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DESIGN FOR CHANGE

20 VOICES TO CELEBRATE 20 YEARS

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INTRODUCTION

Facing great uncertainties and numerous critical issues such as the climate crisis, how can design be a force for good and a catalyst for change?

Posed to 20 design leaders and field experts, the above question drew responses that inevitably centered on an all-important subject: the climate crisis. In their own words, and based on their respective fields of expertise in architecture, design, technology, hospitality, and arts and culture, the leaders interviewed acknowledge the future beyond the pandemic, and how they plan to approach building a better, more sustainable world.

In tribute to the 20th anniversary of Business of Design Week (BODW), Asia's premier event for innovation, design, and brands held annually in Hong Kong, this report features voices from past and recent speakers and moderators of the event, who come from various cities and countries that have partnered with BODW, including the Netherlands, BODW's Strategic Partner for 2022-2023.

This trend report is produced by **CatchOn, a Finn Partners Company**, in partnership with **Business of Design Week**.

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LI EDELKOORT

TREND FORECASTER, TREND UNION, FRANCE



In response to the uncertain times we're living through, in 2020 I co-founded the World Hope Forum. Under the leadership of ambassadors chosen in participating countries, the World Hope Forum brings together creatives that are examples to live by; they share stories of sustainable practice, retail reinvention and innovative ideas that all sprout from the spring of hope.

We can start up from scratch and build new systems where social altruism outweighs the ego, where morals and values overrule shareholder profits, and where collaboration and cooperation prevail to give more people equal opportunities. We have no choice but to join forces and stand together. New pacts need to be forged between fibre farmers, yarn makers, textile industries and fashion houses, between raw material producers, independent designers and their craftspeople.

Contemporary creatives are already reconsidering the amount of items they want to produce, recalibrating their assortment in line with precisely calculated demand. Fashion is one industry that has the unique opportunity to roll back production, especially in the face of a global energy crisis. Success in the future will be redefined on a smaller scale, handcrafted in ateliers, keeping a privileged connection with collectors and clients alike. Whole chains need to be integrated, stimulated by federal funds, finding a shared interest and income from this rebirth in business. The economy of hope has the potential to transform society from within.

