Welcome to Camron’s inaugural Power of Design 2022. This is our lens on the impact of design – the importance we place on design education, cities that inspire us and people who we respect for their insights into this post pandemic world. Design is one of the most important factors when building a brand, improving our cities and creating the world in which we live. Design is playing a leading role in reshaping our understanding of how and why we need to move forward in the next decade. In this Power of Design 2022 we have a section dedicated to how to create a design culture, we celebrate the innovators leading the way in design experiences and finally we share insights into the impact of design and sustainability. In pulling this report together we have engaged with people leading the way in 20 global cities to gain insight into what matters most to them – from Lagos to Lisbon.

We would like to thank Joe Gebbia, Jonathan Mildenhall, Ravi Naidoo, Mazyar Mortazavi, Henrietta Thompson and Jonathan Openshaw for their contribution.
“DESIGN IS A FUNNY WORD. SOME PEOPLE THINK DESIGN MEANS HOW IT LOOKS. BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU DIG DEEPER, IT’S REALLY HOW IT WORKS.”

STEVE JOBS
As we launch into a new year, we sit down with the entrepreneur, designer and co-founder of Airbnb to ask how a more design-led approach to tech can help create connections in a divided world.

Jonathan Openshaw: Design has always been a big focus for Airbnb, where it was quite unusually put on the same footing as tech and engineering at inception. How important was it to the company’s success?

Joe Gebbia: I think it was the thing that made us successful. I studied industrial and graphic design at RISD and Brian Chesky had an industrial design background too. Our education had given us the understanding that design was not just about an object or form, but about an entire experience. So take a product like a bottle of water, for example, design doesn’t begin and end with the shape of the bottle. What does the brand communicate? Where does the water come from? Where do people encounter it? Is it on the store shelf or in another environment? Where does that first taste happen and what is that experience like? What happens with the packaging when they’re done? The list goes on. Good design is never a single fixed moment in time, but a long sequence of experiences that take in the big picture. I remember one of the most powerful learning moments I had at RISD was when they took our class to the state landfill so that we could witness this seemingly endless landscape of trash stretching out as far as the eye could see. I think that was probably one of the most impactful moments of my life – it was a brilliant lesson in why responsible design matters. I’ve yet to meet a designer who has the aspiration to make landfills bigger.
JO: So your design education gave you an overarching ethos, but presumably it gave you specific toolkits too?

JG: I think one of the biggest things it taught me was the importance of craftsmanship and of really sweating the last ten percent. There’s quite a notorious project in the industrial design department at RISD where you’re given a raw block of steel and you have to file it down to a perfect 90-degree angle, with a perfect radius on one side and chamfer on the other. It takes an entire semester of monk-like focus, it’s incredibly labour intensive, and by the end you’re filing things down to the micron, but it really taught us the importance of getting things right. There are some things you can’t rush, but they’re worth doing because it’s going to make the difference between your product getting noticed or it sinking without a trace. It taught me the difference between the effort required to make good design versus how I define great design – when you satisfy the conscious and tickle the subconscious.

JO: It’s interesting that you learnt that lesson through a physical process, and the result was presumably very clear in the weight, balance and tactility of the final object. But how easily were you able to carry the same mindset across when designing a digital experience such as Airbnb?

JG: I think what I really learnt from that process is that details create trust. What I mean by that is when someone can feel the thought and care that has been put into a beautifully crafted thing, then it reorients their entire experience of that thing. And the opposite is also true – we all know that feeling of ordering a product that looks cool online, opening the packaging when it arrives, pulling it out and suddenly realising that it feels somehow… wrong. Something about the quality does not match the promise that you were sold and this moment of disappointment pierces the veil. It gets you wondering, hmm, what else did they cut corners on and suddenly your entire confidence in the brand is undermined. Whereas, when a new product arrives and the whole unboxing experience is amazing, when you have this perfectly crafted thing in your hands, then you just immediately relax and know that it will perform in the way you hoped it would. Design execution is the chalice of trust.

JO: Can you think of any examples where really sweating the details paid off in practice?

JG: Absolutely. In the early days we faced a big problem: no one was using the site. We knew we had a great idea that the world needed, but we didn’t know why the world wasn’t seeing that yet. So we decided to focus on one city – New York – and see if we could debug things. We only had about 30 hosts in the city at the time so it was a very manageable market. We flew out there from San Francisco to see if we could find any patterns. It was immediately clear that the issue we were facing was low quality photos of our homes. We had a great product to stay in, but the merchandising was undermining trust. Pictures were blurry or taken at night. So we set about visiting every host offering to help with their imagery – doing a little styling, making sure the lighting was right, using a good quality camera, getting the right angles. Within a week of uploading the new photos our revenues in New York doubled. This was crazy. >
It might have seemed like a lot of effort, but the impact was immediate. Eventually I travelled to Paris to take photos, to Miami, Chicago, Portland and in every place we discovered that the quality of listings was limiting our growth. This insight grew into an entire photography platform, which still runs today, where we give hosts access to professional photographers. But what was even more interesting is that it became self-perpetuating. By us raising the bar, new hosts coming onto the platform were creating far better imagery themselves, so it became a kind of design-led community.

JO: You mentioned that designing trust was one of your big insights in the early days of Airbnb, and how good design can be used to foster trust between diverse groups of people. Can you say a bit more about how Airbnb was able to design something so elusive?

JG: It was probably our greatest challenge when starting out – how could we create Olympic-size trust between people who had never met, to the extent that they’d be happy to open their homes to one another. It’s hard to remember how big a shift that was from the vantage point of today, where we’re far more comfortable with sharing economy solutions. But back in 2008, it was a completely alien mindset. When you’re faced with a big challenge then you turn to what you know in solving it, and what we knew was design. So the question became: can we design trust? What elements are needed for trust to exist? I did a TED talk on this back in 2016, and the way I illustrated it to the audience was through ‘the phone experiment’. I asked everyone in the room to take out their phone. Then I asked them to unlock their phone and I asked them to pass that unlocked phone to the person sitting next to them. Now you can imagine, the whole auditorium filled with a nervous laughter as it was obviously a very uncomfortable thing to do. That is how a host feels handing their keys to a guest for the first time. Arguably the only thing more personal than your phone is your home so in that moment, the whole room understood the challenge we were up against.

JO: So what were some of the concrete ways you went about it – what are the actual features that allowed you to design trust?

JG: It wasn’t one thing, but many things working together. Let’s extend that phone experiment - how different would you feel if, before handing it over, you first got the chance to introduce yourself to your neighbour, get their names, where they lived, hear if they had kids or a dog. And then imagine that they had 150 reviews saying how great they were at holding unlocked phones. How would you feel about handing it over then? So really what we’re talking about here is a well designed reputation system. This is at the core of creating trust. There was a study that came out from Stanford around the same time I gave that talk which looked at people’s willingness to trust each other across age, demographic, gender and location barriers. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, they found we’re most willing to trust people who are similar to us. That’s the default social bias. But then something magical happens when you add reputation to the mix – we can trust very dissimilar people if they have a strong reputation. For Airbnb, we found that nothing really changes if you have a handful of reviews. But if you have more than ten there’s a tipping point where high reputation beats high similarity. >
Our design allowed us to create this reputation system, creating connections across social barriers. Good design gives people confidence – it’s as simple as that. These insights have probably come to their greatest fruition through Airbnb.org, our non-profit arm that focuses on initiatives such as rehousing refugees. Here, we’re adding in a whole load of extra variables that could potentially undermine trust. Yet what we’ve seen is that people are very willing to help each other given the right system. I absolutely don’t think Airbnb.org would have been possible without our years of experience in designing for trust – Airbnb acted as the trampoline that made this next level possible.

“GOOD DESIGN GIVES PEOPLE CONFIDENCE – IT’S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.”

JO: In many ways it feels like the world has never been more divided, with people entrenching around ever more incompatible world views. But given the right system, you’re saying that a natural generosity can exist between people?

JG: We’ve found ourselves in a swirl of misinformation and a pandemic of loneliness. Our little bubbles follow accounts that reinforce our ideologies and conveniently position them against the ‘other’. I’d posit the quickest way to reconcile incompatible world views is to seek understanding between those holding them. I bet what opposing sides would realize is that we’re all more the same than we are different – after all, only 0.1% of our genome differs from anyone else’s. I think underneath the surface of any discord is the knowledge that we have to work together to get by. We have to learn to work together better because the challenges we face need large-scale cooperation. By the end of the century, some estimate we’ll need more than two Earths to sustain ourselves. That’s how fast we’re burning through resources, and we’re already in 2022. We’re really running out of time to figure these things out. So instead of the internet dredging deep crevasses of distrust, what if we intentionally redesign these systems to bridge understanding with one another? What if we use design to expand our worldviews, rather than bind them in place? airbnb.com | samara.com
Philippe Malouin

Athens is a city where people are allowed to flourish no matter where they come from. It’s a city that leaves enough space to enjoy a spur-of-the-moment social life - from an unpretentious, vibrant art scene to a dynamic restaurant culture that is constantly reinventing itself.

Lexi Shu: Even though we have been to the Greek islands many times over the past seven years, our culinary adventures in Athens told a deeper story about human connection and cultural exchange. Cooking can be a letter of love for a culture, and we really felt this coming through in the restaurants - from the way the menus were meticulously explained to us by the staff at *I Kriti* to the love and care put into the presentation of dishes at *Seychelles* (which always tastes as good as it looks). In the wise words of Chengdu chef Lan Guijun: “Today’s invention is tomorrow’s tradition”, and the chefs in Athens take a curious approach towards different cultures, which will hopefully ensure that the food scene will continue to evolve in a sustainable and culturally mindful way.

Philippe: I worked solidly for a month in Athens in a steel shop in the centre of town. If a tool or a different artisan was required everything was a short stroll away - whether I was searching for a lighting specialist to make custom made lampshades for the pieces I was working on, to an upholsterer who could make cushions for an armchair I fashioned out of salvaged steel plates. Everything could be sourced and done locally. The “culture of making” in Athens encourages creatives to go and meet people to collaborate with and it facilitates in-person conversations rather than text messages. This is all the more important at a time when the pandemic has resulted in many people feeling emotionally distant, fearful and isolated. My experiences of working in Athens gave me the in-person connectedness that many of us have been missing over the past 18 months.

Compared to many other European cities, Athens gives young artists the opportunity to find affordable places to live and work, where they can develop their craft with less pressure. This makes Athens an attractive base for creatives and, though cities must evolve so they don’t become static, hopefully the city won’t change too quickly. As more people choose to relocate to Athens I hope this will happen in a sustainable way. An unmanageable influx would inevitably jack up prices, robbing Athens of this much valued incentive that makes the city so welcoming to emerging artists and designers. This happened in East London where rents became astronomical and untenable for many young creatives. I hope that the Athens that I know and love will continue to thrive in a way which welcomes diversity and new perspectives, and does not shut out young creatives looking for an inspiring place they can call home.
Reflections on my love for the city of Beirut.

There’s something about Beirut that we cannot put into words. It’s a feeling. It has an energy that draws people to it. It’s so hard to describe. It’s like an addiction.

I grew up in Japan, a culture completely the opposite to Lebanon in every way possible. I personally didn’t know my Arab culture so well until I arrived in Lebanon 21 years ago. The Japanese are reserved and understated, whereas the Lebanese are emotional and dramatic. The Japanese are introverts, in Lebanon they are extroverts. Japan is quiet, Lebanon is noisy. These contrasting traits also influence art and design; whereas in Japan art and design is understated, in Lebanon there is a larger-than-life approach.

Having this duality confused me when I moved here but it has shown me how one can see the same thing from different angles and taught me to always seek the right balance between two opposing forces. Beirut gave me the opportunity to express my quiet self. It has given me the chance to grow and to experiment and to face challenges. How can one stay true to oneself in an environment that is so loud and extravagant? This is where I feel I have found my own design philosophy—that balance between opposites—which I apply on my products.

Beirut is itself no stranger to controversy. You have the beautiful sea but then you have the garbage problem. You have the high luxury lifestyle but you also have the poor struggling refugees. There is the rich, there is the poor, there is beauty, there is ugliness. There is kindness and generosity and there is anger and bitterness. All in one place. It’s like a microcosm of the world. Everything happens in Beirut and that rawness is so human.

What draws me to Beirut is its authentic humanity. It is in your face on a daily basis. And that’s why it is hard to leave such a place. As a designer who works with local craft, I’m fascinated by the contrast of everything just as I was personally faced with the contrast of cultures. It’s what drives me constantly to challenge myself. Despite the political and economic problems we have, we feel we can still make a difference here. Working with my craftsmen has taught me that craft is an extension of who we are. We cannot be removed from it. It is our identity.

And hence, my journey in Lebanon continues. Even with the temptation of a more stable life elsewhere, something keeps me here. We strive to be craft custodians, using craft as a means to express our identity in a contemporary way—something we like to call Neo-Arabian. And we are proud to show the world what we can do, despite being one of the smallest countries in the world. Here in Lebanon, I believe form does not necessarily follow function; it follows culture. And we strive to express this soul through our objects.

Come visit and you’ll understand what I am talking about.
Kiki and Joost

We LOVE Eindhoven.

There is a well known Philips campaign that says: ‘Let’s make things better’. It’s the perfect slogan for Eindhoven, a city that wants to make things better and does so through design, creativity, innovation and optimism.

There is another slogan that is often used around here: ‘Eindhoven de gekste…!’ meaning ‘Eindhoven the craziest…!’ It unveils the spirit of the city: a fun place with a strong community that likes to enjoy life.

Joost often says: ‘Eindhoven is so ugly, you have to work very hard to make it nice.’

