



FROM THE EDITOR

EXPANDING DESIGN IN A SHRINKING WORLD

What isn't international in 2007 when it comes to design? Regional is the exception to the rule now, or at least it seems that way. What's your experience?

I've always been fascinated by things from other cultures. I remember once as a child when going with my parents to see relatives off on a Caribbean cruise, I became fascinated with the European electrical outlets in their cabin, which looked totally different from what I was used to. (In those days, guests were allowed onboard prior to sailing.) It really opened my eyes, changing my view about things as simple as outlets from other lands. Did you ever have such an experience?

Growing up in Miami, where many of my friends were from Latin America and the Caribbean, I felt the world around me was merging into one international soup of sounds, languages, cuisines, perspectives and images. All these cultures expressed design in different ways—in their fashion choices, in the design of their homes, even in their mannerisms and lifestyles. Such a diverse community really increased my awareness about how others live differently. It also helped me realize how understanding differences gives us a broader perspective on life and how we can design for many cultural expectations and desires, rather than just our own.

What I find amazing today is that international aspects of design and innovation are the norm. This change occurred slowly, but without hesitation, and, during the past decade or so, has seeped into our entire existence. Increasingly, design solutions are meant for a global audience, and more designs than ever are expected to be global successes. Products are more global than not.

But there are exceptions. Regional products still exist, and, especially for the largest markets, they may continue to exist for a long time. There do seem to be some qualities that are unique to certain regions, which may always require their own subset of innovative solutions. An example, perhaps, is the North American predilection for large-scale products, such as the SUV phenomenon, and the prospect that big means strength, quality and longevity.

There is something about this scale that is regional, not truly global. Designers from opposite sides of the world may have a hard time understanding why North Americans love bigger. Nonetheless, the ability to design and succeed for this market requires an on-the-ground insight and partnership that makes the endeavor inherently global.

Western designers have a similarly difficult time understanding cultural drivers at work in other parts of the globe. For instance, the use of shiny chrome trim and complex forms on some Asian cell phones. We think we know what makes a successful design, then we see a cell phone that does not meet our idea of great design but has sold 10 million units. How do we factor in global design issues with regional differences? When is a design able to be global, and when can it not be all things to all people? Is that even a fair question to ask? And who decides what that answer is anyway?

A speaker at a conference recently projected that nearly all designers in the developed world would soon be replaced with designers in the developing world, that man-

Innovation Advisory Council

IDSA is proud to announce the formation of the *Innovation Advisory Council* which, in conjunction with Executive Editor **Gregg Davis, IDSA**, and the staff, will guide the future of the publication.

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Correction

The correct web address for the Targa designed by Mixer and featured in the Spring 2007 issue is www.mixergroup.com.

ufacturers in the lowest-cost labor markets would soon be solely responsible for product development and doing it better than anyone else. I take exception to this view.

It is clear that teaming on a global scale may never disappear. Teaming among designers, researchers, marketers, manufacturing, distribution, sales, technology, advertising and all the other disciplines required to give life to new things will be needed. Partnership is the foundation of global business, and design lives at its heart. It simply opens up our sandbox to a grander scale—it doesn't take it away.

Finding common ground for great design success has become big business. And it also takes a lot of time and effort to understand what that sweet spot needs to be. Habits and routines are different, governmental support of technology dictates varying ground rules for what can be done, and cultures embrace change in different ways and at different speeds. People approach the future from different starting points and with different prisms.

Gathering information about how people may use your design in far-off locales has emerged into a well-developed, as well as a critical, science. This issue includes articles that look at the dynamics of researching cultural perspectives and the lifestyle impacts on our work. I hope they provide for some provocative and intriguing reading.

Today, having a global network of connections is fundamental to doing business in design. When working in different cultures, local contacts can be helpful in so many areas: by providing resources for research facilities and for ways to study people and interact and observe them. In addition, collaboration with our counterparts who live and think in the culture is crucial. Nothing can replace the need to observe a culture and see how it lives, breathes and works. We need to be in it, absorb it, sense it and feel it. Then we can design as if we are a part of it. Research that brings design into the fold for these insights is the research that provides for true innovation.

What are your thoughts about how international design issues are affecting innovation and design? Do you see the impact of globalization in similar ways? Or do these issues represent only a portion of the market that is affected by globalization? Is the world moving toward a single mega-market in the long term? We'd like to know your thoughts about these issues. Drop us a line at innovation@idsa.org and tell us how you are being affected by globalization.

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