than just an aesthetic inclusion, the ceremony in *Kabila* activates the themes of ritual, reflection, oral transmission, and cultural resilience. ***It offers visitors not only something to see, but something to feel, smell, and share, creating a sacred pause within the design narrative.***

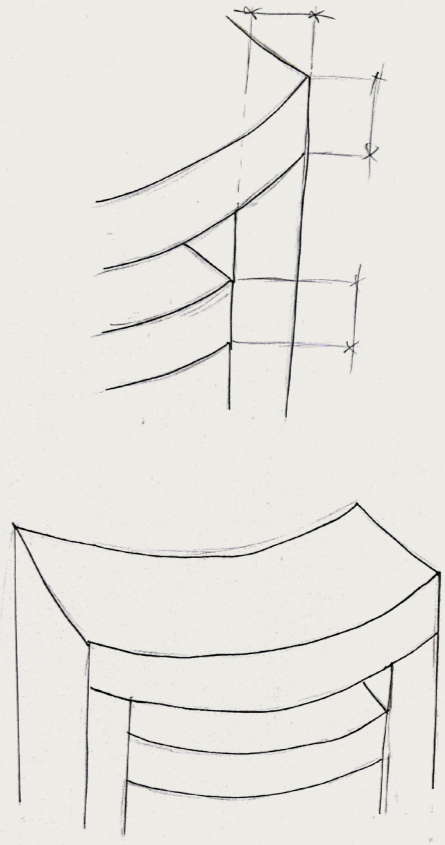