That doesn’t seem to do justice to our city but in a way it does explain the creative spirit and energy that you feel when you live here. There are industrial buildings that are huge spaces totally devoted to creativity and to making. High tech goes hand in hand with low tech. This is a city where creatives work hard in any field of their choice because this is a city of choice. And if you have chosen to live in Eindhoven, the reason is because you want to design.

There’s a very big design community here with many creatives. From established designers to young students, everyone is willing to share work and experiences; Piet Hein Eek, RENS, Ontwerpduo, Kazerne, Dutch Invertuals, Vĳ5, Foundation We Are, Yksi, MU Art House, Sectie-C, Van Abbemuseum. These are just a few out of the hundreds of creative studios and initiatives. It’s a very collective environment.

We are surrounded by a beautiful natural environment of woods, lakes and heather fields. You can forage mushrooms in the forest or have a picnic in the fields. At the same time Eindhoven has this rawness and an authentic grittiness that pushes you to create - you have space to do it and you want to make things better. We can’t say for sure but perhaps living in a city with a past rooted in centuries of architecture and design can weigh on a creative mind.

We built our own workspace two years ago. We used solid wood solar panels and sustainable solutions to make it energy neutral; we feel it’s a beautiful building and a good example for the creative community. This spring we’ll start building an additional exhibition space in our courtyard. We want to showcase our work, but also work closely with our creative community; hosting lectures, pop up ideas, enjoying ourselves and, why not, selling our products.

It’s a continuous process. At the moment we are trying to convince our future neighbours to use their space as a hub for established mid-career designers so they can own a space to work. We really want to create environments where there is an active synergy between the young generation, young talent and the knowledge and know-how of the more established names. Fostering collaboration is a very important aspect for us.

We believe this is the future for the makers of today and tomorrow - not having to rely on developers, but using the power of a community to be your own creative project developer.

So yes we LOVE living in Eindhoven.
Fukuoka is my “home” for design activities and a place to replenish my energy. The design work is usually done in my studio located in the centre of the prefecture, but I find that the human sensibility and energy underlying the manufacturing process is nurtured through interaction with areas throughout the prefecture. What these all have in common is a shared aim to create new things and values by using the materials available in each place. Located in the Itoshima area is “Mataichi no Shio” where salt is produced using traditional methods. Nearby, oyster houses line the streets and every winter you can enjoy the blessings of the sea to the fullest. It goes without saying that when you come into contact with these local traditions you feel a sense of mental and physical satisfaction.

Originally, Fukuoka was a harbour town and because of this different cultures assimilated into the city. It has a history of merchant ways and a tolerance for new things. This cross cultural influence can be seen in the variety of original shops in the centre of Fukuoka. Light Years is a store with a wonderful collection of quilts and special finds from India, Pakistan and Morocco. The owner drives around the area to purchase unusual things and the result is an impressive curation presented in the owner’s unique aesthetic sense.

At the moment there are plans to create a strong cultural movement by fusing historical sites with new ones. The 1,000-year-old Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine has long been associated with arts and culture such as kabuki and calligraphy. This heritage has informed the recently launched Keidai Art Museum. The shrine has inspired artists from Japan and abroad and this historic wooden building hosts food stalls, crafts and fashion in collaborative exhibitions called “Thought”. Although the routes of the shrine are in the past it has always been a centre for the transmission of new ideas and cultures.

The government has ambitions for Fukuoka to function as a hub city for Asia and has set a target for new developments, pulling down older buildings in the process. Designed by the architect Shohei Shigematsu of OMA, the Tenjin Business Centre was completed this fall, giving birth to a sophisticated new building in the centre of Fukuoka. A month earlier, the Arata Isozaki designed Nishi-Nippon City Bank Head Office was demolished after standing in the Hakata district for 50 years. Urban metabolism is progressing at a rapid pace. I am a little sceptical about the type of city that will emerge from this redevelopment. The degree to which this city will be able to function as an attractive one in the future will depend on how aware we are of Fukuoka’s origins, history, culture and the diverse creativity of its residents. Fukuoka is a city to be watched.
Tosin Oshinowo

Lagos is a hot, bright spot of creative energy. Born of a cross-section of influences from across Africa and worldwide, it is a dynamic, vibrant, global city with a community built for innovation and bursting with a desire to create and share its unique culture with the world.

Lagos has always been an active centre for commerce and cultural exchange: a melting pot of different peoples. The city has a complex set of indigenous and semi-indigenous cultural influences, which is evident in the design and psychology of the city. There is a local indigenous Yoruba culture, British colonial influence, influence of the returnees (formerly enslaved people from Brazil) and returning communities from Freetown in Sierra Leone who were rescued from illegal slave trading ships.

The 80s and 90s had a significant impact on the design language in the city. In this period we experienced a series of military dictatorships; with these came many restrictions, all with the intent of encouraging local economic growth. These policies created what many have considered ‘the lost decade’ with significant stifled development in the country with a lasting effect.

This period dramatically influenced many of the present-day designers. The foundational experience of these restrictions is what has pushed us to be so innovative. For example, growing up in Nigeria in the 80s, we had limited exposure to international television. We saw toys we knew we would never have the opportunity to own. So then - what was the next best thing? How could we innovate to imitate? This built Nigeria as it is today; it is where we learned to create the things we wanted from what we knew we could not have - but had seen.

The burst of creativity that is happening in Lagos today began around 2000, which coincides with the end of military rule. We are the generation of Nigerians who had access to foreign education and embraced the historic fusion of cultures that have always defined Lagos because it was our personal experience. So the design coming out of Lagos today is authentic, unique and very diverse in style. We are drawing on a varied set of influences and creating in a pace of limited materials and resources - forcing innovation.

Lagos is defined by a fusion of creativity and cultural influences across the creative industries - from film, music, fashion, literature, architecture, photography, visual arts and sculpture. There is so much intense creativity at this moment in time. And though this movement began as pockets of energy and attention in different industries, you can see it now, collectively, as a cohesive burst - and you can feel it when you are here. There are people making waves across cultural industries internationally, and though Lagos is an enormous city, it is a pretty small, intimate community. Everyone is connected, with cross-inspiration from conversations in restaurants, to pop-ups and celebrations. If nothing else, Lagos is a city of people who love to come together, who love to celebrate, who love to embrace our complexity and similarities. I’m glad that the world is getting to see this a bit more and join in the celebration.
“AT SCHOOL I FOUND I COULD SAY THINGS WITH COLOR AND SHAPES THAT I COULDN'T SAY ANY OTHER WAY - THINGS I HAD NO WORDS FOR.”

GEORGIA O'KEEFE
What defines your school’s approach? Aalto University was established to nurture the crossing of boundaries of field-specific education. Our approach aims to create solid design expertise through hands-on problem solving and framing. This is supported with conceptual and research components, with an emphasis on understanding design’s role in society and its transformational potential.

How do you balance the creative and commercial? We actively collaborate with companies and other organisations such as municipalities and ministries, and we establish collaborations in mutual learning, rather than a client relationship. Many of our teachers also have expertise in commercial design work, which is beneficial for complementing artistic and academic expertise.

What excites you most about this next generation? The students have a strong motivation to make an impact on eco-social-sustainability and they realise that design has an agency. They are agile in collaborating with experts from other fields. Our ChemArts courses are exciting examples of sustainability-oriented co-creation between design and chemistry.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on? Shaping a sustainable future is at the core of our education and it becomes visible in diverse ways – from a creative take on sustainable fashion to tackling challenges in diversity and inclusion within municipalities through service design.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow? Tomorrow’s industry will be driven by material innovations, transdisciplinary collaboration, sustainable futuring, creative and collaborative ways of envisioning. I am expecting the diversity in design to increase from microscopic scales to societal and systemic scales, and the interest in short lifecycle product design and fast fashion to decrease, within reason.

What new markets are you seeing emerge? Circular solutions for products, services and product service systems is taking on ever greater importance. In our department, we also have an ambition to encourage students to create new careers and roles for themselves, rather than moving into traditional paths. The old division to practice-driven and research-oriented designers is disappearing, and increasingly we’re seeing practising designers with strong academic backgrounds continuously renewing and learning.
Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
Sofia Ilmonen, who was awarded with the sustainability award in Hyères fashion design competition 2021. Mikko Latomäki, the industrial designer of the Oura ring and Red Dot award winner 2018. And Noora Yau, a designer and doctoral student who is passionate about materials and transdisciplinary work. aalto.fi

Clockwise from bottom left:
Fashion design by Sofia Ilmonen, Shimmering Wood by Noora Yau, OURA ring by Mikko Latomaki and Kari Kivela, Aalto University classroom.
What defines your school’s approach?
Tink Adams originally conceived of the college as a way to train the talent that he was struggling to find in the advertising industry. So I think that focus on being able to turn your design education into a commercial career has always been central to what we do. There’s a big focus on being taught by industry professionals and we’re tuned-in to industry changes, so we can be quite nimble in that way.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
It’s about empowering students with the understanding that in order to have a full, lifelong career doing the thing they love, then they have to be able to work with the commercial side. If you can’t equip them with that then it’s like lambs to lions.

What excites you most about this next generation?
That they have such seamless access to information and have naturally developed the skill sets to help them navigate this world. Their ability to connect and collaborate far surpasses anything that’s come before, and I think you can see that in the work that they produce. So I would say their work is actually progressing much faster than previous generations.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
Sustainability is now a must have – there’s no longer a debate around it. Designers can now really insist that manufacturers find sustainable solutions, whereas before they would have been argued down on price point. And then beyond that, I think issues around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are probably the driving force for our students.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow?
It’s so hard to say what the drivers of tomorrow will be, from a position of such flux. The last 18 months have turned so many industries on their heads, from workplace to travel, and I don’t think the layers have settled out yet by any stretch. But what I would say is that this next generation are very committed to aligning their work in college with their careers after college, and are strategic in a way that is quite new. There’s a focus on turning their passions into a career that I think will bring big change with it.
How can companies attract and develop the best talent?
This is something we’ve always been quite strong at – connecting students with industry. We’ve been known historically for our sponsored projects, where industry has a chance to work directly with our students, whether that’s a big car company or ad agency. And then from the industry side, it’s about understanding what actually motivates this next generation, and looking at how they can provide it. This is very much about flexibility and equity, and it’s essential that companies evolve even faster in these areas – if you’re not offering it, there’s someone else out there who is, and they’ll secure the best talent.

Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
We’re lucky to have a lot of folk who are creating change coming out of our college, but Ini Archibong is one of them for sure. He’s had a major impact already and he’s going to have an even greater one in the coming years. Then a slightly more recent grad who’s doing some exciting work is Alex Brokamp, as is Chris Adamick. artcenter.edu
What defines your school’s approach?
At Central Saint Martins we believe that art, design and performance can generate real change. We ask students to engage with how creative practitioners might contribute to the establishment of common grounds for shared futures; how we can design for future scenarios that consider people and planet; and how our practises can meaningfully contribute to creating more just societies.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
We’re focused on giving students the time and space to experiment with and extend creative practice and also to explore and test its application. We’re an outward facing institution which means that throughout their time with us, our students will have opportunities to engage in live projects with partners from the commercial, cultural and community sectors.

What excites you most about this next generation?
Their resourcefulness, inventiveness and adaptability – skills developed at least in part as a result of the impact on this emerging generation by the pandemic, but which are also valuable and powerful skills to bring into creative practice and to take into employment.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
Many of our students are making work that is informed by or responds to the intersecting crises of climate and social justice. Coming out of the pandemic, as we hopefully are, there’s also an excitement about the collective act of creative practice – working collaboratively, cooperatively and in the same space as one another.

What are the big industry opportunities and challenges on the horizon?
The climate emergency presents the biggest challenges for not just our industry but society as a whole. This next generation of creatives and designers have a critical role to play in how we create more sustainable and equitable futures. We designed our way into this crisis and must now design our way out of it.

How can companies attract and develop the best talent?
Our students are drawn towards companies who share their values. While the big-name companies still have appeal, I think students are also looking for opportunities where they can have an impact and where they feel they will be nurtured, which means that smaller companies and alternative routes of employment are also interesting to them.
What new markets are you seeing emerge?
The areas of growth we are seeing include placemaking, which at CSM means linking external partners from local government directly with a range of courses including our new MA Cities; circular and regenerative design, where we have students utilising our university research expertise in this area; AI and advanced digital projects, which involves exploring the ethics of new technologies; and collaborative practices – the challenges we face aren’t siloed and so the solutions can’t be either.

Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
Sachi Patel, who graduated from our MA Graphic Communication Design with a hypnotic multimedia project that meditated on relationships between humans, machines and the environment. MA Architecture student Clausen Buchartts, who explores the role of myth and storytelling in architecture. And Amandine Forest, a Franco-Ivorian designer and graduate of both BA and MA Graphic Communication Design, who explores new ways of engaging with Black history.

[Link to arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins]
What defines your school’s approach?
We’re deeply rooted in Dutch culture, which is very pragmatic and questioning, but I think the most important characteristic of Eindhoven is that we’ve always been deeply invested in the social and political dimension of design. There’s an understanding of design as a political activity – as something that shapes the lives of people, that shapes structures embedded in society, and therefore has a responsibility to society.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
Eindhoven was traditionally an industrial city so the school has always had far-reaching relationships with industry, most especially at Philips, which was the city’s main employer for decades. But interestingly, it was also one of the first schools to really question the idea of the industrial designer, focusing things more on the designer as a creator working within their environment. So I think both sides are quite naturally present at Eindhoven.

What excites you most about this next generation?
So many things. I’m inspired by their militancy and uncompromising commitment to take on the social responsibilities that designers must embrace – they’re not going to shy away from the most pressing matters of our age, such as the climate crisis. They’re even willing to question the idea that designers need to be producing objects at all, and really interrogate the idea of material production, which is obviously quite courageous.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
There’s a lot of focus on materials, of finding new ways of using existing materials better, or on circularity and the lifecycle of design. Then the role of technology in design is a major theme, both in terms of problematising technology, but also exploring the capillary presence of technology in everything we do.

