

Beyond the conference

 By Leigh Andrews

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In this exclusive interview, [Design Indaba](#)'s Ravi Naidoo tells us why he sees himself as a tortoise (not a hare) and looks into his crystal ball to explain how Design Indaba hopes to grow its satellite projects like Emerging Creatives, [MBOISA](#) (Most Beautiful Object In SA) and what the Design Indaba future holds...

With so much of what he does centred around creativity, passion and betterment, it's little wonder that Naidoo most enjoys work that has a sense of purpose and is dedicated towards impact. It's a long-term impact at that because if you want to shift the behaviour and consciousness, it's not a 'just add water' form of instant gratification; it's something that takes a generation. So, if it's a tortoise versus a hare race, in this case Naidoo is the persistent tortoise.



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Luckily he's an optimistic tortoise, and has made it the mission of [Design Indaba](#) 2016 to explore new models to galvanise 5,000-odd South African indie creative businesses by creating a digital platform that gives them clout and combined power. With design festivals a common fixture around the world, Design Indaba's sense of purpose and mission beyond the event is its differentiating factor...

1. How does Design Indaba intend growing its satellite projects?

Naidoo: Emerging Creatives is one of our projects we're most proud of. We want to redouble our efforts in this regard and have just made a pitch to corral a grand gathering of every single emerging creative that have ever debuted in one composite exhibition. We are giving it more attention than ever as our attitude towards emerging creatives is not just about the exhibition – it's about a through-the-year kind of commitment through seminars, workshops and facilitating scholarships. It's really an institutional commitment from [Design Indaba](#) to create a launchpad for young creatives. Taking that further, we want to be the pre-eminent platform in Africa for the African creative, and we're working extremely hard with that, even in talks with a massive international publisher to produce the definitive coffee table book on where African design is right now.

Then, taking [MBOISA](#) further, it is such an interesting thing as some parts of design can be reasonably esoteric, involving coding or interaction design. But it's not just a B2B endeavour; we want to talk to the creative class, across all economic classes in order to infect as many people with the virus of creativity as possible.

Asking people in the public eye what to them is the most beautiful object in the country is provocative as some people think

the beauty is in its impact, others think it's in its service, or shape, or making or process. Beauty means so many different things to different people, and that in and of itself is a thought- and conversation-starter.

2. Explain the thinking behind Design Indaba's 'Media Campaign for South African Creatives' and the intended outcome.

Naidoo: While our motivation is always to probe the creative industry, when we sold out in 2004 we asked ourselves why we were using a loudhailer to announce [Design Indaba](#). Instead, we decided to take that collateral and donate it to the creative community.

With the rise of retail selling space available for South African designers, like Cape Town's Woodstock Exchange, The Biscuit Mill, the Watershed, Bree street, or Johannesburg's Newtown Precinct, Maboneng and Kramerville, we're driving people to them. That's why Emerging Creatives is at the V&A Waterfront's Watershed. Instead of creating a hub, we're maintaining more of a hub-and-spoke mechanism, and using the spokes to drive people to where the designers exist in these amazing spaces.

We've also donated R30m of our ad campaign globally, so ads will be appearing in Japan, New York, London and Milan. With the current exchange rate, that's something very few South African creatives would ever be able to afford.

3. That's for sure. Give us a teaser of what to expect from another highlight, the FilmFest.

Naidoo: It's always about premieres. More than that, we've always been conscious of the changing times, and because of technology and the ability of people to tell their stories in a more efficient way, as you can have a camera and a laptop and make a movie. That's why the festival is all about the creative process, and we're interested in all components of creativity from cuisine to fashion design to architecture to music. It's also a wonderful, accessible, 'non-academic' option for people who may not want a high-browed presentation and cannot commit to a full day or three out at the conference, as many of the movies feature Design Indaba alumni and current speakers.

With a beer and a bag of popcorn, it's a great night out that perfectly complements the option of spending three days with us in an immersive theatrical experience at the conference.

4. Time to gaze into that crystal ball and tell us what the future holds for Design Indaba.

Naidoo: Lots. Our programme is constantly evolving – we're doing a book project on African design because we realise that the story needs to be told properly. We're doing it as a joint venture with Gestalten in Berlin. We are making the most amazing documentary on one of our pre-eminent artists, [William Kentridge](#), for film festivals around the world. We find different media and different platforms in order to expand the Design Indaba story. Those are just two things right now that are top of mind.

There'll be lots more on top of ***your mind*** after [Design Indaba](#). [Click here](#) for more on the Film Fest and get your Design Indaba fix from the [special section](#) on Bizcommunity, follow the activity on their [Twitter handle](#) and watch for our coverage of this year's three-day conference...

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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