



NOT SPLITTING HAIRS: Nathan Reddy and Dai Fujiwara

I watched local creative-design heavyweight Nathan Reddy beat Dai Fujiwara of Issey Miyake in blackjack



SOFT SPOT: Ravi Naidoo and Helen Zille Pictures: AMBROSE PETERS

World's design dynamos add colour to indaba

TAKE the world's most famous chef, mix in one of its most powerful trend spotters and add the head of one of the most influential fashion houses, and you get an idea about the sort of design demigods at this year's Design Indaba conference and expo in Cape Town.

It is the brainchild of Ravi Naidoo and, since 1995, has become one of the world's leading design events — it even landed the tag “best conference in the world” a few years ago.

This year, dynamo Ravi's impressive line-up included Ferran Adrià, whose restaurant in Spain, El Bulli, is known as the best restaurant in the world. It is open only six months of the year, because the rest of the time Ferran and his team perfect innovative recipes like ones using foamed beetroot to “provoke, surprise and delight the diner”. Also there was trend maven Li Edekoort, who is paid a fortune to tell big corporations which trends will help them to make oodles of dough (I wonder if she ‘saw’ the recession?).

Ravi and his hard-working gang decided to use a local icon, the Blue Train, to whisk our party of 80 to Tulbagh and back as we were served a four-course meal and treated to massages and games of blackjack.

So there we were at the station being welcomed by Cape Town mayor Helen Zille, who Ravi announced as the recently anointed “world's best mayor”. She called Ravi “an institution”.

Sadly, the mayor didn't come along for the ride, so I couldn't ask her take on COPE's new leader, the Rev Mvume Dandala.

At the bar, swilling a refreshing cocktail, I met Fiona Raby of British outfit Dunne & Raby. She and partner Anthony are designers who work with technicians to make their work more user-friendly.

I also had drinks with the pretty-in-tangerine marketing manager of Absa's sponsorship wing, Desiree Pooe, who you'll not see dead in pink (something to do with her mom tying her hair in pink ribbons).

I watched local creative-design heavyweight Nathan Reddy beat that powerful designer, Dai Fujiwara of Issey Miyake, in blackjack, and chatted about advertising with Mohit Javal and V Sunil from agency Wieden and Kennedy's Delhi offices.

With *Slumdog Millionaire* big news at the moment, we talked about the book, *Q&A*, which had inspired the Oscar-winning movie. It was written by the Indian deputy high commissioner to South Africa, Vikas Swarup.

V told me it is based on an interesting phenomenon called “holes in the wall”, which are personal computers with high-speed Internet connections that are placed in the walls of slums to teach computer literacy to poor kids.

Oh, and I have to mention something about possibly the conference's most unusual guest: if you spotted a Japanese man wearing a powder-blue boiler suit in Cape Town recently, it's probably Nobumichi Tosa, an artist who invents “nonsense machines” such as a fish-powered tractor, a pistol-grip ventriloquist doll, and musical arrows that are propelled off the roof of a car. — CJ