Are there some fads that you expect to decline in importance?
This is not so much a fad, but I think the fashion industry is set to go through a huge transformation at all levels. It’s a recurring theme for our students and I think from both a consumer and talent side, there will no longer be a willingness to accept certain industrial practises. Then more generally for design, we’ll see a far greater focus on ease of upgrade, repair and modularity to design – so things that are designed for obsolescence will decline.
Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
Kostas Lambridis (who creates furniture and objects from layers of materials), Irene Stracuzzi (who works across graphic design, data visualisation and research), and Simon Dogger (who focuses on inclusion and equity in design). designacademy.nl

Clockwise from bottom left:
The Legal Status of Ice by Irene Stracuzzi (Photo Ronald Smit).
The Emotion Whisperer by Simon Dogger.
Elemental Cabinet by Kostas Lambridis.
Students (Photo Bram Saeys)
What defines your school's approach?
We're pragmatic but visionary – so by that I mean we have a realistic understanding of the times that we live in, but we also encourage our students to look forward to bold new directions. Design is no longer just about form, aesthetics and functionality, but must produce meaning, invent new models and solve societal problems.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
It's more useful to talk about ‘commissions from industry’ than ‘commercial work’, because the term commercial can be easily misunderstood as somehow lacking creativity. The industry constantly comes to us looking for new responses to their challenges, and it's down to our students to interpret these, perhaps challenge them and then solve them.

What excites you most about this next generation?
 According to American web designer and author Jeffrey Zeldman, ‘design without content is not design, it's decoration’. I think that says a lot about the perspective of this next generation. Gone are the days when the must for a designer was to design an iconic chair. These days, people stand to move the world forward, and the younger generation is particularly motivated by global warming, ecology and sustainability, social inequality, racism, women’s rights, LGBTQI+ conditions, the fight against terrorism and health challenges.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
A lot of space is given to the environment and sustainable development, but there's so much diversity of themes within this. We've seen projects such as washable nappies developed from an absorbent and antibacterial biodegradable fibre based on algae and eucalyptus wood; washable and eco-responsible anti-pollution masks created when the issue of living with a masks was not yet topical; a system for capturing and de-orbiting space debris in order to preserve a sustainable future in space – the list goes on.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow?
The industry is already well aware of these big themes, although some have certainly responded more slowly than others. But I think the creatives of tomorrow will take this to the next level. Where their input will be the most valuable is how they add creativity to these issues though, and find novel solutions. The practice of finger pointing and calling out will need to give way to this more productive approach.
INTERVIEW WITH ALEXIS GEORGACOPOULOS

Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
There are many that come to mind, but a diverse selection would be Ini Archibong (MAS Design for Luxury and Craftsmanship, 2015), Fabien Roy (Master Product Design, 2020) and Carolien Niebling (Master Product Design, 2014). ecal.ch

How can companies attract and develop the best talent?
They need to really connect with the new ways that this generation operates. So they need to think in less siloed ways, be more open to non-traditional disciplines and open to new skill sets. It takes quite a lot of trust from employers to embrace this way of operating and to accept that they don’t have all the answers.

From left: Robust Nest by Fabien Roy in collaboration with EssentialTech Center EPFL (Photo Noé Cotter), Manna Chandelier by Ini Archibong (Photo Andres Zimmermann), Future Sausage by Carolien Niebling (Photo Jonas Marguet)
What defines your school’s approach?
Firstly, we are transdisciplinarity – from graphics to engineering, data to spatial design – so we blur lines and cross borders. Secondly, we are focused on concrete experience within companies and institutions to show that design is not an abstract concept. And thirdly, we focus on the designer’s role as a citizen with social responsibilities.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
Our students are doing this themselves – today’s students are just as committed to social causes and creative ideals as previous generations, but they are also far more willing to work with and through industry to reach their goals.

What excites you most about this next generation?
They are incredibly hands on, and willing to work with other professionals or collectives to achieve their goals. They are really design activists in many ways, and very focused on how to create change in the real world.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
The overarching focus is design's impact on society and environment. To break things down further, they’re interested in the impact of digital technologies and social media, and they’re very concerned about identity issues – mostly based on gender and sexuality.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow?
It’s impossible to say really, but from my perspective two things will loom large. One is the balance between physical and digital design – bringing them into greater harmony through the so-called ‘phygital’. The other is hyper-customisation and the idea that standardisation is no longer working for people.

Are there some fads that you expect to decline in importance?
This is not so much a fad as an entire outlook, but I think the idea of globalised goods where anyone, anywhere, anytime can buy whatever they want will fall away. There’s already a move to greater localisation in areas such as food production, and this is spreading into design too.

What are the big industry opportunities and challenges on the horizon?
Again there are so many, but one to highlight would be the industries around health.
INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT FUSTER I MARTI

wellbeing and care. As we become an increasingly ageing population these sectors will require greater focus and should be a flourishing area of innovation.

What new markets are you seeing emerge?
So it’s care and wellbeing for sure, and then another market that’s attracting a lot of great talent is ethical and social AI. This is an area that a lot of students have identified as having the potential to create huge change. I think the whole area of cities is also becoming more and more interesting for designers. Many cities have been left to architects and planners, with too much of a focus on building more, but designers have a real role to play in hacking urban infrastructure and making it work better.

Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
A few names that I’d pick out are Pau Garcia, Juan Ezcurra, Paula López-Nuño and Amalia Puga. elisava.net
What defines your school’s approach?
What makes the University of Miami special is that we don’t have a single uniform approach. We encourage students to have multiple interests, allow them to explore multiple disciplines, and allow them to really get a comprehensive understanding of design from multiple perspectives.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
My personal ideology is that the academic informs the commercial. So as you continue to shape designers intellectually – and focus on their creative goals and skill sets – then those things eventually become adopted in the commercial realm. The two work in tandem.

What excites you most about this next generation?
To be completely frank, they are so much braver than my design generation was. They have no problem questioning pedagogy. My generation knew there were issues, but weren’t able to fight those infrastructures. This next generation really questions things – they hold me accountable and they hold the professions accountable.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
I think nowadays across the board – from industrial design, architecture, landscape and urban planning – there’s a much larger focus on design and advocacy. And so you see a lot of academic programmes shifting their processes to be more inline with this, which makes us all better as designers and educators, because we’re no longer just designing in isolation. We’re designing for people.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow?
I’m super interested in seeing what happens at a managerial level, because we’ll certainly get a much larger influx of diverse designers, but will they be empowered to implement their ideas? That’s the part I’m always interested in – will the ideas reach the top and create real change...

What are the big industry opportunities and challenges on the horizon?
There’s a much greater understanding of how interconnected things are now, so taking that systemic approach to design is becoming really exciting.
INTERVIEW WITH GERMANE BARNES

The pandemic accelerated this I think, as it reminded us how connected areas such as spatial design and public health are, for example, so it’s not possible to go back to a system where we’re designing in isolation.

**What new markets are you seeing emerge?**

There’s a lot of mixed reality work going on with our students, such as integrating VR or AR into physical space. That’s not new, but the way our students are engaging with how to use infrastructure to mediate the digital is definitely novel. But I think the biggest innovations we’re seeing is in building materials, because the students understand that this is key in tackling environmental issues. This might be new versions of concrete or more robust sources of sand that in turn don’t deplete our resources.

**Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?**

Jenerra Albert, who is now at the Jax Group. Jennifer Lamy, who is working at Adjaye & Associates. And Amber Kountz, who was Gensler’s Rising Designer. miamioh.edu

Clockwise from left: Thesis section by Jenerra Albert, Thesis render by Jennifer Lamy, Amber Kountz at work.
What defines your school’s approach? We have six principles in our academic plan and the first three are decolonization, diversity & equity, and sustainability. In the Faculty of Design, we express this through the ethos of ‘respectful design,’ where we value different cultures and ways of knowing through empathic and responsible creative methodologies. Respectful design expands beyond human-centred design to the Indigenous concept of ‘all my relations’.

How do you balance the creative and commercial? We don’t see creativity and commerciality as separate. We believe creativity is optimised by designing something that aligns with your own values, the values of the client, and also creates social, cultural and economic sustainability. This means demonstrating to our students how to identify and cultivate clients who match your values.

What excites you most about this next generation? The next generation are redefining the possibilities of design in ways that we cannot imagine. They are pushing us to approach design as a practice to cultivate social, cultural and environmental respect and harmony. These are the kinds of values that will be infused in the design firms and cooperatives that they will build.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on? The first big theme is decolonization in terms of decentring the European biases in design, and recognizing traditions of making from around the world. The second big theme is connection, which became a major topic with the global pandemic. And the third big theme is technology and the role it plays in people’s lives.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow? Yes, decolonization is the reckoning in design that will force us to retell more inclusive stories. Decolonization is also tied to the climate catastrophe, where Indigenous peoples are the stewards of 80% of the planet’s biodiversity. The pandemic and its effects on our relationships will continue for a while as we define what we gained and what we have lost by the global pause.

How can companies attract and develop the best talent? I speak to many companies and advise them on how to make themselves attractive to students. My key piece of advice is to build multiple touch points of interaction with them based on shared values. It is not enough to just show up for a spring hiring fair. Students are interested in long term relationships with companies that support their growth at early as well as later stages in their education.
Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?
Sydney Gittens, who graduated in 2021 as our Advertising medal winner, is already leading the change to make the advertising industry more inclusive. Shabad Singh, who also graduated in 2021 and was our Industrial Design medal winner, focused his thesis on how we began to develop products to display NFT’s. And then Emily Kewageshig (Saugeen First Nation), who graduated in 2021 from our Indigenous Visual Culture program. Since graduating, she has been commissioned to redesign the CBC logo for National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. ocadu.ca
What defines your school’s approach?
I think it’s best described as ‘pluralism’. We are a big school with a broad range of expertise, with degrees in architecture, landscape architecture, construction, planning, urban design and property all under one roof. What unites all of these fields is the design studio as a key mode of learning.

How do you balance the creative and commercial?
We encourage our students to see the commercial aspects of their project as something to also be designed – so much of what gets built today is driven by real-estate concerns alone. How can we propose other alternatives?

What excites you most about this next generation?
They are motivated to tackle the big challenges facing the built environment. They are civically-minded, and bring a broad social and political consciousness to their work. In their hands, design isn’t only about aesthetics, but about shaping the way we live together.

What are the big themes that your students are focused on?
In my studio this semester I have students looking at eliminating microplastics, retrofitting suburbia, cooperative housing, the useful museum, post-industrial green economies, cultural inclusion, and much more… it’s almost endless.

And do you think these will become the industry drivers of tomorrow?
I hope so, but the industry needs to listen to this next generation and get on board. For too long architecture has been a reactive profession, happy to follow developers and investors’ plans. Instead, we ought to be leading from the front foot, and making propositions that can address these major challenges.

What are the big industry opportunities and challenges on the horizon?
Climate change is without doubt number one. What would it mean to completely restructure our schools and practices around zero waste and zero emissions? This requires a full 180 from where we are today, but the opportunity is enormous.

How can companies attract and develop the best talent?
Our graduates are looking for places where they can continue to learn and develop their skills. So many practices are driven by...
production deadlines, that they take little time out to reflect and build confidence with their teams. This is all the more important after the past two years working from home.

**What new markets are you seeing emerge?**

One exciting movement right now is against demolition, which is a huge waste of material and embodied carbon. There’s an opportunity to develop a whole new design industry around adaptation and reuse.

**Can you give us three names to watch from recent graduates?**

William Shaw is engaged with how architecture works to spatialise reconciliation. Emilie Evans examined architecture in deep time, asking ‘what will remain when we are no longer around to use, maintain and care for it?’ Boyd Hellier-Knox explores the many faces of the interior, through sound, ambiguity, and geology. [msd.unimelb.edu.au](http://msd.unimelb.edu.au)  

Clockwise from left: Knox by Boyd Hellier, Render by William Shaw, Emilie Evens at work
Lisbon is on the map! It is official. Even Monocle and Le Monde agree! Lisbon is on the map thanks to its slower pace of life, proximity to the beach and the generous tax incentives offered to international creatives drawn to the city.

Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, has had a long journey towards design since 1999 when the national design biennale was based here and the first design projects were in their infancy. These ranged from products created with local brands such as Vista Alegre (I will always remember the Jongerius glass composition for Atlantis project 01), through to more individual initiatives such as Fernando Brizio’s concepts and beautifully designed spaces such as Bica do Sapato restaurant. Since then, the growth of Portuguese design has been aligned to the country’s economy and its desire to develop on an international level. After all, isn’t design about finding solutions? Even in the most difficult moments, the country’s designers have been inventing and proposing projects in Lisbon, creating a distinctive design culture. Marco Souza’s brand Branca, and more recently UTIL, both offer products made in Portugal.

Over the years, Portugal has gained a reputation for being one of the best producers in Europe for international brands such as Habitat, Conran and Crate & Barrel. They are drawn to the country’s ceramic, textile and furniture making expertise. Portugal’s emerging designers travel abroad for work experience during their studies and after graduation. Coming from a country of immigrants with a big diaspora, the Portuguese have a charming tendency to praise where they come from, turning these young (and generally conscientious and hard working) talents into the country’s best design ambassadors.

