

Five themes from Design Indaba 2016

By [Rebone Masemola](#)

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'With our creativity we are makers of culture'...

The [Design Indaba](#) speakers were like a refreshers course that brought back to life some of the many ideals that I used to naively embrace when I didn't take myself too seriously, but had forgotten to live-by as the everyday practices got in the way. The important thing to recall was that design wasn't something that lived elsewhere, but that, it is rather so deeply entrenched in the everyday that we forget to take caution of its existence, because it surrounds us, it gets taken for granted and truly gets lost in the mundane. Simply put designers create their work out of a sense of public urgency.



Design breathes in the simplest objects that we engage with, like street signs. Its significance and impact is even greater when you remember that the craft is everywhere and in everyone, it's not just for the elitists who occupy spaces out of our reach. Chefs, writers, architects, lawyers, stylist, comics, animators, graphic designers, musicians, scientists and a whole lot of people who rely on creativity to compose narratives, shape our society, drive conversations for change and just keep people entertained fit this category. Since it forms the very fabric of our society it should be utilised to engage human issues, thus things like poverty are a design flaw that can be addressed in such a unique manner.

The concept of design has evolved over time, it now connects people, objects, nature and the world - in essence it is life. It constitutes a whole world of systems that permit us access to future realities, it showcases our true-selves in unimaginable forms that make it possible to rethink how we tell stories through installations, films, comic books, social entrepreneurship, interior design, music videos and fashion shows. I learned that we have moved into an era that intersects design, art, technology and storytelling, where social media allows users to reinvent their reality, and everything coexists to improve how people experience their surroundings. It's a generation made out of creative millennial innovators 'who see the future in the present'. The craft has moved into dimensions that make it mobile and accessible, where information is movement and intention is put into form.

Top five themes from [Design Indaba](#) that stood out for me...

'Earth has a Natural packaging that guarantees life and infinite inspirational possibilities'...

- **There is strong support for developing sustainable and locally inspired designs** that utilise renewable materials, fabrics and energy sources to protect the environment. Thus living in a time that sees art and design as tools that could change and shape how things are being done, such practices are the key to unlocking new spectrums that see 'design with infinite possibilities'.

Nature is now seen as a key ingredient that designers need to observe when coming up with creative innovations, the idea is that meaningful designs can provide inventive solutions to social issues, allows us to rethink our lifestyles and explore alternative sources of knowledge. Using the craft in this manner can trigger an understanding of the bigger picture that feeds back into the world we live in, thus design doesn't exist in isolation. It's about creating a world where we champion aesthetically pleasing works that serve a greater cause - it's like beauty with a purpose.

'Product design doesn't exist in a vacuum, it should harness human habits to fit into the lifestyle of its users'...

- **Human-centric design** invests in the idea of creating pragmatic design briefs that decentralises the craft. This is about the informalisation of the field. As opposed to developing systems that change the way people are already doing things, why not envision our ideas around the conditions of the people we are designing for.

In the case of architecture, why not explore the kind of infrastructure that truly lives in and mimic's residents existing conditions as opposed to imposing formally institutionalised building forms. 'Know and understand who you are designing for', initiating projects that reflect and represent the attitudes of residents is vital to ensure local penetration of by-products. Creatives need to invest in changing perceptions so that users of their products and brands begin to question the notions of place and space. Revolutionising designs that are outward looking so they can blend in to become part of the architecture.

'Buildings aren't always the literal solutions to our cities problems'...

- **The rise of networking as design** is a principle that encourages peer to peer opportunity creation, a lot like crowdsourcing. This challenges everyone to create as a collective because already design is seen as a craft that connects and gives things meaning. Ensuring that we live in an era that drives to create spaces where communities can go to share their life stories and convene.

There is a need for more architectural designs that make public spaces less territorial to decentralise and encourage public participation and engagement, desire to create an inclusive on demand systems for social change. Initiating a collectivist mind-set in the field encourages dwellers to take charge in the rebuilding of their own communities. Empowering them to exercise urgency and action will open rooms for people to address questions about what it means to inhabit spaces.

'Work with history and look with a third eye to mix things others think aren't compatible'...

- **The cross-pollination between traditional practice and new technologies** focuses on using what's already around us to reinvent the design craft. The philosophy that design doesn't necessarily need to invent new things but rather reinvent current systems via a merger with new technological methods.

Sometimes the solution to our future design problems lie in the past. Bringing to life the notion that "a lot of the solutions that we need to resolve our human challenges are already around us", they don't really need the 'big' idea. The 'awe effect' doesn't always have to be complex, over the top or novel, may be cliché but sometimes 'simplicity is truly the spice of life'.

'Less tests and more testicles'...

- **Design that incorporates work and play** was very encouraged by many of the creatives. It seems to be an exciting way to get designers alike to get out into the world and experience life, because after all creatives design for other people who may not be in the industry. It was promoted as a technique that designers can utilise to channel and

inspire the creative process. They are all about exploring new avenues that would allow them to discover foreign cultural practices to incorporate into future designs. They have an open approach to design and production.

'Aiming to create designs that can be experienced'...

• **Branding and creating designs that can be experienced** plays with the notion that the craft needs to innovate to enhance and engage all of the user's senses. Users of the designs who happen to be ordinary people need to be immersed in our creative designs in order to keep them top of mind. There are dozens of brands and products that get developed all the time and all over the world, so by-products need to utilise whatever the technology that's out there so they are memorable and unique.

ABOUT REBONE MASEMOLA

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