



News - The Arts

State of design nation on show for the world to see

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951 words

2 July 2010

[The Age](#)

AGEE

First

15

English

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The State of Design Festival fosters experiments and policy change, writes Ray Edgar.

IN SHANGHAI, a two-wheel vehicle developed in collaboration with Victorian designers is ferrying guests around the Expo site. In Germany, cars that run on hydrogen and are covered in zip-up fabric are being designed. In Melbourne, bicycles are making a comeback.

Each of these pioneering examples of personal mobility will be discussed at this year's State of Design festival, in either exhibition form or forum. It's a festival that also demonstrates that design thinking isn't just about products. Design involves everything from buildings to bike lanes, office environments to public spaces.

"Change by Design", the festival's theme, comes across as a pre-emptive strike in policy change. The organisers, creative director Lou Weis and curator Kate Rhodes, have mustered speakers and workshops that tackle everything from fixing Punt Road congestion to showing kids how to make a sustainable garden.

"We've got 10 days to show design can make the world better by showcasing its benefits, through experimentation, by asking questions, and setting out propositions," says Rhodes. "Change is inevitable, let's make it happen in a sustainable way."

Over the festival's 10 days, more than 75 activities are on offer to the general public. Here are just a few.

Game, set, match

From transport to sport, "Matchpoint Melbourne" takes the city's reputation for major sporting events and applies it to more grassroots activities and less grandiose locations. Thinking lawn bowls for St Kilda hipsters? A little too sedate. Matchpoint takes to the streets, colonising public space and regearing popular activities: laneway cricket, underpass go-kart racing and bicycle polo are the new urban gaming. The organisers believe a celebration of the small can only reinforce tourism, while simultaneously engaging more people.

Pedal power

Transport is a key theme of the festival. Denmark's "bicycle ambassador", Mikael Colville-Andersen, pedals into town to present his credentials at a keynote address, "Four Goals for Promoting Urban Cycling".

Aside from easing traffic arteries and public transport infrastructure, the Danes believe a lifestyle change based on a bicycle can also lead to decongestion of human arteries. Part of the awareness campaign hinges on reminding people it's not just a Lycra workout or a childish phase one leaves behind. To cope with the expected hubbub and avoid international incidents, bicycle valet parking is being offered to the first 250 cyclists.

While it sounds eccentric, valet parking seems just as important as the forum itself. Popular in both the US and Europe, valet parking has solved the problems of bike theft, parking, and finding a shower in the city. For Melbourne's festival, however, only the first two benefits will be offered.

The added bonus will be the spectacle of cyclists flaunting their customised rides in the valet area.

For a festival so keen to promote the advantages of cycling, it's surprising to see Chris Bangle as its other keynote speaker. As [BMW](#) designer director, Bangle was perhaps the most high-profile car designer in the world. Unafraid to change the middle-of-the-road styling of the prestige vehicle, Bangle sculpted its body so radically that an online campaign was waged to stop him "ruining" the car. Yet many carmakers came to emulate the style. After 16 years with [BMW](#), the design maverick has an independent consultancy. During his talks in Bendigo and, fittingly, at [BMW](#) Edge, Bangle will discuss the future of personal mobility and, no doubt, draw on his experiences at [BMW](#), including experiments with fabric covered cars and alternate fuels like hydrogen.

Apart from international guest spots, Victorian ingenuity is celebrated in the exhibition, "175 years of Design". Curator Ian Wong has selected 40 examples of Victorian design excellence including many illustrating the theme of personal transport. The Malvern star bicycle, the Rosebank bicycle helmet, and the futuristic Holden EN-V, which appeared at this year's Shanghai Expo, are all represented. But we won't be able to kick the tyres, as none of the physical objects will be on display.

Retail therapy

While Melbourne's lavish retail interiors are celebrated in two exhibitions — "Curating Desire" and "New Dialogues for Retail Environments" - perhaps the best retail experience during the festival is Design Made Trade at the Royal Exhibition Building.

Unlike the usual patchwork of trade fair displays where individual companies show off their wares, this cohesive display in recycled cardboard stalls reflects the sustainability theme. This year a 25-metre-high giant cardboard "Bucky ball" dome features, along with work from some of the state's best makers of jewellery, furniture and print materials.

The tributes flow as six designers - including Sue Carr and Buro North's Soren Luckins - select six of their favourite designs and explain their appeal.

Office politics

Fearlessly risking being dubbed the David Brent of design, ABC Radio's Alan Saunders weighs in with "The Office", an expert panel discussion contemplating how much better office design can be. Perhaps he'll bring his guitar.

Pins and needles

Eco-acupuncture sounds like something David Brent from The Office might say.

But it's a description used by VEIL (the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab) for their Broadmeadows 2032 proposal. The neglected northern suburb receives a sustainable makeover - through Eco-acupuncture - in which the various strands of design unite. Bike paths and landscapes are redesigned, factories refitted, and communications technology re-imagined.

It's here that the hopes of "change by design" reach their apotheosis.

State of Design Festival, July 14-25, various locations; stateofdesign.com.au

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