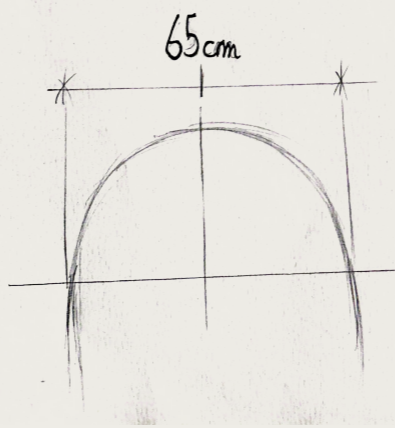
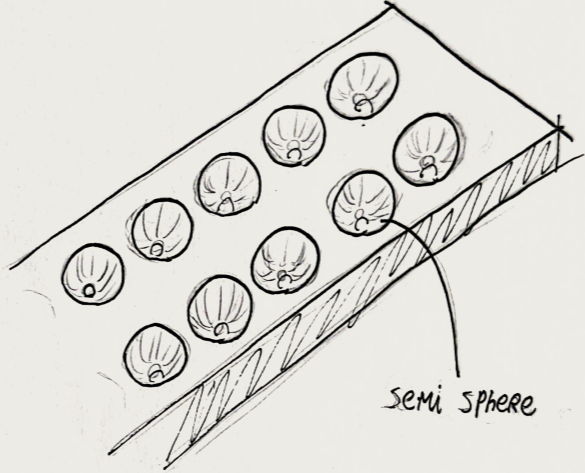
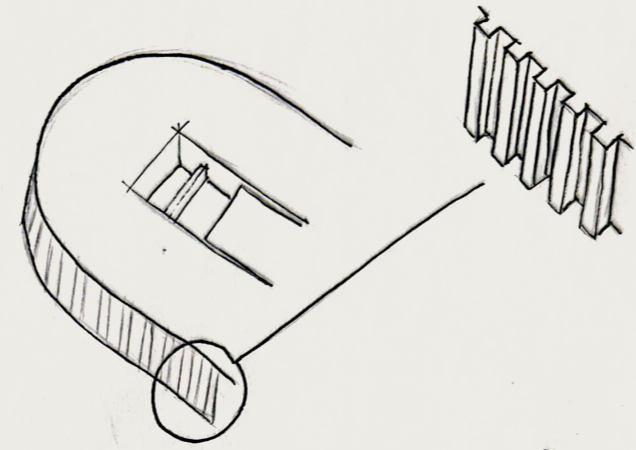
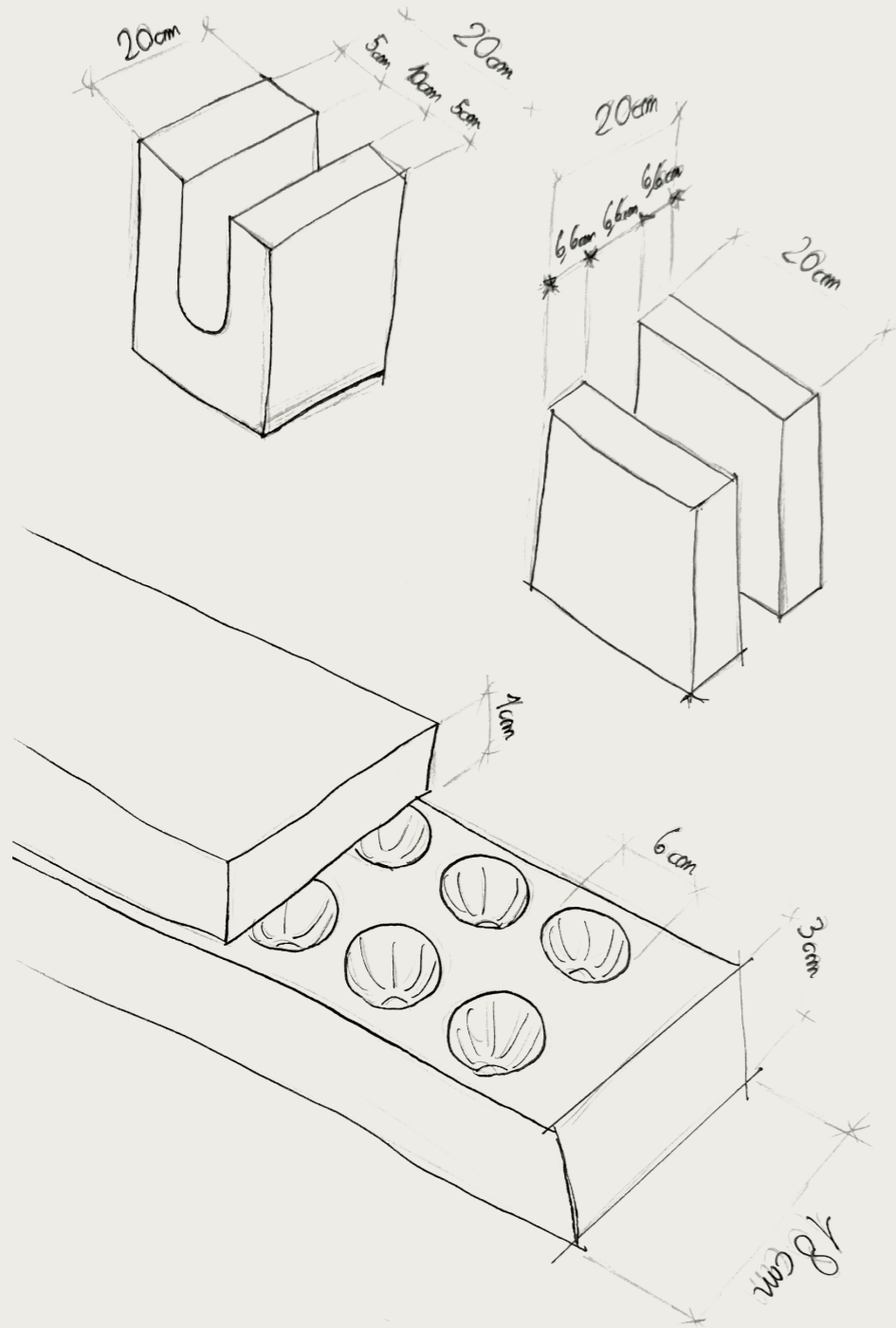
As a performance of care, continuity, and memory, the Eritrean coffee ceremony aligns seamlessly with the goals of Kabila: to restore rhythm, to honor tradition, and to design spaces that remember.