CHI WING LO

FOUNDER, DIMENSIONE
CHI WING LO, ITALY

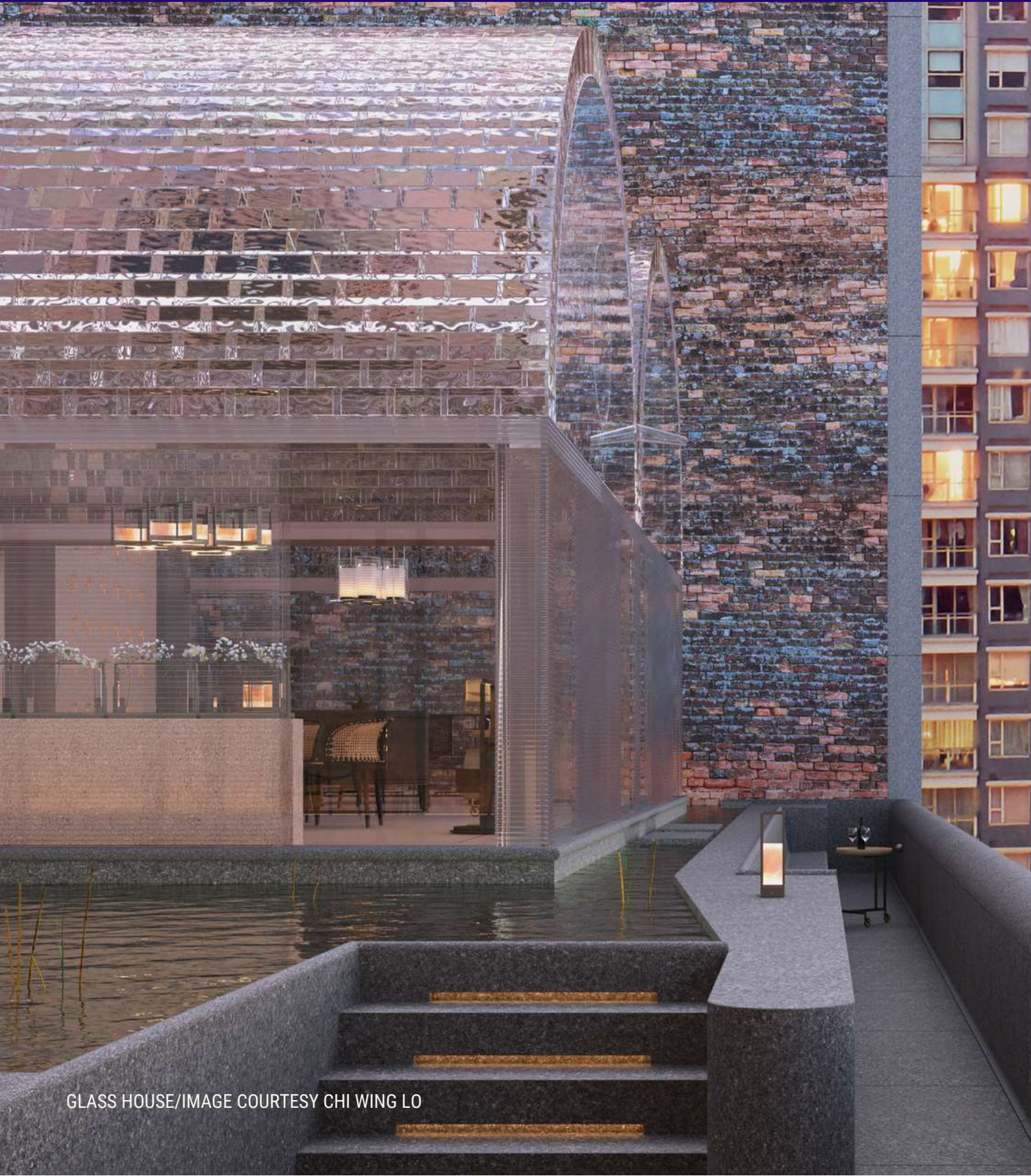


Design is by and large a discipline to serve, to help mostly, for the lack of a better word, generating profit. To be economically viable, designers survive on dreaming other people's "dreams" in order to secure the next commission and stay noticeable between the flashes of design news.

We are living in a materialistic world in which the conventional wisdom tells us that more is better, new is better, and cheap is better. Because they are cheap, we have a greater propensity to buy even if we do not really need them. How often we are lured to buy trashes and throw them away as what they are, trashes. We litter everywhere, in obeying the law of "economic well-being." We are hopelessly driven into this cycle of production and consumption, which must not cease or be interrupted, in order to survive in a collective society.

Paradoxically, one of the rising hurdles for sustainability is design itself. If design is purely for the sake of being different, for the sake of being colourful or for the pleasure to shock; if design is for a joke, a trick, or a shallow motif; if design is not for the love of humanity, if it does not illuminate our eye nor does it nourish our soul, then we shall never design.

“PARADOXICALLY, ONE OF THE RISING HURDLES
FOR SUSTAINABILITY IS DESIGN ITSELF.”
- CHI WING LO



BILL BENSLEY

FOUNDER AND CREATIVE
DIRECTOR, BENSLEY, THAILAND



Design can be a force for good by simply having a purpose - I no longer work on projects where the goal is simply to put heads on beds... we take on projects with meaning, be it environmental, social or educational.

The Shinta Mani Hotels in Cambodia - and soon Nepal! - are a great example of this. A percentage of each guest stay goes back to the Shinta Mani Foundation and funds everything from wells and clean drinking water to schools, building homes for people in need, healthcare and dentistry, micro loans for small businesses, a seed sharing program to help people grow better food, and our free hospitality school to train Cambodians in luxury hospitality. Very few of our guests actually realize this! And beyond that, Shinta Mani Wild was created with the sole purpose of protecting the forest. Design should be a conduit for helping each other and the planet. We need to build less, build smart with cleaner, more sustainable materials, (renovating rather than destroying) and using guidelines such as my white paper on sustainability (SSS) if we are to do our bit to help the planet.



