

Co-creating the co-design future

 By Leigh Andrews

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If you've ever wondered how a culture of open design can lead to a better life for all, the annual Open Design Cape Town programme is for you. Two of this year's Talk 100 speakers share their views below.

There's a reason many dub Cape Town the [next design mecca](#). The fourth iteration of the mainly free [Open Design](#) Cape Town was testament to this, a week-plus collaborative platform of openly sharing design applications as part of a social design workshop experience.



Mazzeo and Baird

Talk 100 was part of this, dubbed as a series of lunchtime talks open to everyone interested in bringing positive change to their communities, cities and working environments. Held as part of Open Design week 2016 from 10 to 21 August, two of those Talk 100 speakers were India Baird of Rock Girl, part of the Women in Transformation track; and Spanish designer Arianna Mazzeo, part of the Women in Design track.

I chatted to Baird and Mazzeo about the state of women in transformation, women in design, and working together to amplify those creative design outcomes...

Baird's Rock Girl is aimed at transforming the lives of young women across the Cape Flats in particular as well as across South Africa. In Baird's talk, she elaborated on the fact that Rock Girl was inspired by a group of girls who wanted to create

a beautiful, safe space in their community. In the six years since then, Rock Girl has installed 56 Safe Space public benches around the Cape Town city centre as well as in Johannesburg, and has trained over 400 girls to be social justice entrepreneurs, using journalism, radio, design, and travel to create safe spaces for girls, and for everyone else. Last year, after the girls took two road trips to the Eastern and Northern Cape, the girls decided to also launch BRAVE. This is a social justice enterprise, promoting and selling products designed by the Rock Girls that offers employment, training, and fantastic girl-designed products.

She touched on this in her Plascon Trend Talk 2012:

Mazzeo then provided global perspective. Currently head of research and professor of Creative Arts in the Bath Spa UK University-Esart Campus, she is also Design and Innovation professor of Elisava Design School and coordinated the first European Open Design School based on the open culture values, collaboration and digital fabrication, providing new emerging business models for open innovation research. She spoke at Open Design Cape Town on the topic of co-creating a new cultural mindset, where we learn and teach to co-design in a different way to improve life and give opportunities for all.

On the importance of transformation in design then, particularly in South Africa, Mazzeo shared that: “Design is social and is transformative per se, and in Africa more than in other places due to people’s human-centred and community behaviour.” Here, she says, it’s a case of people first, then social innovation and sustainability as a matter of survival and “a value shared into the everyday.” So she feels design is a strategy Africans can put in action and that the rest of the world has lots to learn from this.

Future generation design considerations

While she doesn’t feel male or female designers are better than the other, Baird does believe that female designers focus more on the practicality of their products and how they’ll be used on a daily basis, adding that women also tend to be more collaborative, working more closely with their colleagues and peers.

Mazzeo feels the ‘female approach’ to design and how it differs from a male approach is merely a cultural and social construction and that the future generation will be looking for new freedom and values to share and build in order to overcome prejudices and stereotypes such as this. She foresees a new education scenario, led by design as a transformative process for a new society.

The Open Design/Open Culture platform belongs to everyone, says Mazzeo. It’s a new framework to create opportunities and the spirit of entrepreneurship required to foster a new format of innovation through design and design for all.

Baird agrees that design must “meet the needs of everyone, not just a few elite souls.” She loves watching young people who’ve not had first-hand experience with design light up when given the chance to create something. She says, “Everyone is a creator and designer, but many people often don’t have the exposure to take their ideas forward.”

Hopefully Open Design has opened a few of those minds to the possibilities. [Click here](#) for more on Arianna’s UNESCO talk on inclusion by mobile and find out more about Open Culture below.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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