

A sense of place

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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Almost every Design Indaba presenter refers to their country or city of origin as being formative to the success of their design approach and ethos. The evidence stacks up annually as one case study after the next demonstrates that the best design solutions grow out of a sense of place, context and location and are fundamental to inspiration.

Place is pride



The early morning Design Indaba audiences on Thursday were spellbound by the performance of Texas' sole Pentagram partner, DJ Stout, who by the way is not a DJ, in fact he as far from hip-hop culture as you can get without actually falling off the edge of the universe.

He was however accompanied by an award winning performance pianist [Graeme Reynolds](#), who offered a dramatic counterpoint to the photographic essays of Texan cowboy sub-culture, on his rented white Feurich baby grand.

Who knew there was such a thing as [Cowboys Poets](#) anyway?

What impresses and moves is the deep-rooted sense of place, the landscapes, the folk mythology of the cowboy with its wide-open spaces, reverence for horses, boots and saddles, baseball and generations of family values - portrayed today in some of the most breathtaking black & white photography, not seen since before the advent of digital and demonstrating why Stout is an internationally renowned book and magazine graphic designer and all round good 'ol boy!

Note: I learned afterwards in the Brandy Bar that DJ had never performed with Reynolds before and had called him up on a whim to ask if he would like to accompany him to South Africa to appear on the Indaba stage, to which Reynolds, who has played for ballets, truck ballets and other even weirder gigs, apparently did not hesitate for a second in accepting the invitation!

A dish is about where it comes from - Margo Jansen

A culinary insert has become *de rigueur* on the Design Indaba programme probably because it illustrates the importance of being inspired by locality so well. Great chefs use local ingredients in their recipes to create dishes with authenticity. In the case of Margot Janse, Dutch roots transplanted to South Africa, it is brandy and grape juice reductions paired with Joostenbergvlakte-sourced duck, prepared in a "Dutch oven" of sacred Limpopo Baleni Salt and fynbos herbs, that ensure the ongoing status of Franschhoek's le Quartier Francais as one of South Africa's top culinary destinations. Originally from the fertile fishing grounds of Namibia's Skeleton Coast, and feeling the vibe of Jozi's high energy Saxon Hotel, fellow presenter, David Higgs described how he pops up to the certified organic roof garden of Saxon Hotel to gather the kohlrabi, wild asparagus and black radish, which might grace a dish of farmed kabeljou, finished with prickly pear. Both chefs discussed how space and their formative years inform their menus and the fulfilment of their artistry.



Give people space and they will know what to do with it - Michel Rojkind

Pride of place was the opening line of Brazilian architect Michel Rojkind's presentation, describing his native Mexico City as 'chaotic as hell'. Time and again it becomes clear at Design Indaba that architecture is not about putting up a building -



It is about creating interior and exterior spaces and places, in which people want to be, in which commerce will thrive, in which imagination will take flight.

Rojkind shows all of these in the opening up of glass bridges in a dome roof apartment that will allow people to see and engage with each other in their comings and goings and not feel alone. Extensions to the existing Cinetec complex offer fantastic play of light via lattice-covered areas and public spaces. A deep understanding on consumer behaviour is demonstrated in the purposing of previously non-existent space to create a roof garden, which has increased store income by 30%, and the deep display solutions that offer additional dimensions for performance and activations rather than just a flat façades. [Just be inspired.](#)

Creating a Moroccan village in a building - Clive Wilkenson

Clive Wilkenson, the interior architect responsible for new thinking in corporate interiors around the globe, from Google and Nokia to Chiat Day and JWT NY etc made the point that we have considered and revised every aspect of our domestic spaces over the last 100 years, but put hardly any thought into new models of office space where we spend a substantial part of our lives. His solutions anticipate new ways of working, team structures, digital connectivity and other factors. Advocating the incorporation of play, fluidity, texture, transparency, human scale, community and collaboration in imbuing workspaces with both more fun and more functionality. The Superdesk concept for the Barbarian Group NY, is a stand out example of the future office.



Be like a cowboy or a chef

Perhaps what we can learn from all these extrapolations, is that culture, community, tribalism, a sense of place - is not about souvenirs and symbols, specific logos, colours or crests - but more about not being afraid to admit that the light and landscapes of place can touch us emotionally - like a cowboy or a chef, inspired and in tune with the rhythms and seasons, flavours and texture of our unique place in the world.



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