

Let's talk about Design

 By [Terry Levin](#)

23 Feb 2005

A veritable feast of design, inspiration, innovation, creativity and skill is being showcased at Design Indaba 8, which was opened Wednesday, 23 February 2005, by, you've guessed it, Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rassool, with his customary sense of occasion and well chosen words about the importance of design in the transformation of our society. He reiterated the support of government and the DTI for the Indaba and design in general.

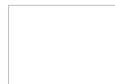
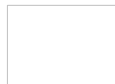
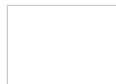
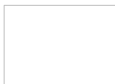
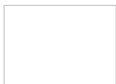
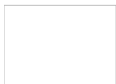
One would sincerely hope that their commitment runs to actually sending representatives to attend the sessions to learn how design can serve our society, rather than paying lip-service from the sidelines.

NATHAN REDDY



As one would expect, the first speaker, creative director of Grid, Nathan Reddy, is passionately South African. His ideas abound. The redistribution of hunger via the Mr Delivery concept, whereby recipients of a take away would send away a can of food for the needy, is a great example of how creative thinking can make a good idea even better.

Work that moves is the ID for the DTI's involvement in the Mapangupwe region and the rediscovery that Africans have been global traders since around 1057! Also welcome is the work for the AngloGold show, opening New York fashion week as well as YFM and YMag - portraying South Africa as a sophisticated nation, which need no longer be represented solely by leopard skins and safari holidays! The power of designers to influence and transform is a recurring theme and the visual of the well-meaning little Aids ribbon turned hangman's noose says it all.



MASSIMO MOROZZI



All the ideas in the world are nothing without the application skills and the Italians are the masters of an economy based on design. Unlike us, as Italy has few raw materials, they have had to create their own - manufacturing fabrics, leather, ceramics, glass, metal and plastics - theirs is a story of craftsmanship.

How so they do it?

Well for a start they did not put their craftsmen in a corner to make souvenirs for tourists, but ensured that they adapted the

know-how of centuries of craft skills with available modern, technical and industrial processes. Ferrari, Gucci, Prada and Ferragamo are produced by craftsmen! In addition, production is not concentrated in factories, but in independent specialist industrial districts, where streets are crowded with the exchange of components and ideas. Work for Edra - the Red icons - features everything in red, and showcases global collaborations in furniture ideas. Most iconic icon of the day has to go to the red couch - if you close your eyes and think of a sofa - this will be it - a direct copy of the sofa in Mickey Mouse's house - its message is clear - so much design is pollution and excess, design is not complicated, it is a process, a quality of life which brings more joy into our lives.



ALISON JACKSON

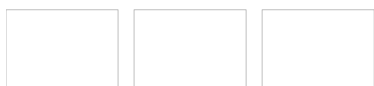


Alison is billed as a fine artist from the UK, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, who explores the voyeuristic relationships of the public to celebrity figures, through the medium of photography. When Princess Diana died, Britain came to a standstill, although all people really knew of her, was a set of myths and perceptions created via photographic images of her. This inspired the series of photographs showing Diana, Dodi and an imaginary mixed race child, accomplished by means of look-alikes so similar to the iconic images of the real people, that you would never know the difference.

Work featuring Tony and Cherie Blair, George W. Bush, Posh and Becks, all the rest of the Royal family and Marilyn Monroe, have drawn mixed reactions. Initially banned and shunned, they are now featured on the covers of magazines, in the Guardian newspaper, as well as in the galleries where they started out.

Live performance art window displays for Selfridges featuring 'the Blairs' doing Yoga and 'David Beckham's' behind, drew 1000's of onlookers - and their cameras. From our perspective it would undoubtedly be construed as unconstitutional to flagrantly parody celebrities in this manner and could also raise interesting debates about artistic licence and freedom of expression - but not in Britain where everyone is fair game.

Amusingly, when asked at the press conference the other day if she would be interested in giving South African celebrities the same treatment, Ms Jackson offered dryly, 'well I might, if there were any...'

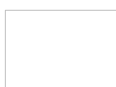
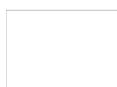


ISSAY KITAGAWA



Is there a Japanese word for design? Although speaking in Japanese, through an interpreter, the word design cropped up frequently in Issay's presentation. His company, GRAPH, is a 70 year old printing company offering design solution for the last 16 years and specialising mostly in exquisite books and paper products which demonstrate a thorough mastery of the possibilities of print. Books as commodities is a novel idea in an era when the Japanese and the rest of the world become increasingly averse to reading.

