

Design in context (part I)

 By [Terry Levin](#)

1 Mar 2013

Context could be said to have emerged as an underlying theme of day two of [Design Indaba](#) 2013, currently in progress at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC).

God is a chef and we must listen to her - Alex Atala

Brazilian chef Alex Atala ([@alexatala](#)), whose restaurant has been voted among the world's top 50 for the last seven years, says "the best way to be global is to be local". This approach sees him fusing the ingredients of his culture and location, even the burnt and bitter tastes of the deforestation of the "Amazonas" region, into his dishes. In asking us to consider the "souvenir flavours" arguably missing from South African restaurants, he is in effect asking us to redefine the context of our cuisine.

This would go beyond just the addition of more local ingredients into our dishes. Atala points out that when the global population reaches numbers of 9-12 billion, we will likely see the tipping point where wars will be fought over food and water. Reminding us that our planet is actually already producing enough food for 12 billion, our problem is not one of scarcity but of waste. What would it look like if we reimagined the content, cooking and consumption of our food, in the context of our region? [Note to self: the subject of another article.]

Design responds to context and works with what is already there

Asif Khan is a London-based architect who, among other landmark projects shown such as the Coca-Cola Pavilion for the 2012 London Olympics, best demonstrated his sense of context via the case study of work done in a refugee camp of 10 000 people on the border of Burma and Thailand. Citing every conceivable factor which may have had an impact on the local bamboo housing - termites, lung disease, materials and building techniques, scale, geo-political issues and, of course, design itself.

"Contexts for interaction in public spaces"

Also working with what is already there, or lacking, Rotterdam-based designer Jeanne van Heeswijk ([@jeanneworks](#)), is billed as a "visual artist who creates *contexts* for interaction in public spaces". For the last five years, Van Heeswijk has devoted herself to reviving marginalised urban communities. In the case of the Afrikaanderwijkmark in Rotterdam, her solutions channel the inherent skills of a predominantly young, immigrant community to create a revitalised co-operative market space. Objectives for her work in the Anfield region of Liverpool set out to re-establish a sense of confidence and ownership in communities which have been demotivated, and to renew a sense of pride in a neighbourhood which has been systematically dehumanised by legislation.



[click to enlarge](#)

Food out of context

Back on the Design Indaba stage after 11 years, Catalan Marti Guixé hates working with food, is not a foodie at all and only looks at food as "edible objects"*. This provides the basis of a radical approach to food design: for example, food in the context of a keyboard can't be messy - the solution SpamT, a snack from Catalonia which sees a tomato stuffed with bread and variations of food stuffs stuffed into other foodstuff, which he calls Techno tapas, "designed to be eaten in extreme conditions". Tapas pasta sees penne rigate strung onto spaghetti and tied in bunches with coloured elastic bands - "for ease of dipping and sharing" and yes, you can eat it at the keyboard with your hands.

His iCakes look like pie charts, wittily showing the proportions of their ingredients - sort of like cakes as infographics, a hands-free lollipop has three sticks in order to balance like a tripod and he also does something called something called Food Karaoke.

In response to solving the age-old problem of having to carry your drink around at an art exhibition, Guixie presents GAT FOG - or Gin and Tonic FOG - derived from an agricultural ultrasound technology which breaks down molecules into a fine mist, no doubt allowing you to inhale an intoxicating cocktail mist.

Other new food models include a reimagining of the Mr Delivery model, except one where you go out to a restaurant and then have a choice of 12 menus from which to order off - the obvious solution for someone who wants to open a restaurant and not have anything to do with cooking!

**The complete antithesis to former speaker Atala, who bestows intense reverence on even the minutest leaf, sauce and sprinkle of his dishes.*

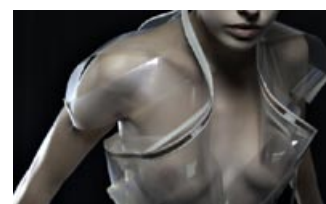
Technology in the context of being human = tecno poetry

Show-stealing presentation of the day - and possibly of the decade - goes to Daan Roosegarde. The example of a bank of interactive illuminated reeds, installed in a formerly scary gangster underpass, transforms the space so profoundly that it even becomes a popular location for romantic venue wedding photos!



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Moving on to more pressing issues, Roosegarde showed a sustainable dance floor, where dancers produce enough energy to power up lights and electricity in the club. LED lights can be seen through transparent panels in the floors, going deeper the more power you drum up - dance floors are as infographics too. A few of these dance floors are currently travelling around the world.



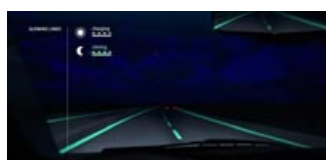
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Oh, he is also credited with designing the dress made of fabric that becomes transparent if a woman gets aroused. Everyone always mentions this first.

In the context of smart highways



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Applying participatory dance floor thinking, Roosegarde comments on how much time and money has been invested in car design, but nothing on the actual road. Talking on matters such as this at an event at which a senior member of [Heijmas](#), one of Europe's biggest road manufacturers, happened to be present, has led to initial proposals for lights to be replaced with glow in the dark luminescent paints, windmill lights that power up via the draft of passing cars, motion sensor lights that only go on when you pass them and priority lanes for electric cars or smart roads.

Roosegarde explains that, if this had been three years ago, it would never have happened, but now the lights are being shut down on highways because governments can't afford to keep them on, China is coming and a new breed of entrepreneur is emerging.

Few audiences can match a Design Indaba crowd in the throes of enthusiasm, and a raucous standing ovation for Roosegarde ended day two of Design Indaba 2013 on a neat highpoint.

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