

#INTERACTIVE FACTOR



An interactive element in modern experiences is clearly redefining the design process. So we asked this choice group a few questions. Their thoughts are an insightful indication as to how contemporary designers are applying the term 'interactive' – and what it means to connect, interact and create with experiential factors in mind.

—
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“By making the relationship between the designers and the consumers more meaningful, we’re helping the designers make the relationship between the user and their products more meaningful.” – Drew Smith

INSIDE You’ve worked as a strategist for some of the world’s largest automotive brands, advising design, brand and platform strategy. Currently with Sense Worldwide, you manage projects for clients including Nike, Unilever and Vodafone where you seem to be helping clients understand people — using ethnographic research and design methodologies. How do you define the interactive factor in your work?

DREW SMITH To me, interactive design, put simply, is making relationships meaningful. My work extends across industries these days but as a human-focused designer, I’m striving to improve how people relate to space, objects and one another.

The user experience team of a global telecom company recently came to us - heads in hands – having been handed a statistical analysis of 33,000 consumers and instructed to design for them. Given really great design depends on the designer being able to forge a strong emotional link with the end-user, their desperation was understandable. So we set out to humanise the data.

We conducted a series of deep-dive interviews across Europe to uncover the unarticulated behaviours and latent needs, the sorts of things that can only ever be observed in-situ and never encapsulated in a survey or unearthed in a focus group; things like how people organised their lives across physical and virtual diaries or how their device usage changed according to the time of day or context.

We collated all the ethnographic data and produced a series of six user types or personas. These personas each have life stories, habits, tastes and points of view that communicate to the user experience team - in a very human way - how various consumer groups are living their lives. So, what was the benefit? By making the relationship between the designers and the consumers more meaningful, we’re helping the designers make the relationship between the user and their products more meaningful. Looking forward, ambient intelligence has the potential to enable truly transformative experiences. When the technology disappears and we can just get on with being human, then I’ll be happy!

INSIDE Having worked under Shiro Kuramata, then Issey Miyake, you established your own design studio in 2000, designing product for Driade, Swarovski, Kartell and Moroso, while creating installations for Lexus, Hermes and an exhibition celebrating Cartier’s extensive archives. As your practice spans product and object design, installation, interior design and architecture, how do you define the interactive factor in your work?

TOKUJIN YOSHIOKA I do not know the core definition of interactive design, yet currently, I believe design is shifting its direction – from designing shapes and forms to designing experiences and sensations.

I have been pursuing the mechanism of how people would feel and would be emotionally moved through my creations. These contents of messages and emotions differ depending on the people who care to experience it. My intention is to create the sort of design that emits energy and a symbolic message as a form of radiation. I have never been conscious of the interactive factor in my creations, yet as an example of design that values the communication with a ‘customer’, I recently designed 132.5 Issey Miyake. I pondered a store space in which customers could experience the items with an understanding of a brand’s creation. The important thing was to communicate the background of the items and the purpose of the development. Just making everything simple is not the goal. The most important thing is whether the message of this brand can be conveyed when eliminating decorative elements from space. With the iPads installed in the store, customers can tap into selectable information, from computer graphic imagery of the complicated design process to the general background and history of the brand.

Personally, I am fascinated by any design that returns to the fundamental of a basic idea; something close to the initial invention. In this case I ask: How would purchasing these products change our lives? What would we possibly experience? The ‘Air multiplier’ from Dyson is born out of the foundation, which was to design a machine that produces air, not to design a new shape for the fan. It is important to ponder these sensory experiences; if a client asks you for a wooden floor, we have to foresee if they will actually like the material itself or the feeling of warmth.



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– Trent Jansen

INSIDE As director of BKK Architects and co-host of the Triple R radio show The Architects you seem committed to innovation and engaging in the public discourse of what design can do to better people lives. That sort of design approach remains socially and culturally relevant – an intellectual approach to problem solving, with a broad industrial, commercial and residential client in mind. Considering all this, where does the interactive factor come into your work?

SIMON KNOTT Interpretive design is a vital part of our architectural practice. For us this means a process of investigation and re-interpretation on a number of levels.

Perhaps the most obvious and immediate is the context, both physical and social. Our projects start with a rigorous mapping of the surrounding context at both a micro and macro level. We also start with trying to understand the social context of a project. This is usually undertaken through a community consultation and engagement process. Once these studies have been completed we then undertake an analysis of the results. This entire process forms the basis from which the design is produced, thereby ensuring that the results will be driven from a ‘ground up’ community basis that is firmly entrenched in the environment in which it is located. This process is never linear. It is more of an iterative approach constantly moving between the design and the social/physical context.

Our practice designs projects that range from small, intimate follies, to substantial houses, up to large scale infrastructure and major projects. ... We are currently involved with the redevelopment of an existing 1960s housing commission tower in Footscray. This project involves understanding the complex dynamics of place that exist for a community of over 60 year old (mostly men) who have a number of social and health issues. We have spent considerable time observing and meeting with this small community and their support groups to better understand their needs. Our analysis of these requirements has driven us to new understandings, and the designs are quite often counter to the normal practice of our studio. The results are certainly not driven by aesthetics or abstract design ideas but firmly rooted in the social aspects and user amenity of the residents.