From a collectible design point of view, Lisbon’s museums are world class, most notably MUDE and more recently MAAT, an exquisite building by Amanda Levete along the Tagus river. It is run by director Beatrice Leanza and since opening in 2016 MAAT has given the city an undeniable allure. As Portugal’s capital, Lisbon is extremely well connected by air and the city is rapidly attracting newcomers from France, Germany, Lebanon, Switzerland and the USA. Lisbon has been transformed by this influx of entrepreneurs, resulting in a more global design attitude and the opening of stylish studios, original fashion stores and creative warehouse spaces… not to forget the burst of hipster cafés offering - guess what - avocado on toast, cinnamon brioche and takeaway coffees of course!

Let’s hope these new international creatives will find a way to participate in Lisbon society by introducing new concepts and innovations as they bring ideas, energy and a financial boost to the city. ■
Mexico City has long captured the imagination of many - a bustling and deliciously chaotic cosmopolitan Latin American city – a megalopolis layered with possibilities that can keep one occupied for days, or a lifetime. The language of the city, its codes and intricacies, reveals itself after repeated visits, its tenses and vocabulary increasing in complexity as you excavate layers, digging to understand and discover its secrets.

Growing up in its neighbouring country to the south, Guatemala, my entire childhood and adolescence was deeply impacted and informed by all things Mexican – having Mexico City at the core of its influence. From popular telenovelas to teeny bopping boy bands, Mexico successfully exported its culture and dominated our airwaves. I grew up with the duality of feeling connected to the city yet also that it was somehow immaterial, a fantasy.

Tenochtitlan, the city’s name in Nahuatl, has been a teeming metropolis since it was founded almost 700 years ago on an island in what is now Centro. This is a portal into an entirely different world that fascinates all who discover it. In modern times, visitors from the American south flocked to Mexico City for culture and entertainment – my parents and grandparents returned with romantic anecdotes of great meals, intimate concerts, excellent shops and first rate art exhibits. In the late 1960s my parents, like many of their peers, honeymooned partly in Mexico City. They would always comment on its massive scale and punctuated contrasts, but above all their romantic reminiscences would help build my personal mythology of the place. Mexico City’s reach has continued to expand and, I believe, it has become a must-visit cultural global destination. Casa Barragán has become a design pilgrimage site, mid-century Mexican architecture is getting the recognition it deserves, and local young architects are able to build interesting structures at a pace that is rivalled by few cities. The creative energy is contagious and pods of talent constantly burst through the establishment across different practices and fields.

For me, the decision to move here was informed not only by its proximity to my home country, but also by its scale, thriving art scene and sense of possibility. Mexico City is a city of contrasts, a clash of the high and the low, the best and the worst – the most inspiring and the most heartbreaking. In one breath one can smell a sweet hint of jasmine and a fraction of a second later an astringent whiff of open sewage. Next to a close-to-perfect mid-century Mario Pani building one finds a failed 80s monstrosity. It is this sensory explosion, over saturation of disparate elements and their probable intersection that makes the day to day exciting and inspiring. Most importantly, the city is alive with a talented community of makers that form its core - countless workshops that preserve the vernacular and innovate and evolve local craft and making traditions. There is a cleverness and spontaneity in how things are conceived and resolved that makes them deeply seductive. It is in navigating through its complexity, contrasts and imperfection that makes this city a beautiful and thorny bouquet of inspiration.

Rudy F. Weissenberg

Postcard from...

MEXICO CITY
When we think of Portugal, we might first think of its capital. While Lisbon is the city of light, those of us who live here can say that Porto shines just as bright. The second Portuguese city is proud of its historical heritage and projects itself well towards the future. Porto has seen a great boom in recent years. I lived in Lisbon for twelve years before moving to Porto. I came from Paris and it seemed obvious to me to go to the centre, where we talked about design with the Experimenta Biennial and Porto the MUDE Design Museum. However, the industry is mainly concentrated in the north of the country and the Porto region is considered a key area in Europe for the manufacture of furniture. As a designer, you need to make constant visits there. I ended up making the decision to settle in Porto for professional reasons but also because I was charmed by the local creative dynamic.

By virtue of tradition, Porto is the city of architects. The Porto School is recognised worldwide and is the only city in the world with two Pritzker Prizes, for Alvaro Siza in 1992 and Souto de Moura in 2011. You only need to walk through the streets to realise the quality of its design and town planning (the centre is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site). There is a pervasive aesthetic culture: from the graphic design of the logotype to the elegant interiors of any given address. Today, Porto is the capital of design: the Design Biennale has taken place here, the new Casa do Design and Casa da Arquitectura museums have recently opened in the city. More precisely, they are located in Matosinhos where I set up my studio. It is also here that the promising Portuguese ‘Silicon Valley’ will be born. The Fuse Valley, designed by BIG and scheduled for 2025, is driven by the startup and world leader in luxury e-commerce, Farfetch. Another major project is also underway: the Matadouro, a business and cultural district designed by the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma in partnership with the Portuguese architects OODA. On a smaller scale, national brands are opening showrooms, as is the case with my partner Riluc, known for its metal furniture. Young designers from other countries have settled here, such as the German designer Christian Haas and Gabriel Tan from Singapore. This is nothing new, the city has always been open to the world; it is from here that the Discoveries of the 15th century began and as a result the city grew, influenced by cultures from all continents.

We can feel a certain impetus from the new generation of designers who are organising themselves. This year the Clink space opened in the Bombarda art gallery district, exhibiting Portuguese designers and brands, brought together by Brimet Silva and Paulo André. Surprisingly this is the first time this has happened in Portugal.

Today, we talk a lot about Porto from a tourist point of view, the city having won several international awards. Even during the crisis, Porto knew how to renew itself. And this is thanks to creativity: proof that architecture and design have their importance in society.
Times are changing and Prague is changing too.

For a long time, Prague was a sought-after destination because of its architecture, the best beer in the world and its goulash (ironically, not a Czech dish but from Hungary). The architecture offers a unique combination of Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque monuments side by side on the streets. Besides this, the city boasts another world rarity and that is its cubist architecture. Thanks to Czech architects such as Gočar or Janák, Prague’s cubist architecture is one of the unmissable jewels of the city.

But we are lucky that the Czech Republic has another world renowned tradition - glassmaking. Historically, it is one of the oldest crafts preserved in our country and which, in recent times, has had greater visibility on the international stage. Glassmaking has become a world phenomenon in the field of design and the Czech Republic, with Prague as its capital, is lucky enough to be not only an integral part of this movement, but one of the main actors.

Thanks to the quality of sand in Czech forests, traditional production recipes and above all the skilful hands of Czech glassmakers companies such as Lasvit, Bomma and Brokis emerged, standing side by side with the famous Moser. The range of products that these brands produce is as extensive as the number of world-famous designers who design for them. It was Nendo, for example, who first designed a collection for Lasvit. He was followed by stars such as Marc Newson, Zaha Hadid and Kengo Kuma. But it is important to say that most of the owners of these world-famous companies remember where they come from and they give Czech designers free rein and an opportunity to create for them. It is also thanks to this that Czech design and its creators now have an international presence, highlighting Czech craftsmanship. It is no coincidence that designers are now sought out by other foreign lighting and furniture manufacturers.

However, there is another important event that has contributed to promoting Czech relations in the field of design. Prague has become the main venue of Designblok, the largest design festival in Central Europe. It has been hosting designers, gallerists and journalists from all over the world for twenty-one years. Designblok is an extraordinary autumn design happening, combining the Czech artisanal tradition of glassmaking, the fresh ideas of designers of all generations and a foreign audience, including the world-famous gallerist Rossana Orlandi and the new talent scout Giulio Cappellini.

You can see that Prague is moving with the times and has not become a mere historical cliché. This can be seen mainly in the field of design and craftsmanship, where it has much to offer. Thanks to its tradition and openness, it has become the centre of the glassmaking world. A world for which I wish a very bright future!
I've lived in San Diego for about seven years after spending most of my life 100 miles north in Los Angeles. Comparatively, San Diego is not a creative hub the way LA is, where people move from all over the world to build their lives in film, art and music. I was formed by the wide-open creative landscape of LA and grew up there learning to create life on my own terms: music, art and surfing in equal measure. For a long time I thought this kind of life was only possible in a globally recognised creative centre but after decades living in LA and NYC, I learned that I have more than enough curiosity and drive to build a life in design anywhere I want.

I now live with my family in North County, San Diego in a small city by the beach where the weather is mild enough that we almost never have to wear shoes. For the most part our neighbourhood has a country vibe with no sidewalks - people's yards that spill out into the street have a natural, unmanicured feel. Giant hundred-year-old pines stand next to young eucalyptus trees, passion fruit vines creep over cedar fences and succulents grow in nearly every yard.

The best food around is also the least expensive: we have abundant taquerias serving local favourites from all over Mexico. Bringing food from one of these family-run places to eat on the beach with friends as the sun drops into the ocean is honestly better than any restaurant experience I've ever had.

The design scene here is as low key as everything else and so is our design heritage. In La Jolla teenagers skateboard past the colonnades of chalk-white modernist landmarks by Irving Gill. surfers walk dripping and barefoot past pairs of wooden Schindler houses and Louis Kahn's masterpiece, the Salk Institute, is quietly tucked away on the bluffs above Black's Beach.

The designers who hold the most sway around my part of town are the legendary surfboard builders who, in the twentieth century, modernised an ancient Polynesian craft and spawned a global industry in their backyards. These are humble giants: only a handful chose to become wealthy from their creation. Most instead choose to share their discoveries with future generations in pursuit of new ideas and unknown pleasures. Some have been honing their craft since the 1940s and are true masters. To me, these people embody the spirit of pure design and creativity.

The low key lifestyle here affords the distance from scrutiny that new ideas thrive in, although sadly it is no longer affordable to live here. One wonders if luminaries like John Baldessari, who famously got his start in San Diego, would have been able to be artists here if they were starting out today. Maybe this is why many creative people are choosing to live close by, south of the border, in the relatively affordable and extremely vibrant city of Tijuana. ■
“I THINK ITS VERY IMPORTANT FOR CITIES ALL AROUND THE WORLD TO REINVENT THEMSELVES, LOOK FORWARD AND NOT BE BURDENED BY THEIR HISTORY.”

ZAHA HADID
Turquoise Mountain is a not-for-profit charity founded in 2006 by HRH The Prince of Wales to revitalise artisanal communities and generate incomes through heritage and craftsmanship. The organisation supports artisan producers in the Middle East and Asia, to enable clients to access high quality handmade rugs, fabrics, furniture and accessories inspired by the heritage of artisans, and suitable for today’s luxury markets. Our team has more than a decade of global experience working with hospitality and interiors clients to integrate bespoke products made by master artisans into luxury interiors. Crafts such as mother of pearl inlay, wood mosaic and metalwork have been integral to the identity and economy of the Levant for centuries. Today, many of these crafts are slowly disappearing in the context of conflict and displacement, economic hardship and lack of access to regional and international markets that place value on the mastery of craft.

Jordan serves as home to artisans of woodwork, stonemasonry, metalwork, silver and gold-smithing, textiles and glassblowing, whose level of skill places them among the best in the world.
This network has grown since the beginning of the conflict in neighbouring Syria, which has long been recognised as a centre of craftsmanship for the region. Meanwhile, the design sector in Jordan is also expanding at a rapid pace, with the first Amman Design Week taking place in 2016 and new design-focused studios, concept stores and start-ups launching each year, alongside dozens of highly trained Jordanian students graduating from Jordanian and international universities.

In Amman, Turquoise Mountain’s team of designers work with master artisans who are specialised in the region’s traditional crafts to bring about new encounters between contemporary design and traditional artistry. We work at the intersection of craft and design to support artisans, preserve their crafts as integral components of the region’s intangible heritage and generate new opportunities for employment in these fields.

Through our showroom in Amman and collaborations with international designers, arts institutions and retailers, our designers and artisans are able to redefine heritage crafts for a new generation and create important opportunities and income for local communities in a context where access to both is limited.
Young at heart and age, culturally diverse, light on traditions, forever sceptical, bold enough to try anything and question anyone, and ‘things not done’, are just a few ways to describe the sizzling city of Tel Aviv. The very essence of our soul as wandering people travelling with our bare necessities brings about an inherent talent for inventiveness and improvisation for the lighter and ephemeral quality of things. That inherent talent manifests itself in many ways, so that each individual brings their specialty to the mix which might seem like a joyful cacophony in a strangers’ eye.

However, upon closer inspection, one can spot a seamless continuity and an indigenous logic of past, present, and future in the plethora of scenes that make the city of Tel Aviv.

One of the most exciting scenes in Tel Aviv is that of the culinary world. What started as a melting pot of Jewish diasporas has been fascinating taste buds around the globe for the last decade. Ottolenghi was an ambassador of what has become an overwhelming movement of young local talents that capture the minds and hearts of food aficionados across the world.
And why not. Tel Aviv has it all – decades of old markets where ‘farm-to-table’ is as real as it can get. The unique smells of tradition hit you so hard that you have to taste it all, with upcoming chefs introducing Israeli cuisine with a twist. Street food in Tel Aviv has been transforming itself into a laboratory of unprecedented creativity, leaving fine-dining miles behind.

After a good meal, in a renowned restaurant or on-the-go, you find yourself in the midst of the ‘White City’, a collection of thousands of Bauhaus buildings - 4000 listed, and 2000 being protected and restored as we speak - spread around the central neighbourhoods of the city. Their unique form that cherishes simplicity, openness, lightness and accessibility brings notions that resonate with a city in the making, working hard and with speed to embrace the hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing Europe.

Just a bit south of the ‘White City’, the Florentine and Neve-Zedek neighbourhoods stand out as the Mecca of local craftsmanship, where anything from traditional local crafts to fine arts, fashion and design thrive. Heavy weights and upcoming talents endow their experimental techniques, alluring styles, self-expressions, and agendas. Walking through them sparks the city with an air of entrepreneurship, audacity, charm, and an everlasting feeling of fluidity.