ROSSANA HU

CO-FOUNDER, NERI&HU,
MAINLAND CHINA

Urgency, while it often means a pressing necessity related to time, also points to the critical urgency as it relates to importance, longevity, and magnitude. We have to change the discipline from within—education, theory, practice, technology, culture, and media. Our vision must look beyond the immediate local, city, nation, and towards an expanded spectrum of a globalized hybridity that is becoming the new identity norm.

We should be working alongside engineers and scientists to offer design expertise to augment the technological breakthroughs. Our projects should focus on the collective public, the people; it matters not who is signing the check or the planning approval, but the architect's responsibility is to the constituents of the place. We must connect a disciplinary expertise of place-making to the pressing matters of common concern, while crossing the traditional divides that separate the east and west, the them and us, the old and new, and the familiar and estranged.

We should be crafting a new “modern” to include a discursive “other,” so we are equipped to create with different voices, marginalized pasts and diverse cultural stakeholders.

“WE HAVE TO CHANGE THE DISCIPLINE FROM WITHIN —
EDUCATION, THEORY, PRACTICE, TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE, AND
MEDIA.” - ROSSANA HU



BEN VAN BERKEL

FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL
ARCHITECT, UNSTUDIO,
THE NETHERLANDS



Design can only be a catalyst for change if it leads by example, for the benefit of both people and the planet. Design - from products, to buildings, to cities - has the capacity to influence choices, opinions and behaviours; to 'nudge' these in more sustainable and equitable directions. **It is therefore essential that sustainable, circular and inclusive solutions form part of the design process right from the outset, and in an integral way.** A balance has to be found early on that offers the best results for sustainable environments and healthy communities. A bottom-up approach to planning and design also plays a large role in creating a more equitable future. We can no longer make assumptions about what we think people need from their built environment. They need to have agency; a voice and opportunities for constructive input that informs the design of the environments and buildings that they will inhabit.

CHRIS VAN DUIJN

PARTNER, OMA ASIA, HONG KONG



It is true that the number of crises in the world seems to have reached a new level. Many of these crises are interrelated, such as climate change, the energy crisis, the pressure on energy transition, the recent geopolitical tension and escalation, mass immigration, the new nuclear threat, and so on. The intensity of all these crises is intimidating and overwhelming, yet I am convinced that if we act together, a change of course is possible.

I think that we are looking at the convulsions of the end of an era, and we are on the way to a global redistribution of priorities, values and power led by a new generation. Such changes will take time and require the solving of a lot of smaller problems in many industries at all levels. We as designers are required to create and contribute to such solutions. **For changes to happen, it is fundamental to better understand each other, to take each other seriously and to collaborate. To be able to understand the big picture and to translate it into local and practical proposals are essential.** This is what we are trying to bring into practice in our daily work as an international office.



EDWIN KEH

CEO, HONG KONG RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF
TEXTILES & APPAREL (HKRITA), HONG KONG

The new normal we are now in is full of turbulence and uncertainty. How we dealt with challenges and issues in the past may not get us the results we need in the future. So we have to think of new ways to solve new problems. A new creative opportunity now presents itself to us. A starting place maybe to engage and listen to more stakeholders to understand their desires and aspirations for a better future. **We should especially consider the views of the young, the underrepresented, and the marginalized. What is most urgent? What is most important?** Future design process should take these into consideration. By listening to the voices of many, we can then work together to design a more sustainable, equitable, and desirable future for all.

TONG HUIMING

PROFESSOR, GUANGZHOU ACADEMY OF THE ARTS,
MAINLAND CHINA



Empty talking misleads the country, real doing work benefit the land. Design is a creative applied discipline that can efficiently integrate technology and business, so designers can only be based on the industry they are in, deeply understand what the most critical problems are currently facing, and use design thinking to propose practical and optimal solutions, with promote their implementation into real products that truly value for public use. That's the way of good design.