The use of bubble wrap packaging to make books more desirable on display, jackets in the same reflective substrate as that used on running shoes, diaries to die for, and some very good sake over lunch, were just some of the things on offer from the Japanese contingent yesterday.



PIERRE TERBLANCHE



Although unlikely that an 'oke' educated at Hoerskool Brandwag in Uitenhage, would one day become the Director of Design for the Ducati Motorcycle Company in Bologna Italy - he did. A story of passion and persistence paid off for Pierre and ensured that he rose through the ranks of the European automotive industry. His bikes have drawn critical acclaim from trade showings and have also been sold successfully via the internet. With instant access to information at their fingertips, he reckons designers have it easier today than they used to, and should have no excuses why they can't do something. His design maxim: Creativity is a given - Method a God, without which he would be unable to produce some of the sexiest consumer goods in the world.



[Pierre Terblanche - Design Indaba Day 1](#)

BRIAN STEINHOBEL



Possibly South Africa's best kept resource in our objectives of making SA design a global design player, especially since according to him, we have the highest incidence of patent applications in the world. He posed the question as to why this is, and it bears some consideration, when you're sitting in the traffic or gazing idly at the bathroom taps.

To this end, Brian showed prototypes of a few of the 50 new taps commissioned by Cobra, soon to be on our shelves and they are actually pretty awesome. We also saw state-of-the-art renditions of supermarket trolleys, devices made for and used at the Sydney Olympics for repelling sharks in the swimming leg (well obviously) of triathlon events, lighting that uses solar and wind power LED technology which will be used at the Beijing Olympics, intelligent pool cleaners, the snake board and a hard hat featuring lifesaving functionality for use in gold mines - a thought while we were enjoying the merchandise on offer at the Jewellery Indaba, for the guys who risk their lives for gold.

Internationally styled office furniture solutions, chairs, kettles, crates and beautiful bottles are also pumped out for global buyers right here in Gauteng. Unlike the rest of world, South African's have never been afforded the luxury of specialisation and have had to 'do everything', cultivating a healthy lateral approach as well as high level of technical transfer.

The fact that there were no industrial design courses in South Africa until relatively recently, makes achievements by a company like the Steinhobel Group all the more impressive. When asked in the Q&A session where he'd studied, Brian made reference to Bok Street Tech, but went on to say that it doesn't matter where you study. Possibly the best designer he has ever seen is a guy called James Seery, from Soweto, with no formal training. If there's anybody out there looking for a bursary candidate particularly in the automotive field, here's your chance. Brian reckons this guy can rival any automotive designer anywhere!



CARLOS MIELE



Carlos reckons that being here in Cape Town feels a lot like being in Brazil. Both countries offer exuberant colour, bio-diversity, sensuality, colour and energy which inspires the rest of the world. The folkloric image of the 3rd world in a state of misery banalises our work - yet the underprivileged are rich in culture that goes against globalisation. His idea to overcome this state of affairs was to export very expensive dresses to a global market and do it very well. A model in social responsibility, he partners with traditional crafters, using 500-year-old dying methods along with technology to produce a staggering array of haute couture to die for. Using only 100% silk, his clothes are thus totally organic and flow over the body like wind on the water.

Here commercial art is used for social change, and to raise levels of self esteem. Worn by the likes of Christina Aguilera, Sarah Jessica Parker and Paris Hilton - ironically, increasing their self-esteem in the process. The flagship store in New York is an essay in white on white organic forms. Another store is planned in Paris soon, proof that having your heart is in the right place is half the battle to a successful global brand. Another brilliant idea is using street musicians on his international catwalk shows. Applying this concept at Cape Town fashion week, for example, would be the ultimate in an inclusive win-win esteem raising exercise.

One can only hope that all this heralds a rediscovery of humanism in design. To achieve this, design needs to come out of the agencies and studios where it lurks and out into the public eye - the Italians for example have centuries of experience in using their public spaces for the sharing of information and ideas, in the words of Massimo Morozzi: "We need to talk about design - we are all its ambassadors... we all stand to reap its rewards.

Make a noise.

ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

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