Very close by is Tel Aviv’s five kilometres beach front, stretching along the Mediterranean, where some of the city’s history is cemented. Owing to 11 wonderful months of sunshine, it’s the most vibrant strip of white sands where kiosks and restaurants, beach sports, street vendors and pop-ups charge the strip with a voluptuous and alluring air where horizon and sunsets make for a well-deserved refuge for a city that never stops. >
Since the 90s, Tel Aviv has been gradually transforming into a business hub for the high-tech industry, AKA 'Silicone Wadi'. It resonates as a city that aspires to be an international hub of creativity and leave its mark on the world map. A fact is that many of the biggest international tech companies were conceived in greater Tel Aviv, (Monday, Wix, Waze, Fiverr, to name just a few) and is still a home for entrepreneurs, developers, and leading tech professionals. 

This thriving industry is also craving infinite inspirational spaces to cater for their workers while endowing them with unprecedented wealth. These young professionals have the means to follow their dream; interiors being one of them. If we add to all of this our indigenous cultural and social mentality, it all seeps down to some very exciting times for designers.

Urban development has been a huge disruptor for Tel Avivians for the last decade and it’s here to stay. A city centre headcount of tower cranes would suggest we’re booming, residential projects of new-builds, restorations, and additions pop up like mushrooms after the rain, attracting unprecedented buying force that empties the shelves and pushes the price of real estate up to the top of the cranes. Yet peripheral neighbourhoods which have been regarded until recently as the backyard of the city are now steadily springing: Yad-Eliyahu, Kfar-Shalem, Yaffo-Gimel and Daled, Shapira and Kerem Hateymanim make for a partial list. Each of these neighbourhoods brings a distinct character that adds new flavours and aromas to the centre. The 'cherry on top' is the underground metro and light rail projects which have been ploughing our streets with chaos, adding fuel to an already blazing city. These are rejuvenating and exciting times for Tel Aviv and especially for architects and designers for taking part in defining the future of our city on such a colossal scale. So even though Tel Aviv currently feels and looks like a construction site, it is the spirit of its dwellers that keeps the good vibes afloat, according to the local catchphrase: we prevailed over Pharaoh, we will prevail over this as well.

Tel Aviv doesn't stand out as a city of monuments, great boulevards, statues, or social classes... Tel Aviv is all about its people; cheeky and embracing, bold and compassionate, sweet and sour, holy and mundane, and ever doubtful of anything, nothing is taken for granted even when it is. Every law, every formula, every given... these are never set in stone. This mindset is a great catalyst to moving forward and trying new things, new combinations, new materials and technologies, new spatial configurations and so much more. We cherish creativity and we seize the day because tomorrow may never come regardless of what people say...
“DESIGN IS A CORE BELIEF, EMBRACING CULTURE AND A WAY OF OPERATING. WE CREATE DESIGN EXPERIENCES THAT ARE LOVED BY PEOPLE.”

ALISTAIR CURTIS
CHIEF DESIGN OFFICER LOGITECH
LEAD ESSAY: JONATHAN MILDENHALL
Design is the cake, not the cherry

FEATURE
Creating a design culture

LEAD ESSAY: MAZYAR MORTAZAVI
Using design to make a better world

FEATURE
Building design experiences

FEATURE
Design and sustainability
Having worked with some of the biggest brands on the planet, marketing and communications guru Jonathan Mildenhall makes the business case for design thinking.

Back in 2008, three recent graduates were going round all the venture capital funds in San Francisco offering 10 percent of their startup for $150,000. Two of those grads were design majors, only one of them was an engineer, and none of the VC’s were interested. It wasn’t felt that designer-founders were credible – that somehow design was a ‘soft touch.’ The company was Airbnb and if one of those VC’s had taken the deal, then it would have produced one of the greatest returns in investment history. That stake would have been worth around $12 billion today.

The success of Airbnb is now touted as a tipping point for how design was perceived in Silicon Valley. It wasn’t the first property sharing business to market, but what it did differently was enshrine design principles at the core of everything the company did. It was something that I’d already learnt in my career at Coca-Cola, where I started in 2006 with a slightly less polished understanding of what design meant. >
“DESIGN PROVIDED THE TOOLKITS TO OPTIMISE OPERATIONS WHEREVER IT’S APPLIED.”

Back then, like most people, I thought good design was about making things look and feel great. I could see that Coca-Cola had some of the strongest visual identities and brand differentiation in the market, and that its design team was amongst the best in the world. What I didn’t yet know is that working with these designers would transform my entire approach to how I do business.

Although Coca-Cola was incredibly strong on product – on getting things to jump off the shelf – it was quite challenged when it came to putting other work out into the world. I’d go as far to say its marketing process was horrendous, so I started looking around to find a way to solve that. It wasn’t long before I settled on the design team. Here were these incredibly talented professionals who had brilliant toolkits, processes and systems for developing products. Why couldn’t those same tools be applied to other business challenges?

What this developed into was a completely novel way of communicating for Coca-Cola, and a new way of working with our agency partners to create work that could be embraced by the entire system including bottlers, partners, retailers and the like. We called this new design-led approach to creative development ‘HotHousing,’ and it soon became influential across the business – not just for marketing communications projects, but in employee experience, stakeholder management, and just about every systemic process. The approach that my team pioneered gave me absolute clarity about the true potential of design – that it provided the toolkits to optimise operations wherever it’s applied, and that design thinking needed to exist from the ground up, not added as a final flourish.

As with so many things, cross-fertilizing diverse perspectives, outlooks and ideas can bring about the most spectacular results. I’ve found that taking processes honed in design studios and applying them to so-called ‘hard’ business challenges can create innovations that would be impossible had we stuck with tradition. Having developed this thinking at Coca-Cola, I was then able to explore its absolute culmination when I joined Airbnb in 2014, where the focus on design thinking touched literally every aspect of the business, from employee experience to host experience and guest experience. It was incredible to work with a company where the brand was so carefully conceived and was treated as a bedrock to the business, rather than something separate to be handled by the marketing team.

Left: Coca-Cola Zero marketing campaign
It’s that vision I’m now carrying forward through co-founding TwentyFirstCenturyBrand. We’re working with some of the most exciting businesses on the planet, including Peloton, Pinterest, HBO Max, Instacart, and Gemini. Our role is to help them to create vibrant, beautifully designed brand ecosystems. This ranges from developing the core business ambition or identifying the community they want to serve, all the way through to creating go-to-market business plans alongside key performance metrics. The brand is the foundation here, not the veneer, and it’s no accident that we use architectural language – one of our hero products is called the Brand Blueprint - which is consciously borrowed from architecture. Design is the foundation, scaffold and masonry of our approach.

The world is very different today to how it was in 2008, when those ambitious young design grads had such an uphill climb. Just as so-called ‘soft power’ has taken off in geopolitics, so too have the ‘soft skills’ of design come to define the most important brands of the 21st century. Design thinking is no longer a nice-to-have, but a foundational must-have for any ambitious business that wants to create differentiation and community.

twentyfirstcenturybrand.com

Above: Airbnb office
CREATING A DESIGN CULTURE

Building a strong design culture has never been more important, as consumers and employees alike demand to be seen, respected and treated not as data but – shock – human beings.

Of all the momentous shifts the world is experiencing right now, the Great Resignation – or The Big Quit as it’s also known – is one of the most unprecedented. With as much as 41% of the global workforce considering resignation and quit rates reaching all time highs - 4.4 million US workers resigned in September alone, what some are putting down to another random quirk of Covid freakonomics, others view as an indication of a whole new work-world order.

The Great Resignation phenomenon is being explained in several different ways. Is it being driven by disgruntled Gen Zs or enlightened home-schooling parents/sourdough bakers/online yoga teachers? Though it’s tempting to blame it on Brexit, the worker shortages and complaints are clearly global in their nature. Another theory is that – when push came to shoved-into-the-shed/spare-room – it triggered an epiphany. People in their millions discovered that although we’ve all been conditioned to love and do anything for our work, maybe our work doesn’t always love us back. Also, life is short and work is too often - in the grander scheme of things - pretty meaningless.

For those thinking it’s only low-skilled labour this affects, think again. According to WeTransfer’s annual Ideas Report - one of the largest studies about the creative workforce there is - 45% of global creatives are thinking of changing their jobs in the next six months. “Creatives who are thinking of switching jobs are 36% more likely to feel squeezed financially, 32% more likely to feel their work/life balance is off, and 50% less likely to feel connected to the people they work with.” What ‘is’ clear, is that brands are going to have to work much, much harder to attract and retain employees.

Coincidentally – or not – another headline the business media has seen a great deal of since the start of this fateful decade would posit the exact same thing but substituting the word ‘customers’ for ‘employees’. Between Gen Z, cancel culture, the Black Lives Matter movement, and a huge push for radical transparency when it comes to sustainability, sexual and gender equality, brand policy and action, consumers are voting with their wallets as well as their time. “Gen Z doesn’t want to save the world,” confirms WeTransfer’s report. “They want brands to take the lead in fighting for a more sustainable future. Gen Z is experiencing more mental health issues, feelings of isolation, and financial troubles than other age groups. They don’t want to clean up the mess older generations made on top of all that.”

“Trust is a gift”, says Damien Bradfield, Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder of WeTransfer. “It’s given unbelievably sparingly, and people will only trust brands or people that they feel share their values. In general, most will choose to trust people able to demonstrate empathy, thought and generosity. Those that are true to their word, consistent and good or effective communicators.”

Above: Lido Pimienta (Photo Daniela Murillo)
If we break down what makes great design, or what skills are needed by great designers, we will see a huge overlap: the ability to empathise, to listen, to respond.

The situation may be multi-layered and heinously complex, but the obvious way forward lies in investing in human relationships: empathy, integrity, trust and compassion. Put plainly, brands must design new ways of doing business. As Mark Curtis, head of global innovation and thought leadership at Accenture Interactive puts it, “The choices that businesses make next might affect our world and its structure in more ways than we can imagine, and it all points to shifts in people’s relationships — with colleagues, brands, society, places and with those they care about. There are challenging times ahead, but also great opportunities for businesses to stitch together positive relationships to create a fabric of life that is good for people, society and the planet.”

As companies look to deliver value and relevance to their customers, employees and society, creating a strong design culture has never been more important. McKinsey put it well in its 2015 report ‘Building a Design Driven Culture’ when it said empathy is a real-world business need. “Using empathy to put customers, clients, and end users at the center of the problem-solving equation is the foundation of design thinking. With this focus, design becomes a tool for change, capable of transforming the way companies do business, hire talent, compete, and build their brand.”

Bradford Shellhammer is VP, buyer experience, at eBay, and tellingly responds to our questions just before he heads to Brazil for sabbatical (just “another awesome thing eBay does for its employees with tenure!”).

Shellhammer believes technology and tech companies have upped the bar. “There’s so many ways to disrupt via design. Industries that haven’t recognised that must evolve.”

The issue with design, says Shellhammer, is the word. “It means everything, and nothing as a result. Anyone selling anything, providing a platform or service, that’s all some sort of design. I think of the brands I personally love like Jeep, Spotify and Ikea and they’re very much design brands. At eBay, everything we do is about design. Our product development process, which is what I lead for buyers, is one deeply rooted in research, design and AB testing culture. We are essentially a design company.”

“DESIGN TASKED WITH SOLVING YOUR CUSTOMER’S PROBLEMS, MAKING THEIR LIVES EASIER: THAT’S THE MAGIC.”

Bradford Shellhammer, EBAY

WORDS BY HENRIETTA THOMPSON

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How? “Listen to them,” says Shellhammer. “At eBay we are so close to both our customers and potential consumers. This connection, via surveys, social media monitoring, research reviews, feature survey, etc. helps drive our hypotheses about strategy or branding or a new feature to launch. And listening is not enough. You have to act on what they tell you or else you lose trust. And that can be a death blow.” Personalisation is also enormously important to the brand, with more than a billion items for sale on eBay, understanding and leveraging the data that provides has great opportunity. “Imagine what Spotify is to music, unlocking nostalgia and helping music lovers find their passions, eBay’s opportunity is similar for things like fashion, collectibles, home goods and design, cars and motors, etc. It’s quite possibly the most exciting personalisation project in ecommerce.”

In his roles across design and brand at Nike, including Chief Marketing Officer, Greg Hoffman was recognized for his transformative leadership. Fundamental to his approach is empathy. “It’s a trait that, if exercised consistently, can allow for gaining a greater understanding of the world and people beyond yourself.

Unlocking the creative power of a diverse team means allowing an individual to bring their lived-in experience and life perspective into the professional arena. This means going beyond creating a diverse team by the numbers. As a manager, you need to see, hear and feel the experience of your team members. A greater understanding and awareness on your part will allow for a more empowered team and a world that will benefit from that.”

Hoffman now runs his own brand advisory group, Modern Arena. From fortune 500 brands and startups to non-profit organizations design thinking is integral to long term success. “Fostering a working culture where the left and right brains multiply each other will more likely allow you to create and introduce game-changing innovations into the world. The kind of solutions that not only satisfy the rational needs of your audience but the emotional ones too. When risk-taking is incentivized within a brand culture, and you don’t have to ask permission to use your imagination, you unlock big opportunities that you wouldn’t otherwise see. You move from not only designing products but dreams too.”

The move to a design led culture is, for many brands, one that is difficult to quantify, and by extension the investment into human satisfaction can also be difficult to justify. It’s something Denis Dekovic, global creative director at Adidas, understands well. “It takes a lot of conversation and it’s about highlighting the issue or the challenge, offering some solutions,” he says. “Top leadership meetings can be heavily finance focused - we are here for business, there’s an urgency for change.