Kabila means “**clan**” or “**tribe**” in both Arabic and Swahili, a word that evokes origin, kinship, and shared belonging. This philosophy is what shapes the adaptation of the Kabila Collection into a larger spatial installation: a sculptural environment where ritual, memory, and community are embedded in form.

Rather than presenting furniture as isolated design pieces, Kabila places each object within a curated architectural narrative. The furniture collection takes inspiration from the African courtyard, a central, open-air gathering space that exists between homes and generations. A symbolic and functional hub: where stories are told, where conflict is resolved, where meals are shared, and ceremonies unfold. It reflects the idea that **identity is not individual, but communal.**





At the heart of the Kabila Collection is **Sapele wood**, a rich, lustrous hardwood native to West Africa. Known for its deep tonal grain, durability, and warm reddish hue, Sapele has long been used across Nigerian woodcarving traditions, where materials are never neutral, they are chosen for their symbolic and spiritual resonance as much as for their physical properties.

In Yoruba, Edo, and Igbo carving cultures, **wood is seen as a living medium** capable of storing and transmitting *ase*, spiritual energy or life force. Sapele, in particular, is often used to create sacred objects: ritual stools, ancestral masks, drums, and shrine panels. These are not just decorative works, but instruments of memory, protection, and transmission, designed to endure time, weather, and spirit.



Within this structure, the coffee table becomes a core ritual object. It features:

A built-in Oware game board, referencing the Ghanaian strategy game traditionally passed down through generations, transforming the table into a site of memory and interaction.

A recessed space for the Eritrean coffee ceremony, celebrating a slow, intentional ritual of presence and gathering, turning the everyday act of coffee-making into a communal performance of care.

