

The Wonders of Indaba

On dead ducks and Beckham's left shoe

Amongst the gazillions of conferences taking place across the globe on every subject under the sun, there are not all that many that offer insightful information in an atmosphere of intelligence and good humour. This year's gathering of clever minds and spirited characters threw up some succulent snippets to chew on, from presentations involving a dead duck to the ins and outs of a recycling plant, accompanied by an anecdote about Beckham's sneakers and grated cheese.

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Sissel Tolaas presenting her smell lab of ideas during the Indaba conference. (top right)

Porky Hefer's designed dog ball with human characteristics... (above right) © Porky Hefer

Facing page, clockwise: Porky Hefer's lecture on design and 'no one is listening'...

Noma chef René Redzepi on how to kill a duck.

Indaba front man Ravi Naidoo in good company with the guys from Massive Attack in the Westcape Winelands.

Hans Ulrich Obrist at the world's most southern tip, on the Art of Curating.

Design talks can be as dull as dishwater for people with delicate sensibilities. Not so the Indaba conference, an annual three-day event located on Africa's most southern tip, where talking heads from all areas of the creative industry make a one-hour-wonder presence on-stage - from a Michelin star chef to a favela starchitect - all challenged to bring an engaged narrative on and about design and life, personal stories balanced between thoughts and doubts, sometimes resulting in forward-thinking projects or innovative problem-solving.

Cross-disciplinary thinking

Now 17 years since its inception, the speaker line-up of the 2012 edition shared various design proposals and cross-disciplinary thinkings and doings - from the worlds of industrial and graphic design, architecture and urbanism, music and fashion, publishing and advertising, film and broadcasting, crafts and industrial manufacturing, visual and performing arts, and fine wining and dining - with an equally varied audience, ranging from designers and other creatives to those involved in business and education. As usual, the 'best of the best' were the speakers who shared

their own experiences, sauced up with a firm dose of humour and self-relativity.

Dead duck

Among those who sharpened our appetite (on an empty stomach) were Danish wonderboys René Redzepi and Bjarke Ingels. Redzepi, chef/owner of Noma restaurant, brought onto the stage a strung-up dead white duck, underpinning his deviation-from-the-norm methodology as a #1 savage in the kitchen, while little BIG man Ingels presented an overview of his latest architectural adventures, from a puffing recycling power plant with extended ski facilities, to a multicultural, embedded 'red square' in one of Copenhagen's most frictional neighbourhoods.

Smells like...

Meanwhile, Berlin-based Sissel Tolaas, olfactory artist and professional blonde, explained the missing link between Beckham's sneakers and a freshly grated cheese for the London Olympics' business lounges, the same city in which landscape architect Dan Pearson is dreaming-up new gardens for a slope somewhere in Japan. South America's 'social case' architect,

Alfredo Brillembourg from Urban Think Tank, came all the way from Caracas to talk passionately about the ongoing projects in the favelas, from his vertical metro system to a metronomically built youth music centre, while the a-star-is-born designer-slash-entertainer Porky Hefer (sic) merely drove his Landrover three blocks from Oranjezicht to the Convention Centre to give the local crowd a lesson in the authenticity and honesty of the (professional) self. And then there was, last but not least, the ubiquitous, indefatigable Hans Ulrich Obrist, talking at a speed of 240 words per minute on the subject of art & curating. There are certain certainties... #

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