But when we talk about numbers, we need to connect it to purpose, because if the focus is only on the numbers, we are not going to inspire our own employees to come back to the office to give their 100%. Adidas’s Creator Farm – a progressive design hub in Brooklyn set up in 2017 – was established not simply to create the shoes of the future, but culture itself. To talk to the design team or Adidas aficionados it’s a success in every sense but “The challenge is explaining the value of it,” says Dekovic. “If you spend 10 million dollars a year on a center like this you want to know how much comes back. And it’s hard to quantify everything that design does. We absolutely need to do it but I myself have not figured it out yet. How do we talk to finance people in their language about design?”

Above: Nike
Other design challenges brands are facing include how to answer the constant pertinent and wide ranging questions of both customers and employees, and how to best look after and care for them, mentally and physically too.

As WeTransfer’s Damien Bradfield puts it: “Control shifted and flexibility became the word of 2021. Companies are going to have to work very hard to create working conditions and working environments that will attract and retain a talent pool requiring complete flexibility.” If the past two years haven’t already made it abundantly clear, business underestimates the degree of relationship change we are seeing - and the role of design in responding to it – at its peril.

Henrietta Thompson is an architecture, art and design writer based in London.

“ADIDAS’S CREATOR FARM WAS ESTABLISHED NOT SIMPLY TO CREATE THE SHOES OF THE FUTURE, BUT CULTURE ITSELF.”

Denis Dekovic, ADIDAS
WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN BUILDING A CREATIVE DREAM TEAM IN 2022?

1. DIVERSITY
To build a creative dream team where innovation flows freely, you must prioritise filling the roster with diverse life experiences and perspectives, not just skill sets.

2. CREATIVE CHEMISTRY
Break creative disciplines out of their silos, figuratively and literally. More and more of the solutions we create need to be holistically connected throughout a consumer’s life. To achieve this, a team needs to move together as one creative force, sharing and building on each other’s energy and expertise.

3. SPEED AND AGILITY
The most successful teams in sports have two consistent traits: Speed & Agility. They master these two opposing forces. Develop a creative team that can move at the speed of your consumer with the flexibility to fulfil their evolving desires and dreams.

4. BUILD THE ARENA
It’s hard to be creative if your working space is void of it. Whether physical or digital, make the work environment as innovative as the solutions you seek to create.

5. DIGITAL FLUENCY
Develop the ability to leverage the ever-expanding digital tools, platforms - and products within the creative process and the capability of delivering those solutions into the accelerating digital marketplaces.

Clockwise from bottom left:
Nike poster,
Greg Hoffman,
Nike (Photo Stephan Schmid)
CAN YOU SHARE EXAMPLES OF HOW DESIGN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE UPTAKE OF A BRAND?

Design is a difficult thing to describe, particularly today. However, all my thinking around design is based upon the Japanese philosophy of Motenashi — which focuses on human-to-human interaction. The basic principles are as follows:

1. ANTICIPATION OF THE OTHER’S NEEDS
   The host should respond to guest’s needs before the latter feels such need himself.

2. FLEXIBILITY TO THE SITUATION
   Refers to the appropriate amount of formality or casualness respectively.

3. UNDERSTATEMENT
   The host should not display his efforts, in order to create a natural feeling for the guest.

   All in all this methodology or set of principles is humanistic and I believe is more important than ever. Great design comes from a thorough understanding of the audience, and that requires the ability to listen. To create great, well designed brands that inspire and create aspiration we need to be real. Not authentic, the buzz word of 2019, but real. We need real people, to have real beliefs, to show their real self and make real products. Do that well and the uptake will be phenomenal.
MAZYAR MORTAZAVI

HOW TO SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE THE CITY

A Toronto-based family business is making waves for its innovative approach to city planning, connecting purpose and profit while keeping communities at the core.

Big problems call for big solutions. From social equity to climate collapse, the world is awakening to the fact that taking a case-by-case approach is not going to cut it. What’s needed are grand, multi-generational visions that can bring about lasting change.

Few problems loom as large as cities in the 21st century. At some point around 2006 (according to the United Nations) humanity sailed over an invisible line where – for the first time in our history as a species – more people lived urban lives than rural. Since then, we’ve flooded into urban centers in our droves, with the UN forecasting that 68 percent of the world will call cities home by 2050. Not even the global pandemic seems to have slowed this long-term trend in any significant way.

Cities are the undisputed engines of our social, political and economic life, and should be celebrated as such. But they also have the potential to wreak havoc on the wellbeing of those who dwell in them. >
"BIG PROBLEMS CALL FOR BIG SOLUTIONS. WHAT'S NEEDED ARE GRAND, MULTI-GENERATIONAL VISIONS THAT CAN BRING ABOUT LASTING CHANGE."

The big battles of the 21st century – from health to equity to pollution – will be fought in urban centres, not rural hinterlands.

The problem is that cities have too often been shaped by the short-term needs of property developers and politicians, who may be looking for a quick buck or positive news story over long term investment. Much of our globalised world has become addicted to short-termism, it seems. Tied to financial quarters, annual reviews and midterm elections, we operate on the scale of hours, weeks and months, rather than decades, centuries or millennia. Can we find another way?

“The fact that we’re a family business is crucial,” says Mazyar Mortazavi, President and CEO of TAS, the Toronto-based real estate business that his parents founded as Iranian immigrants in the 1980s. “I think it really comes down to our family values: that set of ideas that underpins what we do. It takes on a multi-generational aspect.” This approach has echoes of the so-called Cathedral Challenge: a way of enacting long term change that stretches beyond the lifetime of an individual. The name references the cathedral building families of mediaeval Europe, where the grandfather would lay the foundations, the father would build the structure and the son finish the masonry. No single generation oversaw the whole, but all contributed to a singular vision.

“We live in a time where capital has become about extraction rather than generation,” continues Mortazavi. “where we try to extract as much as we can, as quickly as possible, and just leave a hole for the next generation to deal with.” By taking on a multi-generational construct that attributes value to the social, environmental and cultural as well as the financial, TAS has made a mark on Toronto, and is rightly beginning to garner global attention for their approach. “Rather than calling ourselves a real estate company, we say we’re an impact company that uses real estate as a tool,” says Mortazavi.

Even over video link, Mortazavi is an impassioned and charismatic speaker, and a cynic could dismiss his vision as the kind of corporate spiel that we hear from various messianic Silicon Valley types. The difference is that TAS have been assiduous in holding themselves to account, not only obtaining B Corp certification, but launching their own Impact Framework earlier this year. Linked to the independent Future-Fit Business Benchmark (which in turn is grounded in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) the Framework applies concrete criteria to all TAS projects. As such, it formalises the TAS family-values approach into a set of measurable environmental, social and governance criteria.

“I would stress that this is not about becoming a charity or operating purely altruistically,” explains Mortazavi. “Real estate is big business and we have a deep respect for the financial aspect of what we do. We cannot create change if we’re not financially successful, so it’s not about suddenly slashing profits from, say, 25 percent to 5 percent.”
But it’s also possible to have a significant social impact from quite a subtle shift in value attribution.” Many companies tout purpose and profit, but few in the real estate sector have tied themselves quite so closely to measurable, multi-generational responsibilities.

At the core of the TAS approach sit the communities and neighbourhoods of Toronto – the type of small-scale groupings that have so often been bulldozed and displaced in cities around the world. “A great neighbourhood allows people to connect and care for one another,” says Mortazavi. “When neighbourhoods work well, cities work well, and we have models to prove this throughout history – from rural villages to mediaeval towns.”

Mortazavi has the academic training to back this statement up. As well as studying architecture, he wrote a thesis on the eastern bazaar as an enduring system of social cohesion. “If you look at the fundamental structures of a bazaar then they haven’t changed in millennia, and yet they have retained a vibrancy that comes from their incredible ability to flex and adapt,” says Mortazavi. “We used to have this in mediaeval Europe, too, but with the Renaissance came an obsession with the individual and with monolithic architecture. We lost that more organic, community-driven focus.”

This community model can still be found in successful neighbourhoods the world over, with Toronto’s own Kensington Market providing a prime example. Often cobbled together by disenfranchised groups outside the purview of city planners or politicians, such spaces were able to grow through small-scale social cohesion. Of course, it’s impossible to turn the complexity of today’s mega city over to communities alone, but the challenge as Mortazavi sees it is how to retain these social bonds within a grand city plan.

“I guess carpet weaving is in my Iranian roots,” chuckles Mortazavi. “I want to bring different threads together. The amazing thing about weaving is that you can have these very delicate strands individually, but when you combine them they become incredibly strong.” TAS has been receiving a lot of press recently for the innovative development of the Wellington Destructor, an 1920’s trash incinerator that will now take on a new lease of life as a multipurpose space that weaves culture, commerce and leisure. Just as important as these big blockbuster projects are more subtle combinations, however, such as rehousing a 10,000 square foot Salvation Army in the ground floor of a gleaming new residential development, or working with the City to bring a public library to another underserved area. “It’s about looking at what makes a community special, or identifying what a community might lack, and blending that together.”

“WHEN NEIGHBOURHOODS WORK WELL, CITIES WORK WELL, AND WE HAVE MODELS TO PROVE THIS THROUGHOUT HISTORY – FROM RURAL VILLAGES TO MEDIAEVAL TOWNS.”
A side-effect of the global pandemic is that it made us connect far more deeply with our immediate neighbourhoods, and it may result in a greater planning focus on walkable clusters of mixed amenities within global cities. This idea of the 15-minute neighbourhood has long been a priority for visionary planners from Jane Jacobs to Jan Gehl, but too often it got pushed aside by the more prosaic plans of politicians. “I think the pandemic has really made us focus on our core needs from the streets in which we live, and those needs may be as simple as the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker,” says Mortazavi. “We need to stop kidding ourselves that we know better than our communities do. It’s the job of professionals to create the fundamental infrastructure, but to leave plenty of room for the magic that is community building.”

Combining a multi-generational vision with commitment to community, TAS is showing how it’s possible to develop neighbourhoods with soul – and without impacting your bottom-line as a business. The challenge of living healthy, fulfilling, vibrant lives in high density cities is one of the biggest that lie ahead of us, but the world could do worse than look to this Toronto-based family business for some inspiration.

tasimpact.ca
At a time when the hospitality, travel, culture and retail industries have all been left reeling from the impact of the pandemic, the term ‘experience’ has evolved. Now most often preceded by words such as ‘digital’ or ‘remote’. From emergent economies to convergent retail to Facebook’s rebrand, attention has turned to the upcoming Metaverse as the most exciting place to be. But is it? Looking through that space/time vortex, there is a compelling alternative proposition built on human emotion, personal transformation and connection to nature.

Local Projects is an exhibition and experience design studio pushing the boundaries of human interaction. In 2021 it won Fast Company’s award for Design Company of the Year, and put four new museums on its showreel. Of its many current projects, there is one – not a museum – that stands out as being especially prescient. Principal and founder Jake Barton explains the background: “It’s a shock to me that despite heavy investment and a pandemic that locked everyone in their house for 12 or 18 months, VR still is a weird fringe platform,” he says. “There’s a lot of content for it. The headsets themselves are not exotic and they’re relatively cheap. All of the investment that’s going into VR, all of these properties, all these amazing panoramas and platforms that have been built, it’s all just stuck in these goggles.”

Most of us fall into one of two camps, he says. “There’s a tiny percentage who love it and just want to live in the metaverse, and the rest use it once, say “Wow, it’s really cool,” and then never go back because it’s uncomfortable and socially isolating, or because it’s just strange, and weird and actually not that fun.”

DreamCube takes VR out of the headset and uses projection mapping to put you in a social space. As a platform for extended reality entertainment, it brings all the benefits of VR, but without the goggles (no nausea) and it’s communal. “It builds on the model of social experiences like karaoke and bowling that bring groups of people together into an intimate social experience. Visitors can have food and beverages and chat while simultaneously engaging in this immersive and interactive entertainment,” says Barton. “It’s good for sports, for culture. It’s super interesting for gaming - there are amazing opportunities here.”

There is a presumption that technology will help to bring meaning to experiences, but brands are discovering that there’s much more to it than meets the eye. To create the greatest impact, it’s not necessary to keep chasing the latest, the newest and the next, but to employ whatever technology works best to tell an emotional story and make a connection with your audience. It also means bringing designers on board that are truly aligned with a brand’s purpose. Maison Perrier-Jouët uses creative collaborations to reach a wider audience while cultivating a joyful, positive...
vision of the world. For the past decade, the brand has commissioned artists and designers including Bethan Laura Wood, mischer’traxler and Andrea Mancuso to reinterpret its Art Nouveau heritage and reflect the four pillars of the Art Nouveau movement: taking nature as a source of inspiration, integrating craft, bringing beauty to life, and placing an emphasis on art which breaks down barriers between disciplines.

Axelle de Buffevent is Perrier-Jouët’s style director. “It’s essential that an experience be both emotional and meaningful,” she agrees. “The emotional dimension of an artistic experience enables us to create a bond with the audience, which in turn facilitates the important messages we want to share. The experience must create both freedom and meaning: the artist or designer shares their vision freely, opening up an imaginary world for the spectator to experience freely, in their own way.”

Storytelling through experience is something that the hospitality industry has long been familiar with, but it’s still evolving as an artform. On the western side of the Seto Inland Sea in the Hiroshima region – across from ‘art islands’ – the much-anticipated Azumi Setoda has finally opened. A short walk from the now sleepy port on Shiomachi Shotengai, once a major shipping thoroughfare, the ryokan inspired hotel is the first opening from Azumi, the brand launched by Aman founder Adrian Zecha and Naru Developments.

Fusing exquisite craftsmanship with modern, contemporary minimalism and a magnetic sense of community spirit, the hotel is designed by architect Shiro Miura and is a beacon of discreet design sophistication in a region famed for its still blue waters, seafood and views.

