

Alternative creativity at its best

 By Leigh Andrews

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In the two decades Ravi Naidoo's been behind bringing some of the best local design and international creative speakers to our shores, he's seen trends rise, fall and resurge. In this exclusive interview, Naidoo lets us in on his personal inspiration, and what he's most looking forward to from [Design Indaba](#) 2016, which kicks off today!

Known as the creativity booster of SA design, Ravi Naidoo is an inspiration to many. But he himself draws new inspiration constantly. He particularly likes the brave band of creators, makers and doers who are not doing the kind of thing which the previous generation did.

He's also inspired by the prevailing startup culture and its ability to take people with amazing academic credentials going into social entrepreneurship and trying to devise new models for socio-economic impact. An example of this is free translation engine [DuoLingo](#), which lets you test phrases as you learn and translate bodies of work, which in turn boosts consciousness of others' culture and languages.



It's this exact form of 'alternative creativity' model that Naidoo taps into with [Design Indaba](#).

But is it all about passion for design, passion for changing the world, making better use of our individual creativity? It's all of this. Let's call it a hybrid powered by collaboration, especially when it comes to unpacking Naidoo's best moments at [Design Indaba](#) past and present...

1. Where do your personal responsibilities lie when curating the conference and the year-long agenda of Design Indaba.

Naidoo: My primary agenda is to advance this idea that we can create a better future by design. And so, everything resonates with that simple thought. We select people who have been reformers and pioneers, and people who have affected change, and people that speak. The responsibility lies in finding people that actually match that mission of 'a better world through creativity' as well as creating a better future by design. It's a call to action that circumscribes the kind of person hybrid creatives we look for, like songstress, pop-diva Imogen Heap. When not singing like a goddess, she's experimenting and investigating with coders how to create special alternative digital music gloves, and a platform that will find a more equitable way for the distribution of music. It's this kind of 'hybridity' we want to advance.

[Click here](#) for more on this year's change-making conference speakers and watch Heap explain her 'musical gloves' in the video embedded below:

2. What are you looking forward to from this year's Design Indaba?

Naidoo: I look forward to everything! We pay such crazy attention to detail in all that we do that not a single speaker is a free pass, absolutely every single one is sought out and chosen. When it comes to the FilmFest, every single movie is a premiere in Africa, and every youngster that has been chosen for Emerging Creatives is the best of their class in the country this year. So I have no favourites, I love it all equally.

The big thing is 'hope', especially in putting on a particular programme that we hope falls on fertile ground and sprouts a whole host of other activities and projects as we see Design Indaba as a launch pad or catalyst. We provide the catalyst, and we hope that people take it on and that they use the inspiration and ideas to good effect after Design Indaba.

3. What can we expect from this year's conference? Is there a specific focus for it that you have in mind?

Naidoo: It really is about 'Design Indaba'. With the evolution of the conference, the **sensorial aspect** to it has grown. We really want to make it a beautiful, goosebump-y experience, and we've asked all of our speakers to really push the stall out. Some of them are interacting around kinetic sculptures, some of their presentations morph into a concert, and yet others are doing the presentation in the form of a play. So the experience is not going to be led from the podium. They're all encouraged to give it more energy and reimagine the creative ways of presentation as we really invest in the production values of these presentations.

4. What do you see for 2016, beyond the conference?

Naidoo: More and more ways of seeking relevance, particularly as an intellectual platform for the benefit of improving SA companies' service offerings and multinationals abroad alike. We aim to create the kind of agency that actually is not about the skill pool of the people in our office, but which is also tapping into the 600-odd Design Indaba speakers from all around the world and telling companies and multinationals to use the gene pool we've created and the thought leaders we've curated over the last 20 years.

That's going to be a key part of our work as we come from an agency heritage, so this is part of us utilising our intellectual resource that we have in all these amazing people and looking for ways and means to find residual value in these relationships.

There'll be relationship-building aplenty with all the design thinking floating around after [Design Indaba](#) 2016, which kicks off at the Artscape in Cape Town today. Be sure to get your Design Indaba fix from the [special section](#) on Bizcommunity, follow the activity on their [Twitter handle](#) and watch for Bizcommunity's tweets and coverage of this year's three-day conference.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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