

Getting it together at Design Indaba



The 9th annual Design Indaba kicked off at the CTICC yesterday, Wednesday 22 February with an uncharacteristic lack of ceremony - no address by the Premier, Deputy Ministers of Arts or Culture, no choirs and no praise singers. Perhaps this was fitting because in a climate where so much in the world needs to be redesigned, there is little time to waste. Arguably the world's most pressing design challenge is that of environmental degradation.

 By [Terry Levin](#) 22 Feb 2006



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opening yesterday was the aptly named Jeunesse Park, CEO of Trees for Africa - an initiative specializing in ensuring that the energy output of any event, is offset by the commensurate planting of trees in underserved communities.

Kudos too go to Lyndall Coburn and Ivan Ayliffe, the as yet unsung designer/copywriter team from Jupiter Drawing Room responsible for all aspects of the accomplished 'Design is the new Currency' campaign for DI9. Print production by Debbie Sher, illustrated by doyen Doug Powell and with animation by Masters & Savant, the whole campaign hangs together like a row of banners.

Keeping it proud, was John Hunt, flown in for the day from the Paris office of TBWA, to talk about ideas - truly original being the most difficult to manifest, identify and sell. Apparently a new way of countering client insecurity is creative solidarity. As Hunt put it "Clients take comfort when creatives of different disciplines agree with each other."

It took the concept of a giant ball, which could catapult fans 12 stories into the air via bunjy, at 170km per hour, to really communicate the Adidas promise - 'Impossible is nothing?' - the outlandish idea from young New Zealand creative, to coincide with the 2006 World Cup. The concept of integrated disciplines is also seen in their ongoing work for client Steve Jobs and the pretty cool idea of launching U2 album, Vertigo, exclusively

via itunes and polishing the Apple brand in the process.

In fact even if you live to be 100, never again will you hear the word collaboration uttered so many times in one place, in one day. New York Times Art Director Nicholas Blechman and uber-cartoonist Christoph Niemann used it about 100 times to describe what they do and cite the benefits of collaboration as the division of labour, as well as a relief from the solitary and lonely pursuit of graphic design.

The biting, ironic and poignant humour directed at American war efforts has become a familiar theme of Indabas over the last few years, but they manage to make it seem so fresh. Witness their genius at www.christophniemann.com and www.knickerbockerdesign.com respectively.

Collaboration is the future

In addition to collaboration with the above two fellow New Yorkers, graphic designer Paul Sahre also collaborates ↯ with his mom, dad and deaf brother Greg, see why at www.spreadintheluv.com. He says the design is everything to do with "what you decide to do with your time in the office".

Also seen to be collaborating to mutual benefit, were the US-based, virtuoso product-, car interior- and office-furniture design team of Ayse Birsal and Bibi Seck, www.birsalplusseck.com. Focusing their presentation on 'process', they demonstrated their approach to collaborative ventures - in an unexpected partnership with local crafts people while on a three week holiday in Dakar, Senegal; or with the project team for the award-winning Herman Miller 'Resolve' office furniture system inspired by trees and organic honeycomb forms.

On the topic of project management and such like, at Jewellery Indaba a panel discussion hinged on ↯ the need for local jewellery designers to 'get together' to promote and develop a desirable and saleable African jewellery idiom. Collaboration, it seems, is about coming out of ivory towers, cubicles and compartments ↯ about throwing open the doors to enriching cross-disciplinary models, about commitment and trust and the sharing of know-how.

It's also more about sketching and less 'MAC'. Beautiful forms now are home-grown, hand-drawn, hand-lettered and hand-crafted - especially at idea stage. Ayse Birsal called it 'putting your brain on paper'. Hopefully those of us in Cape Town will use the downtime of our latest power cuts for more doodling... for the rest of you, try pulling the plug now and again!

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