“Experience is everything,” says Yuta Oka, founder and director of Azumi. “And design plays an integral role in creating it.” Having famously built Aman’s success on creating spaces where guests would feel as if they were guests in a private home rather than a hotel, Oka’s business partners understand this better than most. Japan’s ryokans have existed since the eighth century and make up some of the oldest hotels in the world, serving travelers on Japan’s highways. “Regardless of Eastern or Western culture, when we trace back to the root of inns, the simplest definition may be that it is a private place to stay the night and have a meal,” says Oka. “That definition may be somewhat similar to the definition of a home.

There is no manual for hospitality in a home, yet it is only natural to provide the utmost comfort possible to house guests. That thought is reflected in every aspect of our design.” For Azumi, and architect Shiro, the goal is not simply to create a chic destination, but to forge deep local ties, revitalise local communities and consider elements far >
Above: La Samaritaine by Yabu Pushelberg

Beyond the walls of the estate. By extension, the experience had by the guests is considerably richer.

In 2021 Ace Hotels opened Ace Brooklyn. This year they will see the opening of Ace Toronto and Ace Sydney – bringing its total worldwide to ten. “Design is a fundamental through line in all that we do,” says CEO Brad Wilson. “Travelers and locals alike are increasingly savvy and seeking nuanced aesthetic points of view. But design also applies to the potential of our spaces, how we hope for them to be experienced and what they might facilitate.”

Where the experience becomes truly valuable is where it demonstrates a human touch. “Ace was born out of a desire to create a space for our friends to stay. Our founding team didn’t think of it as “lifestyle” per se, rather the concept arose naturally from our community and ethos of living,” says Wilson. “As we evolve, we remain rooted in sharing ideas that excite us. We’ve got an appetite for finding the stories in things, and our guests are genuinely interested in discovery.”

Aman is renowned for offering guests extraordinary ultra-luxury lifestyle experiences (with that word meant in its most purposeful sense). Here, says Chief Commercial Officer Anna Nash, as guests are getting younger their expectations are greater than ever. “Aman is proud to create experiences which are enriched by the local culture of our destinations and build meaningful and lasting memories,” she says. “The Aman proposition can be brought to life in an urban, jungle, desert or oceanfront destination, but the potential location must be unique to the rest of our collection, and it must be exceptional. For example, our two forthcoming Aman properties in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be located in AlUla, a place of extraordinary natural and human heritage with Unesco World Heritage sites of archaeological significance.”

Aman has a continued mission to explore new destinations and cultural experiences. The brand currently has 15 properties located close to or within Unesco sites. “Experiences like the guided meditation within the world’s largest Buddhist temple, Borobudur, which we offer at Amanjiwo, Indonesia, are other-worldly and create incredibly special moments our guests will remember forever,” says Nash. “It is also becoming increasingly popular for our guests to request private Aman experiences, which they can enjoy in safety, comfort and privacy.”

It’s no surprise in the current climate that guests are looking for experiences that offer retreat and sanctuary. “There is a very special feeling when you stay with Aman, there is a depth of connection to the place and a spirit which is unlike anywhere else,” says Nash. “It’s about human touch, interaction and personalisation. Our unique formula, coupled with our outstanding locations, creates an irresistible atmosphere.”

In the competitive arena of luxury retail, Yabu Pushelberg’s work on the exquisitely reimagined La Samaritaine in Paris, demonstrates the importance of creating an exceptional environment. “We believe that more than experience, people shop for a form of entertainment” says Glenn Pushelberg, co-founder of the internationally renowned interior design studio. “We shop when we travel because a store is part of a culture and becomes part of a memory. La Samaritaine is one of the best examples of this because it connects history with modernity. It creates joy, engaging with people’s emotions to connect history and modernity.”

“La Samaritaine was a tremendous undertaking and an even greater responsibility”, adds partner George Yabu. “The department store is a quintessentially Parisian landmark that we wanted to resonate not only with visitors and tourists, but also with Parisian natives. An exceptional environment in this instance required a balance of heritage and modernity: a preservation and celebration of defining characteristics married with a modern interpretation of them.”
Whether it’s digital, physical or a combination of both, making a brand experience inspiring and memorable is – as many are finding – about making the right connections. When the experience is not merely individual, but also collective, it is amazingly powerful. As Local Projects’ Barton explains: “Giving audiences a job or a purpose, an experience to find yourself in, to see yourself reflected in: these are notions that are really the expanding horizon. An experience should reflect something about you and have a self curating angle to it too.” Yes, people all want a beautiful, seamless experience, but they also want something they can participate within. It doesn’t take immersive technologies to immerse a person emotionally in an experience, it takes a creative, intelligent and 360 degree approach by design.

Henrietta Thompson is an architecture, art and design writer based in London.

WORDS BY HENRIETTA THOMPSON

“OUR UNIQUE FORMULA IS ABOUT HUMAN TOUCH, INTERACTION AND PERSONALISATION”

Anna Nash, AMAN
Out with the old. The 2020s are producing visionaries with a new attitude to sustainable thinking. Their promise: to effect change both radically and – we can hope – rapidly. ‘Make do and mend’, ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’, the mantras of the sustainability movement may be enduring in every sense, but at this stage it’s clearly not enough. With a bold new generation of business, new technologies and new awareness comes the realisation that sometimes things are too old, too broken, too outdated to fix. What we really need is bigger, braver, better funded ‘new’ ideas. From how we travel to the way we build, sometimes it’s best to start afresh.

After six years of development, Arrival is now just months away from production on its potentially world-changing electric vehicles. The technology company – which has reportedly already reached Unicorn status – credits the success of its vision to the fact that it has created a low carbon strategy for our vehicles and platforms from scratch, leaving the legacy of the combustion engine behind from the very start.

The development of equitable, safe and clean public transportation is crucial for the success and survival of our cities, says Howard Lichter, Arrival’s VP special projects. “We want to create an integrated transportation ecosystem that can assist cities in meeting their zero-emissions goals and bring clean air to their communities.” Through continuous innovation across hardware, software and materials, Arrival has developed a radical new method for manufacturing that hinges around a network of microfactories. “Arrival’s vehicles - including the major components and materials - have been designed specifically for assembly in these low CapEx, small footprint production facilities, that can be placed locally serving the cities that need them.”

It’s a decentralised production strategy that will allow Arrival to make EVs and platforms designed for each city, in the city itself - upskilling local talent in the process and providing modern 21st century jobs.

Most other companies creating EVs are wed to the traditional production line method of manufacturing, and you cannot build a traditional vehicle or EV in a microfactory - our vehicles have been designed specifically using our proprietary enabling technologies and platforms,” explains Lichter.

eBike start up Cowboy Bikes is meanwhile making progress as they look to grow as an impact business, aligning profit with city and civic impact. Measures include returning bike assembly to Europe, automating many aspects of production, and developing a circular initiative. How does design contribute to effective change? “We work hard at finding the right design solutions,” says co-founder and CEO Adrien Roose, of Cowboy’s mission to create simple yet intelligent, intuitive products. The bike is connected, equipped with built-in sensors, providing Crash ->
Detection, Theft Alerts, Air Quality updates and much more. Cowboy’s software is at the heart of the experience. “We want to remove any possible friction point for users and provide the simplest ride, with help and information along every step of the way. Design is a way to provoke change when it facilitates one’s life and provides a healthier alternative to the status quo.”

Getting around the city is one thing, but we all know cities themselves – or least the construction of them – are one of the largest offenders from a sustainability standpoint, with the building industry accounting for 36% of worldwide energy usage, and 40% of CO2 emissions. Automated Architecture (AUAR), a technology company operating at the intersection between architecture, design, technology and community, believes that to address the demands of the housing and climate crisis, the business of building needs to be entirely reinvented. “We are revolutionising construction using robotics and automation to empower people and communities to create better and more sustainable homes. We believe in healthy, inspiring and sustainable living environments that are designed by and for local communities,” says Molly Claypool, AUAR’s co-founder and CEO.

In a solution that is truly a world first, AUAR has designed a modular building system that consists of 1 type of simple building block, which are robotically pre-fabricated and assembled into dwelling units with minimal material waste. “Our software integrates the whole delivery process: from design to robotic assembly to procurement, localising the production of homes. The units can be easily customised based on site and context.”

With timber as is its modular cladding system, all additional construction materials – including a non-toxic, recyclable EPDM roof, rubber floor, and paper cellulose insulation – have been selected for their low-carbon, sustainable properties. Like Arrival, AUAR also uses microfactories to localise the fabrication and construction process. Instead of importing materials or modular homes from far afield, this radically reduces the production chain. “One industrial robot can be a factory, embedded in local communities that need housing, providing opportunities for upskilling local labour and creating new kinds of jobs. This simultaneously reduces carbon footprint and increases community involvement.”

Arksen is yet another venture taking an industry-reinvention approach – this time with a focus on the oceans. An innovation and technology company in the business of building explorer vessels and vehicles, Arksen is propelled by an expansive vision that makes the superyacht status symbols of the aging mega-rich seem impossibly outdated. Supporting research, designing and building with a circular economy in mind and offering new forms of ownership and engagement, Arksen has a fresh point of view and a laser
focus on the next generation. Alongside its Expedition Vehicles – for traversing both sea and land, including yachts, tenders, support vessels and trucks – and Expedition Labs, there is also the Arksen Foundation, which exists to facilitate scientific research and provide project funding.

Across materials and manufacturing, the design process has been developed to minimise environmental impact and optimise recyclability at the end of life. Jasper Smith, Arksen’s founder, explains. “In summary, we are trying a different approach – one that is rooted in sustainability and the joy of experiences rather than ownership alone.” Arksen is pioneering a syndicate model for its boats, allowing members to access fully serviced vessels as required rather than – as is typical – leaving them moored in a marina for 96% of the time. Its social philanthropy model goes one step further still, seeing owners donate sea time to ocean research and conservation projects.

“Transforming what are often seen as opulent toys into a network of vessels that can further our understanding of the ocean is very powerful,” says Smith. “Within a few years I’m not sure any other model could be justified.” In a similar vein, Arrival plans for its car to help address the global need to shift to ride-hailing and shared mobility, not least through partnerships – for example with Uber. The Arrival Bus, meanwhile, aims to provide cities with the multi-modal zero-emission transportation ecosystem required to meet city’s sustainability goals.

We have evolved past the need to ‘own’ everything in order to reflect status or power, and that not only goes for consumer products, it goes for businesses too, says Smith. “Collaboration between designers, suppliers, shipyards and end users offers many more engagement opportunities to help share resources for mutual benefit. This will allow greater investment in technologies, systems and processes that promote rapid change (hybrid, hydrogen fuel cells, sustainable materials) and the design of products that embrace the principles of a circular economy.”

For Kvadrat, internationally renowned design company of high-performance textiles, circularity is fundamental to sustainability, and it begins with the durability of the product. Philine Kriependorf, Sustainability Manager, explains: “Quality, of course, has been engraved in Kvadrat’s DNA since the very

“THE GREEN TRANSITION MUST BENEFIT EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE, COLLECTIVELY BENEFITTING CITIES, BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES, AND ALLOWING THEM TO BENEFIT BOTH ENVIRONMENTALLY AND ECONOMICALLY.”

Howard Lichter, ARRIVAL
beginning,” she says. “That matters more than ever when you start looking at circularity or extended product life.”

Over at Vitra, Christian Grosen Rasmussen, Chief Design Officer, would agree. “High quality and longevity are pivotal at Vitra and are reflected throughout the entire portfolio from our classics up to our contemporary designs. Quality and longevity are inevitably linked to sustainability and it doesn’t make sense to talk about one without the other. Vitra began an exciting but also long journey towards sustainability many decades ago and in 2020 we’ve defined our goal of becoming climate positive in 2030.” Over the past few years, Vitra has opened three Circle Stores, selling used Vitra products. “This is definitely a concept that we will continue to develop and expand. Take back programs and rental schemes are also becoming more and more popular in the furniture industry especially in our contract markets.”

One of the biggest challenges facing manufacturers is true supply chain transparency, says Grosen Rasmussen. “Brands that are credible and able to be sustainable and bring their customers with them on their journey and guide them through the complex decision process of making sustainable choices will be the winners. At Vitra we are working heavily on that topic as this is one of our goals for 2030.”

In part as a measure to tackle the same challenge, Kvadrat took the decision around two years ago to move sustainability into the strategy department. “You can’t become a sustainable company without collaborating. At Kvadrat we know we have to decentralise - change can’t come from one sustainability department. It really needs to reside in different parts of the business across the value chain. For example, it is crucial to really understand the production process of our partners, understand their challenges, and figure solutions out together.”

Kriependorf is part of the team building the Kvadrat Changemaker Network. “We now have three different networks around the globe – with the goal to have four by next year. One network is established for our design teams from all Kvadrat brands, one in sales, one network at the HQ, and finally the production partners. It’s about sharing knowledge and best practice. For example, the sales network: we have selected very ambitious and sales colleagues from around the world, from each market. They come together once a month and are trained on different modules on sustainability. The idea is that they become the extended arm of our sustainability department to train their local teams and

“ONE INDUSTRIAL ROBOT CAN BE A FACTORY, EMBEDDED IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES THAT NEED HOUSING.”

Mollie Claypool, AUTOMATED ARCHITECTURE
then to go out and have the dialogue with clients and explain what our approach to sustainability is, while also understanding the clients better, what their needs are.”

Kvadrat has also implemented a Changemaker Network for its brands where designers come together and are trained, for example, on dying methods or the risks of recycled materials.

It is easy to conclude that smart tech, extreme materials, automated manufacturing and microfactories are all helping us to create better, more efficient and more consumer-friendly products. But where innovation is also making a huge difference is in the design of a more collaborative business structure. Whatever advances we make, we seem to be reaching a consensus that we’ll never achieve the sum of our parts if we operate in isolation.