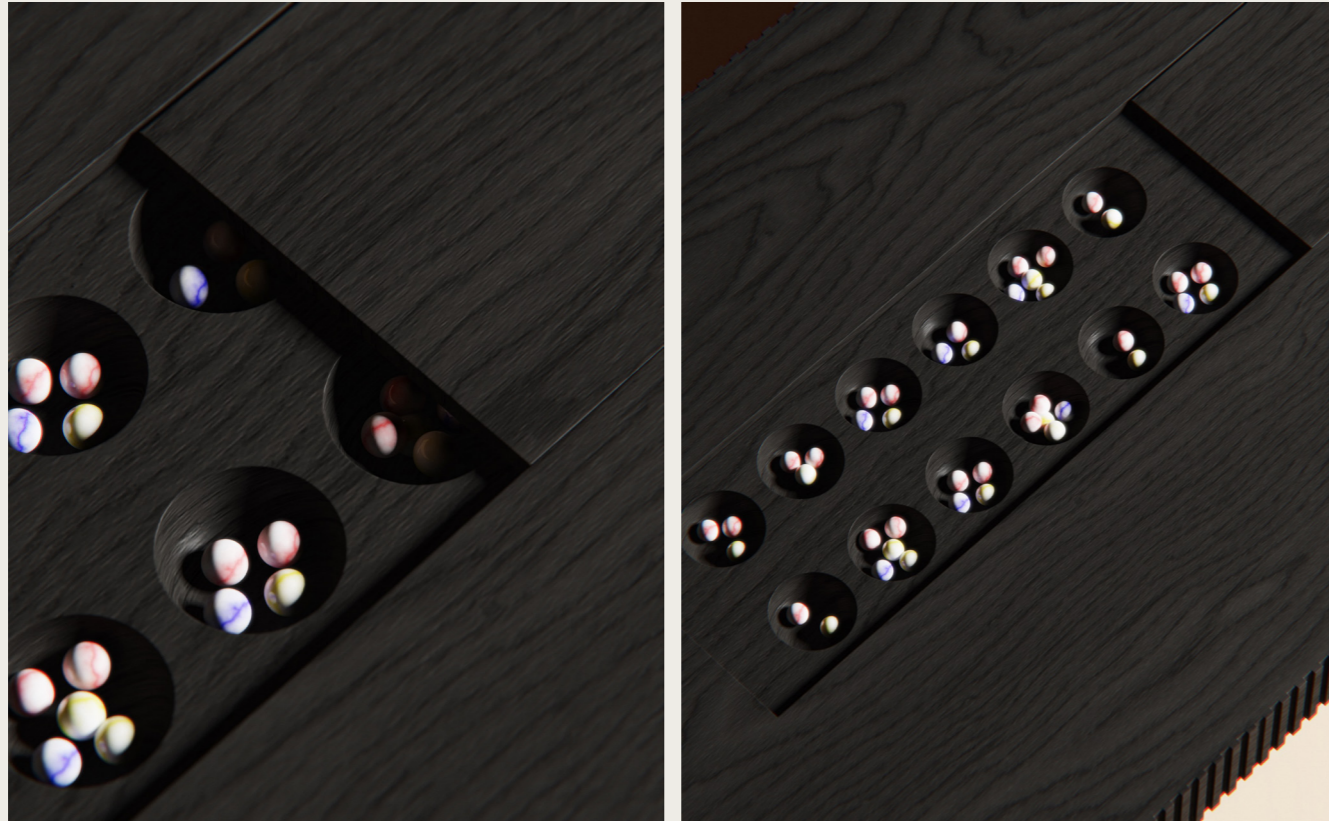


In the heart of the Kabila coffee table, a hand-carved Oware board is embedded, not merely as a decorative feature, but as a living symbol of memory, community, and intergenerational exchange. Known by many names across the African continent and its diasporas, Oware is part of the broader mancala family of games, one of the oldest known forms of strategy-based play, with origins dating back thousands of years.

Oware is more than a game, it is a cultural thread, a shared ritual that binds families, generations, and even entire communities through intellect, dialogue, and rhythm.

Oware is a two-player strategy game involving a carved board with rows of pits (called “houses”) and a set of seeds or stones. The object of the game is to capture more seeds than one’s opponent through careful counting, prediction, and strategic moves. Traditionally, the seeds are made from tamarind, cowrie shells, or pebbles, and the boards themselves are often hand-carved into wood, sometimes ornately, as objects of art and heritage.

The gameplay is rhythmic and cerebral, requiring focus, foresight, and intuition. But Oware is rarely played in silence: it is often accompanied by banter, storytelling, teasing, and song. This makes the game not just a mental exercise, but a social performance, deeply embedded in African modes of communal life.



Its inclusion in Kabila is a deliberate statement: that *play is not separate from design*, and that joy, memory, and cultural transmission must live at the center of our shared spaces. The Oware board is an architectural gesture, a carved archive of African heritage that reclaims leisure as a form of resistance, identity, and connection.

Just as the courtyard reflects the spatial form of community, the Oware game reflects its emotional rhythm. **It celebrates presence, patience, and the elegant strategies we pass down across generations through touch, laughter, and care.**



The Kabila Stool draws deep inspiration from the traditional stools of the Benin (Edo) people of southern Nigeria, forms that are far more than functional furniture. In Edo culture, as in many West African traditions, a stool is not simply something to sit on, it is a ritual object, a symbol of status, and often, a spiritual vessel.

In the ancient Kingdom of Benin, stools were carved with deep reverence, reserved for chiefs, priestesses, and elders, and often placed in shrines as stand-ins for the presence of an ancestor or spiritual figure. They were designed to hold space, both physically and spiritually, marking where one rests, reflects, or communes with the unseen. When not in use, a sacred stool is placed on its side, to signify that no one is occupying its spirit.



Traditional Edo stools are often sculpted from a single block of wood, low to the ground, compact, and symmetrical, balancing solidity with symbolic grace. They frequently include carved reliefs or motifs that reference royalty, protection, or cosmology. Their simplicity is deceptive: they carry generational power, often passed down and never mass-produced.

The making of Kabila was never just about creating only an installation, it was a cultural journey, one that moved across geographies, histories, and ancestral wisdoms. ***Each material, each symbol, each spatial gesture was carefully chosen as part of a broader act of remembering, and reimagining what it means to belong, to gather, and to honor where we come from.***

From the sacred geometry of the Musgum mud huts in Cameroon, to the ritual grace of the Eritrean coffee ceremony, the carved language of Adinkra symbols from Ghana, and the deep-rooted elegance of Sapele wood used in Nigerian craft, Kabila carries the voices of many places, many peoples, and many stories. ***It is both rooted and diasporic, both grounded and open, offering a space where architecture becomes a vessel for memory, ritual, and reconnection.***

More than an object or a space, Kabila is a living archive — a sculptural tribute to community as culture, to design as storytelling, and to form as ceremony. It invites us not only to observe, but to participate: to sit, to play, to share, to reflect. And in doing so, ***it reminds us that the most powerful designs are not those that seek to impress, but those that create meaning, invite presence, and hold us together in time.***

KABILA

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