

Where it's at

 By [Herman Manson](#): [@marklives](#)

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Cape Town is gearing up to host one of the world's premier design conferences - the [2012 Design Indaba](#). Design Indaba regular and Pentagram partner [Michael Bierut](#) ([@michaelbierut](#)) will MC this year's event alongside [Michelle Constant](#) ([@MichConstant](#)) and [Khaya Dlanga](#) ([@khayadlanga](#)). The conference takes place 29 February-March 2012 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre and the expo (which is open to the general public) takes place 2-4 March 2012.

You never quite know

You never quite know who will be the standout speakers at the annual three-day celebration of design and the design economy. What you do know is that you are likely to be surprised by who wins you over. Not Martha Stewart of [glitter pork fame](#) or the guys from Google [fawning on and on](#) about The Founder.



Last year, Mexican designer and founder of Taller Flora fashion label, [Carla Fernandez](#), stood out with her inspirational presentation on and celebration of traditional Mexican clothing design and textiles. The simplicity of squares and rectangles in traditional clothing design made it possible for local indigenous communities with little tailoring skills to manufacture her designs, providing not only jobs but also keeping traditional methods alive. Burkina Faso architect [Francis Kéré](#) thoroughly dashed notions of Western design superiority with his low-tech community orientated approach to architecture.

This year will be no different. Based on previous experience, I suspect the architects speaking at the event on innovative approaches to urban design will again steal the show. Look out for local architect Heinrich Wolff to open the day on Thursday and for [Bjarke Ingels](#) (named *Wall Street Journal's* Architectural Innovator of 2011) who will be the final speaker on Friday.

SA design heroes in the mix

There is also a good sprinkle of South African design heroes in the speaker mix this year. In fact, the conference opens properly with a talk by MD [Charl Thom](#) ([@CharlThom](#)) and creative director [Justin Gomes](#) ([@justinjommes](#)) of agency [FoxP2](#) - widely considered to be one of SA's best creative agencies. The agency took top ranking at the Loeries again last year, beating many of its significantly larger creative rivals.

Other speakers on the opening day of the conference includes [John Bielenberg](#), a design maverick and social entrepreneur, and a proponent of turning conventional thinking upside down, as articulated in his 'thinking wrong' philosophy (where conventional thinking is a treat to creativity and unique solutions). Landscape designer [Dan Pearson](#), head chef of Noma restaurant in Copenhagen; René Redzepi; Pentagram partner Eddie Opara, artists and designers Chris Milk and [Aaron Koblin](#); and the founders of urban design firm Urban-Think Tank are also speaking.

The ever-popular [Design Indaba Pecha Kucha](#), which showcases the work of young designers, also takes place on the opening day.

Thursday's lineup

Thursday sees Pete Hellicar and Joel Gethin Lewis of Hellicar & Lewis, furniture designers [Greg Gamble](#) and [Philippe van der Merwe](#) from [Tonic design](#), architect [Y Tsai](#) of [Tsai Design Studio](#) and Cape-Town design hero [Porky Hefer](#) (best known for his work '[Cratefan](#)' - the giant statue built with recycled Coke crates - in Cape Town's V&A Waterfront) take to the Design Indaba stage.

The afternoon will be given to filmmaker Akshat Verma, art and design practice [United Visual Artists](#) (made up of Ash Nehru, Chris Bird and Matt Clark), Dutch furniture designer [Piet Hein Eek](#) and French designer Mathieu Lehanneur.

On the final day of the conference, look forward to a talk by another South African made good globally, [Clive van Heerden](#), director of [Design-Led Innovation](#) at [Philips Design](#), the team behind the emotive-clothing concept *Time* magazine named one of the world's Best Inventions of 2007.

Top-rated chef and author Gastón Acurio, scent expert [Sissel Tolaas](#), interaction designer Andrew Shoben, Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-director of the Serpentine Gallery in London, and artist Carsten Höller and Carlo Ratti and Assaf Biderman of the [SENSEable City Laboratory](#) also all present on Friday.

Annual expo open to the public

The conference itself is closed to members of the public but they are invited to the [Design Indaba's annual expo](#), which aims to showcase exceptional design across various disciplines, and although you are unlikely to find any bargains, you might well unearth a few treasures. It opens Friday-Sunday and tickets are R60.

Don't forget about the Design Indaba [Filmfest](#) at the [Labia on Orange](#) - a giveaway at R30 a ticket.

[Sónar](#), the electronic music festival, will be presenting "[A Taste of Sónar](#)" in Cape Town during Design Indaba on 2 March. Tickets for the event are R250 for general admission and available through Computicket.

With [Common Pitch: South Africa](#), taking place on 29 February at Cape Town's City Hall, social innovation start-up teams will compete for a R200 000 prize by pitching, in five minutes each, their business ideas a panel of judges. Tickets are R150 at the door.

Design Indaba magazine

Finally, Design Indaba has ceased publication of its quarterly [Design Indaba magazine](#), in favour of a format-neutral project approach which saw the creation this year of an innovative magazine edited by [Richard Hart](#), titled 'Where it's at.' Billed as a survey of SA creativity, it will consist of 84 text pages, 28 gatefold posters and a cover that folds out as a colourfully large map of Africa.

Future projects could be produced as DVDs, a documentary, a coffee table book or a poster collection (in short, nobody knows and anything goes).

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