“BY LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF MANY, WE CAN THEN WORK TOGETHER TO DESIGN A MORE SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE, AND DESIRABLE FUTURE FOR ALL.” - EDWIN KEH



IMAGE COURTESY OF EDWIN KEH/HKRITA



MARISA YIU

ARCHITECT & FOUNDING PARTNER,
ESKYIU; CO-FOUNDER,
DESIGN TRUST, HONG KONG

'Design' is often misunderstood as being only for the privileged, seen as an embellishment or as a service, or as a luxury product connected with the commercial sector. 'Design' is, however, very much part of our everyday. We see the need for better and ergonomically well-designed public spaces. We are inspired by how the process of designing new technologies can reduce waste and impact on our environment. We are intrigued by design scholars who research the history of urban form to allow us to better understand the rapid needs of the future of cities. The processes required to achieve 'good', positive design outcomes require rigorous methods, insightful design thinking and unique approaches. Through these projects, we envision that a richer dialogue could be fostered; one in which a culture of experimentation, new ideas and innovative possibilities can build a stronger future.

MICHELE DE LUCCHI

FOUNDER, AMDL CIRCLE, ITALY



Nothing exists without “the rest.” We should be investing our energies in this concept if we want to do something to save this humanity of ours, or at least if we want to change the way we inhabit the planet. My studio AMDL CIRCLE and I are strongly convinced that we should build walls to unite, not to divide, bringing people closer, fostering communities by projecting an idea of how the future can look. **We are connected at all levels, nothing happens in isolation, just as nothing will prevent each of us from disappearing if the human species becomes extinct.** The environment has a substantial influence on the development of human personality: as architects and designers we have a great responsibility because creating objects and buildings, we also create the behaviours of the people occupying these places. Inspiring sustainable behaviours is the most important challenge: if those who live in even the most ethically eco-friendly architecture in the world is not bettered as a result, all the benefits of sustainability are wasted. Through our research project “Earth Stations” we are committed in designing visions of sustainable architecture: collective and individual spaces for socializing, working, learning and enjoying leisure time, responding to the considerable and urgent need to change our way of thinking and living.

NIKKI GONNISSEN

CO-FOUNDER, STUDIO THONIK, THE NETHERLANDS



The world needs fundamental shift and the first, largest problem in the world is the climate crisis. People are feeling fear, the world is divided, and there are many problems in the world: housing problems, economic problems, large inequalities between people. And you see that it's complex. The world is on fire in that sense. But we also have to trust that this may be a sort of transition. We cannot look back, we have to do something. There are a lot of movements going on already because we see that it is no longer sustainable and that we need another environment for our grandchildren to have a livable future. I think it is very important that designers look for other ways. [Designers] have the freedom to look out of the box, they have creativity, and they have the power to make. They are open and curious, and they want to collaborate. Designers should be at the table when new policies are developed in a very early stage. So normally, governments, politics, businesses, they come up with new ideas and then they ask the designer in a very late stage, but that's not a good idea. It is very important that design comes at an early stage so there is room to collaborate.

I also think we need a sort of a shift in attitude – the economic system is so present, it's so much based on competition and I want to stress the fact that collaboration is so important and that it's not only about making money in the world. There's so many other values, and I do think that we should just try to look beyond that sort of making money, consuming, and shopping. Well, it would be wonderful if we could reach out to each other and connect through culture, through each other's knowledge, learn from each other. I think then the world would be a much better space because it's about emotion and passion, and that's what drives us as humans.

“COLLABORATION IS SO IMPORTANT AND IT’S NOT ONLY ABOUT MAKING MONEY IN THE WORLD.” - NIKKI GONNISSEN



IMAGE COURTESY OF NIKKI GONNISSEN/STUDIO THONIK

RICHARD HUTTEN

DESIGNER AND FOUNDER, RICHARD
HUTTEN STUDIO BV, THE NETHERLANDS



The most important issue design needs to tackle is our addiction to fossil fuels. Design is not only about the looks of a product, design involves the whole production chain, from the raw materials upon to the delivery to the consumer and even the use by the consumer. Production facilities should only use renewable energy for production and transportation. Products should be fossil fuel free, which means we have to stop using plastic, not only in the products but also in their packaging. And products should be designed in such a way that they are long lasting. Products should be easy to repair, and not too trendy, so consumers can enjoy the products for a long period of time. **And the end of the life cycle of a product they should be completely recyclable. We need less but better products.**