“We need to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what sustainability means, because if we just continue having various definitions out there we can’t streamline our work towards a common agenda,” says Kriependorf. “Time is running so we need to make that change happen as quickly as possible. For us, it’s about involving as many people as possible, but also defining what sustainability means.”

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“SUSTAINABILITY SHOULD BE THE PRIMARY LEVER FOR INNOVATION AND BE THE DEFINING PARAMETER THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.”

Christian Grosen Rasmussen, VITRA
Singapore is a small island city-state belonging to the region of South East Asia. Viewed from an aeroplane, Singapore's geometry is distinct: an undulating green diamond lying on its side with orthogonal outcroppings, hook-like peninsulas and clean straight edges at its extremities — the telltale signs of human intervention, progress and sheer force of design will.

Being just north of the Equator, the weather here is perpetually hot except when it rains. Our dark tropical mornings are punctuated by the cries of the Asian Koel bird: an ascending 'ku-ooh' that increases in tempo until it reaches fever pitch only to start its calls anew. On the weekends, the Green Corridor throngs with locals seeking refuge from our dense urban landscape. This 24km nature trail bisects the island of Singapore and was once a railway. Now, it is lined with giant Elephant’s Ears and tall Tembusu trees shrouded in creepers; offering sightings of wild boars, long tail macaques and possibly pangolins.

This is the minutiae of Singapore that I know and love: tiny moments of poetry and wonder encountered in the interstitial spaces of an efficiently run metropolis.

The more typical and well-known descriptions of Singapore come in superlatives such as “world-class airport”, “greenest city” and “best place to do business”. Our skylines grow more futuristic year-on-year with megastructure projects like Gardens by the Bay, Marina Barrage and Jewel Changi Airport — feats of design and engineering that speak to a long-term vision and planning.

We even have a Design Master Plan that seeks to transform the Singapore economy into a design-centric and innovation-driven economy by 2025. This is the scale and face of Singapore best known to the world: prescient, aspirational, ambitious.

As a resident of this city, a lover of speculative fiction and a designer, it comes as no surprise that Singapore is often a point of reference for models of utopia or dystopia. When composing the futuristic world of HBO’s Westworld series, the producers consulted with architect Bjarke Ingels who suggested Singapore as one of the primary filming locations. In this fictional universe, two of my favourite buildings magically coexist in the same city: the biophilic PARKROYAL on Pickering by WOHA and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Mayan Revival Ennis house.

But, the Singapore I want to share most, and that speaks to me as a designer, is not found in the mythologising of my beloved country by outsiders nor its own grand narrative. It is in the unplanned and the everyday, the unexpected in a world of order. It is the resourceful auntie who illicitly forages for sweet potato leaves along the Green Corridor, it is the quick-thinking family that fashions a rain collecting device from cartons and PVC pipes for their high-rise flat, it is the tender-hearted guerrilla designed cat houses left out for the strays in our various public housing estates. It is these spontaneous unsanctioned activities, unconscious design interventions and creativity disguised as pragmatism, that inspire me the most — and leads me to believe that design is more natural and more deeply entrenched in our culture that we realise.
When I first moved to Sydney at the age of 19 to study industrial design I could never have predicted the incredible transformation that would occur in the city and across Australia for both design and cultural identity.

Located on Australia’s east coast, Sydney is well known for its beautiful surrounding nature from coastal beaches to natural gum forests. However at its heart, Sydney is incredibly urban: encompassed by a heavy mix of heritage and modern buildings awash with beautiful blue skies and a unique (hard to describe) light unlike any other city I’ve lived in.

Sydney has always been full of incredibly talented designers, however, for many years it felt as though the city suffered from a creative drain, with some of the most talented designers often working overseas for early parts of their careers. This somehow feels different now with many young Australian designers building their own careers and profiles in Australia first, alongside international designers drawn to the beautiful city and quality of life.

With a less established design history there is a freedom for younger designers to compete on incredible projects. This is particularly apparent in the architecture and design scene where young designers are winning large tenders based on talent instead of company heritage, and in doing so, transforming the city’s physical makeup with the desire to create genuinely unique work.

As the value of buildings have surged over the last 10 years free of recession (unlike so many other cities), construction has boomed and Sydney has grown to support many more local designers.

On the other hand this has created an expensive city to work in - but those who can afford it are able to build incredible individual careers and companies.

For me, the inner west of Sydney suburbs are where some of the most interesting and diverse creatives are located. Rent is slightly cheaper and there is a higher density of commercial warehouse spaces centrally located. Away from the stereotypical beach life, this hub is a breeding ground for artists and designers alike with many startup companies and communal creative spaces paired with buzzing small cafes, bars and restaurants.

It would be a lie to say that Sydney alone is driving the creative design scene in Australia. Melbourne alongside Canberra, Adelaide and many other cities are pushing Australian design internationally and there is a genuine supportive kinship between designers and artists across the country.

Australia - and Sydney - deserves more acclaim for its incredible local manufacturing industry that is a driving force in the quality and outcome of many designers’ work. This, in conjunction with Sydney’s unique Asia Pacific location, has allowed it to become a hub for design in the region.

Every year the local design scene evolves as new designers emerge and established designers continue to innovate. It truly feels that right now the identity and makeup of the Australian design scene is being reinvented today.

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Postcard from... SYDNEY

Tom Fereday
Venice is one of the most generous cities in the world. It’s generous with its inspiration, its details, its architecture and its decorations - inspiring designers worldwide.

The city has always been considered as the commercial centre of La Serenissima and Venice’s strength is exactly this: a port city and an intersection of encounters and cultures - an intoxicating place attracting exceptional visitors who cannot help but be captivated by a unique rhythm which appears to be slow - but is not. Today, Venice has become a dynamic cultural trade centre thanks to the Biennale and the flourishing private foundations that use the lagoon as a mirror, reflecting contemporary artistic and cultural research.

Well known creatives such as Lucia Massari, Ritsue Mishima, Lorenzo Mason, Omri Revesz, Marco Zito, Luca Nichetto all live on the island and bring their projects to the rest of the world. Also attracting international attention are the graphic designers from Bruno who unite the commercial and the artistic with their bookstore and studio, graphic designer Sebastiano Girardi and in the field of illustration Lucio Schiavon and the young Studio Saor.

People come and go but many choose to say in Venice, opening their own places or creating spaces we can all experience. Lorenzo Vitturi, the great photographer who returned to Venice after spending time in London, is one example that comes to mind. There is also the French-Japanese food designer Manger, filmmakers and architects Beka & Lemoine, Danish designer and artist Thomas Poulsen and Benjamin Reichen from Åbäke. He recently opened an atelier for students from all over the world to create projects there.

The world of design here in Venice is very much tied to the applied arts, or at least to a wide vision. I’m thinking of Extragarbo for example: a creative collective of performers and dancers who create spaces with their bodies and their artistic expression. Another example is Microclima, which has created a floating film festival that unites local foundations and galleries, as well as inhabitants of Venice such as fashion designer Rick Owens. Venice is also the birthplace of unique, independent spaces such as Spazio Punch on Giudecca and Associazione Spiazzi in Castello, which hosts and produces work for designers, stylists and artists who have a 360° understanding of a project - independent worlds, not very institutionalised, and very open to different approaches.

All the designers, architects and artists who live in Venice, and those who are only visiting, nourish the cultural interchange that makes Venice so unique.
I was born in Warsaw, and apart from the time I spent in London and Eindhoven, it is where I have lived my entire life. I love it, even though it’s not always easy. I see the beauty underneath the changes the city went through during the war—it was utterly destroyed and reborn. I guess that’s why there is a lingering spirit of resilience.

Warsaw has a long tradition of design which unfortunately was neglected. In the last decade however, Poland has rediscovered its design legacy and now celebrates it.

Since 1989, Poland has done considerable work redeveloping its economy and becoming a democratic country. It comes with a cost, and that is our obsession with things and the so-called «comforts» of life. We quickly replace man-made with industrially-made items - produced rapidly and affordably - but not necessarily meant to last. Instead, they were meant to break and be replaced with something new. This was convenient and profitable. It fuelled the economy but it saddens me as a Pole. Not long ago, we were a country of inventive and resourceful people who were not afraid to think differently. Fortunately, local designers are now going back to the roots of Polish design to create works that meet contemporary standards putting Poland – and especially Warsaw – back on the map.

After Brexit, I came back to Warsaw and set up a metal workshop and experimental studio. I wanted to work with Polish artisans and have the opportunity to hire a young generation of artists who are still in the process of shaping their identity. Polish design schools often have a very conservative approach to design, so it was vital for me to allow them to experiment and learn about the creative process inside a living organism - inside the studio. I keep a very close relationship with my artisans and wonder if they can make ends meet. The costs of being a sole trader and running your own company are very high. There are few spaces dedicated to workshops and those that are on the market soon will be demolished. Being a part of the emerging design community in Warsaw gives us the opportunity to support each other and collaborate on different projects.

For decades, Poland has been a hub for high-end furniture manufacturing. The country is the fourth largest furniture manufacturer in the world. From communist times until recently, the nation’s subcontractor-producers have made quality furniture for Western brands, with products for Fritz Hansen, Hay and Tesco among the country’s most significant design exports. Now there’s an exploration of contemporary Polish design culture. A decade ago Oskar Zieta and Tomek Rygalik were the only big names on the international stage. Today, there are dozens of talented Polish designers showing at prestigious fairs. Inside Poland, the Łódź, Gdynia and Kraków design festivals are developing their experiential exhibits. In addition, the popularity of underground cultural institutions presenting exhibitions, plays, music and out of the mainstream performances, has never been so large or significant.
“IN SOME RESPECTS, BAD DESIGN GOT US INTO THIS CRISIS AND I BELIEVE GOOD DESIGN WILL HELP GET US OUT AGAIN.”

RAVI NAIDOO
As we navigate the new landscape created by the global pandemic, Design Indaba founder Ravi Naidoo sets out his positive vision that puts design centre stage.

My belief that design can make the world better is not an abstract, intellectual idea – it comes from decades of first-hand experience. I founded Design Indaba just over 25 years ago, and the historical context of that moment in South Africa is critical. It was the dawn of democracy for our country, under the talismanic leadership of Nelson Mandela, and we were very consciously nation building. I knew from the outset that design was far more than decoration; it gave people the agency to reimagine their futures.

Our original slogan was ‘let’s create a better future by design’, which soon expanded to a better future by ‘creativity’ because it became impossible to corral the diverse groups of activities we were championing into traditional disciplinary borders. We became advocates of creativity of every stripe, from industrial and graphic design to filmmaking and coding. We were just seeking out work that could demonstrate the power of turning ideas into reality, and in the process we were looking to empower a generation of Africans to build their own future. That ability to imagine something and then make it a reality is a kind of superpower. >
This focus on ‘doing’ has also been a crucial part of my whole design ethos. Rather than being armchair activists, designers should not be afraid of smelling like an armpit. I see design as rolling up your sleeves and getting things done, and designers should have deeply held convictions at heart. For me, that has always been this vexing question of how to give dignity to the poorest of the poor. I never saw design as a way to add value to a luxury good, or as a handmaiden of consumption, but as a wonderfully transformative force in the everyday experience of real people.

There’s a real risk in the design world of becoming inward-looking, organising events where the cognoscenti talk amongst themselves, but the only way we can drive meaningful change is by embracing the diversity of the next generation on their own terms. Those of us in positions of some influence have a responsibility to make the tent a little bigger and invite new perspectives to contribute. It’s not about reaching definitive answers, but more asking the right questions that can help move us forwards.

I’ve got huge confidence that the next generation will find the tools needed to solve our most pressing problems. I remember being on the jury of the Dutch Design Awards a while ago and realising that the student work trumped the professional contributions across multiple categories. There’s a level of engagement and fearlessness that’s particularly apparent in this generation, combined with a willingness to take action. I also think there’s an understanding that we have too much stuff – we really create too many things – and that design should be focused on quality of life, rather than production and consumption.

That should be the ultimate pursuit for all designers – to make life a little better.

I’ve found that the best solutions come from having a plurality of voices across generations and demographics. That’s not to say that decades of experience isn’t enormously valuable, but simply acknowledges the fact that great ideas can come from anyone – a twenty-year-old or an eighty-year-old. By mixing establishment perspectives with challenger perspectives we can better question the true potential of design. Importantly, these expeditionary sorties into new ways of doing things can be a lot of fun too.

One of the most powerful ways I’ve seen this manifest in practice is through our Antenna partnership with Dutch Design Week, which scans the graduation projects of 200 universities around the world for ideas that can solve one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from no hunger to zero poverty to gender equality. I get goosebumps looking at the solutions that these young people are coming up with, and witnessing how they’re committing their talents to solving social challenges rather than just getting a job at a big brand.

By aligning the overall brief to something concrete, such as the SDGs, Antenna creates a new lens through which to assess work and make it more socially, environmentally and ethically-conscious. It means that we are not only responding to a client brief, but also acknowledging that our ultimate client is the planet Earth, that we’re all in service to Mother Nature and need to make our world a more sustainable place.
I’m pleased to say that the United Nations has taken a very active interest in this design-led approach, and we’re currently discussing ways to help put design back in its rightful place at the service of society. Rather than just trying to solve global issues with policy experts, climate scientists and economists.

"WHAT HAPPENS IF WE PUT DESIGNERS AT THE HEART OF THE SOLUTION? WHY DON’T WE BRING IN THE CREATIVE ARMY?"

I firmly believe that the cavalry’s here already, waiting in the wings, but they just haven’t been invited into many of these forums.

In some respects, bad design got us into this crisis and I believe good design will help get us out again. designindaba.com
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