

The morning after... Design Indaba

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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First slot of the last day of the Indaba is not a favourite for speakers, due to the rigors of the customary Thursday night party. The task went to Chip Kidd, famous New York book designer, who is a bit like all the characters out of Will and Grace rolled into one - only funnier.

When asked to design book covers that look good from 50ft away, Chipp comments, I suppose that's because they think people's arms are 50ft long!!! Amongst his myriad of assignments and projects are the cover for the autobiography of Daniel Libeskind - the architect who won the tender to develop Ground Zero - the book did not get great reviews by all accounts. Chip is published himself - his book, *The Cheese Monkeys*, about a graphic design student, was apparently a national best-seller.

A Triumph!

The undisputed Man-of-the-Indaba award this year must surely go to Net#work Creative Director, Mike Schalit. Knocking the socks off many of the internationals and impressing the hell out of them to boot. Showing their 'Hoezit my Bra' print ad for Wonderbra, he commented, "when working in South Africa, do you need a supermodel or just a BIG model?" His presentation

developed momentum from the culty Corsa light campaign, which was the first to aim car ads directly at the young audience, to the classic 'What makes you black?' ad for Metro FM. The epic black and white 'rice' ad for Investec Private Bank has held up well. Every commercial shown at the Indaba received enthusiastic applause, whether showing homeless people 'modelling' their 'new' clothing in a charity appeal or a joint venture between South African and Mozambican police to get all the ammunition still lying around in Mozambique out, for Isuzu. This is the sort of stuff that the international never see and it makes us proud.

The fact that these are all shot to Oscar deserving standards is beside the point, the beauty of their approach is that they cross great divides, and go where other agencies fear to tread - to the backstreets, the backwaters and grammadoelas for great images and ideas. They also made the ad for 'South Africa - alive with possibilities'. His comment that perhaps the stakes aren't high enough for advertisers, "What would happen, if 80% of airline pilots screwed up?"

Beauty and the Beast

In design, invention is the Wow factor, but many products can be improved by small, incremental changes, says Luke Pearson. Much of the industrial design process involves beauty - the cutting edge product you turn out this year and the beast - the fact that the same product ends up on the scrap heap as waste when a new design becomes fashionable. As a result there has been a lot of soul searching in his approach, which has paid off in the form of a plum assignment, to design the interiors of the sleeper class for Virgin Airlines. The safety and logistic considerations of designing for an aeroplane are immense. When they discovered that the new design of the seat could not accommodate the regulation safety belts, Luke said, 'Why don't you use an air bag'? And they did! Message here for designers - think, question, examine your own motives and stay focused on finding your unique approach to what you do.

Design is easy

Answering the question, 'where do you get your ideas?', he comments that all great ideas are in one's immediate surrounding, often in the realm of pop culture. Thus the genius of a good designer, is the ability to see. Many of the great designers of the 20th century have been 'perpetual observers'. Giving new meaning to the term shag pile, are his sex rugs,

featuring graphic outlines of the feminine form, with tufts in all the right places, which have been banned from many retailers. His son's toys are a great source of inspiration with the board game floors and drawn showroom environments for Knoll, making some of the wittiest and most cost effective retail interiors ever. He also did exquisite windows for Hermes in Tokyo, with equestrian motifs printed on oversized children's blocks, thus enabling and continually changing scenes at the flip of a block.

In the final afternoon session of Design Indaba, on Friday, we also sat through an AV of a body of work almost too vast to take in. Shin Matsunaga is the ultimate in pure graphic design with logos for Issay Miyake and a host of others. He cites clean air and water, peace and wholesomeness as the fundamental objectives for humankind. Pretty essential really, as without these all the design in the world is utterly useless.

Building extraordinary forms was the title of Thomas Heatherwick's talk and aptly so. Showing four pictures of bridges that open, Thomas pointed out that when open, they look kind of broken and not harmonious. So when asked to design a bridge that opens in London's Paddington, they came up with a lyrical solution - made from standard material - theirs' concertinas open in a backward spiral forming a sculptural hexagon when closed which unrolls again to form a very ordinary looking bridge. This is the type of inspired thinking that has led to his assignment to create the 40m high sculpture to grace the Manchester Commonwealth Games stadium, a Buddhist temple in S. Japan, that looks like a folded piece of cloth [although made out of plywood!], blue broken glass, under-lit paving, cheers up a dingy backstreet of London and an illuminated structure balances on 1000's of glass rods in much the same way a scrubbing brush balances on its bristles. Google him, this is one of the 21st centuries finest minds!

A round brown world

Richard Rodriguez talked to us via satellite link up two years ago and this time in the flesh by popular request. All things turn brown, is his dominant theme and he uses the history of South America to explain how passion, sensuality and love formed the mixing of Indian, Asian, African and Spanish races. As a brown skinned person, previously afraid to come to South Africa, he observes how our constitution now sets an almost unbelievable moral example to the rest of the world - to allow love. He comments that the mingling is in the air as sound here, with every conceivable type of music on offer, an aural blending of cultures.

Buildings that move

Ron Arad is the man who lost the above-mentioned Manchester monument assignment to Thomas Heatherwick, although his entry was incredible, probably too much so. A structure made out of hundreds of intelligent reflective panels that move individually. This building can text, sway and boogie. He's the Professor of product design at London's RCA and I don't really know how he fits it all in. Perhaps that's why he didn't have time to prepare anything for his Indaba. The Swarovski crystal chandelier that displays text is his baby [in case you wanted to know, the Japanese version takes email as well!] He is currently working on a massive hotel which will

be floated atop the well-known London landmark, the Battersea Powerstation, originally built by Gilbert Scott [of the red telephone box fame]. The hotel looks like a 1960's artist's impression of the year 2000, and is not to everyone's taste, but one thing of which you can be sure, apart from the fact that the rooms will cost a bomb, it will be the most futuristic hotel interface on the planet.

Forming something worthless into something worthwhile

This brings us to the end of this years' Indaba. The Campana brothers from Brazil, are a bit like a Laurel and Hardy duo, but their work speaks for itself. The product of invention showed only by emerging countries where resources are precious and necessity the mother of invention. The flip side of the throw away culture, where things are formed out of stuff found on the street and the by products of other industries. This approach has found them global fame in their relationship with Italian company Erda [see Let's talk about design article 24 Feb 2005]. The textural quality of their furniture exhibits characteristic Brazilian sensuality, whether formed out of wood, rubber or fabric off-cuts, bubble-wrap, rope, or even furry toys. Theirs' is the translation of their environment into something for sale, so you can see why they feel so at home here. If not for their inventive minds they would have probably told you, the only thing inspiring in Brazil is the 1960's Niemeyer architecture, built to herald "The Brazil of the Future" which never arrived...

Perhaps one could sum up the dominant theme of this years' Design Indaba with a quote from the 1994 book by business guru Tom Peters, which says - "The lumbering bureaucracies of this century will be replaced by fluid, independent groups of problem solvers..." The quote is accredited to Steve Truett and Tom Barrett.

See you next year at the Indaba...

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