KOEN OLTHUIS

FOUNDER, WATERSTUDIO.NL,
THE NETHERLANDS



If you know what the future asks, then it's quite easy. But the moment that the future is unsure, if you don't know what the future will be, and that's what's exactly happened with climate change and with all the technical change – we have an uncertain future. The only way to move forward is to create flexibility and to also make sure that design takes advantage of that flexibility. Engineers tend to find a solution and designers tend to show how the future could look like, so what we try to do is to use, embrace the uncertainty, embrace this change, to create solutions that are ready for different kind of scenarios, because [at Waterstudio] we are very focused on water and the effect of sea level rise and the effects of growing cities and how those two come together. In that sense, designers can bring something unique. They can show a possible future on which standard authorities and the law can adapt, because for the futures that we see for our cities and in particular the floating cities which are very flexible and no longer static – they can move, they can adjust and they become smart cities where they independently can change configurations and answer all the needs and demands of the community. For these cities, there are no rules yet, because a normal city has rules for real estate, for fixed buildings, for a fixed infrastructure. So, without design, without designers who can visualize a future, rules can't be made. Because if you take the rules of today, the future is not possible, not to the future that we foresee.

“THE ONLY WAY TO MOVE FORWARD IS TO CREATE FLEXIBILITY AND TO ALSO MAKE SURE THAT DESIGN TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THAT FLEXIBILITY.” - KOEN OLTHUIS



IMAGE COURTESY OF KOEN OLTHUIS/WATERSTUDIO.NL

PAUL THOMPSON

VICE-CHANCELLOR, ROYAL COLLEGE
OF ART, UNITED KINGDOM



Design is always a catalyst for change because **design is a restless pursuit of something better** to try solve a problem, to try make something work, function better in life. I think the most urgent issue for everybody on the planet, at the moment, is the climate crisis so I think designers have to take addressing net-zero as the first priority certainly for the next few decades.



MICHAEL YOUNG

DIRECTOR, MICHAEL YOUNG STUDIO,
HONG KONG

Design can be a force for good when people give it their best experience, without being selfish for the need of creating economy and giving back to everyone that they work with. I think the most urgent issue that design needs to tackle is that everyone examines themselves a little more closely and pays attention to what they are actually doing. **Is it actually needed? Is it affordable?** Is there a business model? Can it be distributed? Can it be sold? **And can it give back in return?**

KITTISAK PATTAMASAEEVI

CEO, MONTARA HOSPITALITY GROUP, THAILAND



More than ever, we need regenerative designs – ones that ensure our footprint leave behind a better world to all stakeholders. As a Thai family business, sustainability is in our DNA. It has always been in our nature to design immersive experiences that both delight customers and inspire greater positive change.

Our resort Trisara is not only home to Thailand's first and only Michelin Green Star restaurant PRU, it is also one of the few resorts in Phuket where sea turtles still return to lay eggs. In Bangkok, we have redesigned a century-old river mansion and a standalone cinema into boutique hotels that conserve and showcase the city's heritage through community-based tourism. Our latest development is Tri Vananda, a 90-hectare wellness resort and residential community in Phuket. At Tri Vananda, 15 percent of the land will be developed into wellness resort and residential community. The other 85 percent of will be conserved as lake, forests, and a wetland nature reserve.

At Tri Vananda, biophilic design, sincere hospitality, and wellness wisdoms are orchestrated to create a multigenerational community where good nature and good health are inextricably intertwined. It is purposefully designed to elevate the regenerative design movement.



GILLIAN HOWARD

FOUNDER, DIGITAL ART FAIR, HONG KONG

In my industry, we cultivate art appreciation and support artists, provide platforms to promote their practice. **Art and culture has been very important to human life. We find pleasure in it; it is something that can enlighten.** I believe that culture holds a special space, especially at Digital Art Fair. We focus more on working with younger artists because, especially in Hong Kong, we find that we are missing opportunities for young adults. When I started Digital Art Fair, I said, if somehow that piece of art or this exhibition is able to give you a smile, or somehow promote a good cause, I think we have done our job pretty well as a curator. I hope somehow we are spreading good messages out there and connecting people on a deeper level.