INSIDE Fresh out of COFA (College of Fine Arts, Sydney) you were accepted to intern with Marcel Wanders, working closely on product development. That collaboration led to moooi launching your renowned ‘Pregnant Chair’ – a highlight of Salone del Mobile in 2008. Now you’ve returned from a two-month residency at Edra, working closely with creative director Massimo Morozzi. How do you interpret the importance of interactive methods in design?

TRENT JANSEN A large part of any designer’s practice is his or her interaction with people inside and outside the design world – and the way in which those interactions influence process.

I was lucky enough to spend 2 months in Tuscany on the Space+Edra Design Residency interacting with one of the world’s great creative directors, Massimo Morozzi. Massimo is not so fond of structure, so despite the fact that this was designed to be a very structured residency, where our interaction would occur in a controlled way (say in a design studio over a sketch book), one of our most fruitful interactions took place in the last week of my residency on a land-speed, record-breaking trip to Milan.

In the car we discussed my return to Central Australia and Morozzi’s love for Alice Springs. Up until this point the work that we had been exploring at Edra had been in one conceptual direction, but this mutual love for a place – that many would perceive as being difficult to love – sent things on a new trajectory. The day before I left, to return to Australia, we met in the Edra studio and Massimo asked me to go back to Alice Springs, to try to find out what that place is about, and most importantly what it is to be a contemporary Australian living in Central Australia.

This single interaction in a car, somewhere between Pisa and Milan started a series of events that now sees me sitting in a shed in 44 degree heat in the centre of the driest continent on earth, doing my best to understand what makes this place work. And whether this interaction eventually leads to a beautiful piece of design or not, I am confident that at the end of this process (at the very least) I will better understand a country that I grew up in and thought I knew everything about.

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– Yves Béhar

INSIDE In recent years your approach to product design has garnered notable attention for its ability to connect with the human experience. As you and your studio innovate new ideas within a pre-existing framework of industry and commerce, how do you define what interactive design means to you and the people design for?

YVES BÉHAR Interactivity is a form of simplicity. An intuitive message to make products and their use better understood. All products have a level of interaction. What I’m interested in is the communication of design ideas, and to accelerate the adoption of 21st-century ways of life (not to mention consumption). How a product is used and experienced, is certainly a part of bringing these ideas to life.

Over the year, I have added interactivity to many projects. Aligning a light’s effect to the user’s mood, for example, with the Herman Miller LEAF light, with the invention of LED’s shifting colors by mixing only cold white-hued LED’s with warm ones. Or even allowing someone to shape a crystal chandelier and leave a visual message with the Swarovski Morpheus. Lately, I’ve been designing speakers for Jawbone. Jambox gives subtle sound cues to the users as to remove the need for a screen indicator. For the Milan furniture fair, we’re building a sound exhibit called JAM-SCAPE. Hundreds of Jambox speakers will emit sounds and vibrations that will create an oasis sound space, away from the “noise” of the fair. I hope it becomes a true place to chill.

Interactivity is also a form of intelligence, and products in the future will be poetically simple. At the same time, a lot more design will be ‘in-sync’ with the way we feel. The advances in motion technologies and the ability of products to recognize situations and needs, to react accordingly, will finally turn the tide in making technology not a burden, but rather an invisible enabler. Great interactions will make technology invisible, and allow all of us to concentrate again on the real experiences of life.

INSIDE Before establishing Shareen Joel Design in Melbourne, you were one of the youngest designers to work for the Ford Motor Company. Now executing product development through to interior architecture for clients, what sort of common link do you find when you think of this interactive factor in design?

SHAREEN JOEL In our studio we have experienced two distinct forms of interactive design. One is practiced throughout the design process – a dynamic development process that utilizes 3D visualization and animation. During my time in the automotive industry the first stages of interactive design was evident through the experimentation of design software to create an ‘almost there’ vehicle. We were able to experience the drive without any investment in tooling. With the development of the Sheridan retail stores we worked hand in hand with our in-house visual renderer to design the concept and details in multiple dimensions. This fast-paced process of design has its advantages. Besides being dynamic and immediate it allows one to create forms and details you wouldn’t have thought would be possible. Some other examples are the works of Swedish designer Front Studio, and Nendo’s Diamond Chair.

The second form of interactive design is otherwise defined as interactive functionality — available to the end user. Such products respond to consumer behavior. Some examples are within the Sheridan store, a first for an Australian retailer in this sector. An interactive display screen generates a custom designed interface. Customers are invited to personalize their bed linen combinations and designs. In the past, furniture has been designed to respond to the comfort and preference of the end user. The Cassina Maralunga’s sofa, as an example, broke new ground in this respect, introducing its maneuverable head and backrest. In this recent years you’ve seen Japanese designers such as Nendo and Yoshioka lead the way in this experience-driven direction. It’s all quite exciting.