CHUL BAE LEE

SVP & EXECUTIVE HEAD OF LIFE DESIGN INNOVATION
CENTER, LG ELECTRONICS INC., KOREA



Creative design solutions based on the design thinking process could resolve a number of problems in customers' lives, such as overcoming drastic climate changes or uneven quality of life. I hope design-driven social innovation initiatives could be an answer to such problems. An affordable product with proper functionalities and high-quality design, and a high-end product with cutting-edge technologies and maximum quality design could be built-up on the same hardware platform so that the benefit of the good design could be enjoyed by the broader spectrum of customers; this is the objective of our designers. **Extending the range of products with eco-friendly concepts, so that they could be easily reused or recycled, and making it more accessible even to the socially disadvantaged class would be one of the first steps we could take.**

“DESIGN IS A RESTLESS PURSUIT OF SOMETHING BETTER TO TRY SOLVE A PROBLEM, TO TRY MAKE SOMETHING WORK, FUNCTION BETTER IN LIFE.” - PAUL THOMPSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF PAUL THOMPSON/ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART



SARA KLOMPS

DIRECTOR, ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS,
UNITED KINGDOM

Is sustainability in the context of ensuring buildings need less energy? That they reuse water, use renewable energy that the impact of the building to the city and impact on its people, how people live in it is looked at? I don't think it's okay that you have an office building where someone sits eight hours a day and doesn't see out the window. Holistically, buildings and other architecture need to consider more the environment and more the well-being of people, but the environment definitely comes first. **We really need to look at the climate and the environment and why we have climate change, and how we can stop or minimize it.**

As a designer, you are theoretically free. You can do anything you want and when you study architecture you may say, "Okay, I'm going to make the most sustainable project." But in reality, [designers] are also faced with limitations by budget, client, regulation, location. So we are not totally free, but we are still free enough to push forward the agenda of clients, future clients, to put buildings out there which provoke, and which make people rethink. You may show how a building can be different in a certain aspect, and that will then educate people and create future demands. If there are more buildings out there which people start to positively appreciate, the more they will demand change as well.

YVES UBELMANN

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER,
ICONEM, FRANCE



There are several issues that design needs to tackle. For my field, the production of landscape and preservation of culture, design can be a changemaker. I see in my practice that when we are producing an exhibition, the emotions that come from the public, the society, political leaders, can help people to act concretely and solve an issue. Producing an exhibition on the disappearance of cultural heritage, we are highlighting places like Syria, Iraq, Africa, and we are trying to raise awareness on the value of these sites. The emotion from the public when they visit these places help understand the importance of preserving these sites. We walk on a daily basis in emergency situations, and the way we are designing these digital landscapes, the main reason is to preserve threatened heritage. There are thousands of sites that are at risk of disappearance due to conflict, or global warming, climate change, mass tourism. **We use the technology and design as a tool to assess these changes and help record, produce testimony, for the future generations.**

“WE NEED TO BUILD LESS, BUILD SMART WITH CLEANER, MORE SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS.” - BILL BENSLEY



SHINTA MANI MUSTANG RESORT/COURTESY BENSLEY STUDIO



About CatchOn, a Finn Partners Company

Founded in 2001, CatchOn is a brand communications consultancy with offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Armed with a hybrid expertise in branding, integrated marketing communications, market research, and public relations, we create and communicate brands throughout Asia. In 2019, we joined Finn Partners, a global integrated PR and marketing agency. Visit the website at www.catchonco.com and follow us on Instagram at @catchonco.

About FINN Partners

Founded in 2011, FINN Partners is one of the fastest-growing independent agencies in the world and recognized as a PProvoke Media 2022 Agency of the Year. With more than 1,400 professionals across 33 offices, FINN provides clients with global access and capabilities in the Americas, Europe and Asia. Headquartered in New York, FINN has offices in: Atlanta, Bangalore, Beijing, Boston, Chicago, Delhi, Denver, Detroit, Dublin, Fort Lauderdale, Frankfurt, Guam, Hong Kong, Honolulu, Jerusalem, Kuala Lumpur, London, Los Angeles, Manila, Mumbai, Munich, Nashville, Orange County, Paris, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Shanghai, Singapore, Vancouver and Washington D.C.



About Business of Design Week (BODW)

Asia's premier annual event on design, innovation and brands since 2002, Business of Design Week (BODW) organised by Hong Kong Design Centre (HKDC) gathers some of the world's foremost design masters, brand leaders and entrepreneurs from Hong Kong as well as overseas, driving discourse on the value of design and innovation to inspire global audiences and explore new business opportunities.