FOREWORD

Tough times economically make it even harder to raise your head above the parapet to really make a difference through design. Or does it?

The well-worn cliché is you need to ‘stick to the knitting’ in a downturn, focus on what you’re best at – and no more – and expend your energies purely on winning and retaining clients. But another view, popularised by the likes of London Design Festival chairman Sir John Sorrell, is that straitened times bring out the best in creative people challenged by the need to do things differently just to survive and that some of the best ideas – and designs – are born out of the experience. And it is these that meet the criteria for inclusion in Design Week’s 2011 Hot 50.

Certainly, the post-recession period that arguably started last year for design has thrown up interesting shifts and developments, particularly as it has coincided with a major change in Government in the UK, a focus on the all-inclusive Big Society by Prime Minister David Cameron which has had ramifications across the piece and a surge in the influence of social media like Twitter and Facebook over most things in life – that the likes of US retail giant Gap can be swayed so swiftly by public outcry on the networks against a logo change bears testament to this.

The era is also proving to be one of rebellion against the pressures imposed from the top and social changes generally. We have seen students and workers hit the streets to vent their feelings about Government cuts and in design colleges tutors are detecting a greater energy. This was manifest to a lesser degree by the Anti Design Festival, staged in London’s edgy Shoreditch district last September by graphics star Neville Brody and his cohorts. The ADF was conceived as a backlash to what they perceive as the slick, ‘safe’ designs of the post-Margaret Thatcher era when success was deemed to be the only goal and failure, risk and experimentation were to be avoided.

Meanwhile, with local markets for design under the cosh – notably on the public sector – UK consultancies have turned increasingly abroad for their projects, particularly for branding and branded interiors work. A growing number of groups have opened offices as far afield as China or have forged professional deals with agents overseas – such is the reputation of UK design in these fields.

And there is interaction design. Constantly developing new arenas for creativity from apps for mobile devices such as Apple’s iPad and iPhone or experiential features for retail, public or cultural environments, at its best it provides the glue between design, advertising and art and is the discipline most are looking to to lead the way for the future.

It was against this backdrop that the selectors for Design Week’s annual hotlist assembled late last year to establish who – or what – had gone beyond the distance for design over the previous 12 months. Taking the cue from the word ‘hot’ in the title, they have sought to capture the mood, but also to look forward rather than back to identify those who look set to continue as motivators for the design community, clients or society at large.

Of the more interesting entrants this year are movements such as drawing and making, on the one hand, and the return to handicrafts in the face of technological dominance. This is balanced by the gaming industry, which continues to lead digital innovation, and online retailers with Wii Fit and its ilk somewhere in between, blending technology with physical activity.

Exercise is also the theme of another entry – the turquoise-branded Barclays Bikes that have taken London’s streets by storm. The inclusion of the pay-as-you-pedal cycling scheme by London Mayor Boris Johnson brings service design into the Hot 50 as it is the system itself rather than the robust, clunky bike design or missed-opportunity branding linking to Barclays’ sponsorship of the scheme that impressed the selectors. It is good though to see the design of services making an impact in our hitherto object-obsessed culture.

Congratulations to these and all the other entrants in this year’s Hot 50 – be they individuals, organisations, movements or projects. Each has been hand-picked for a reason and each has an interesting story to tell. Each also provides inspiration or a new way of thinking upon which we as a creativity community can build.

Lynda Relph-Knight
Editor, Design Week
The 2010 Fifa World Cup meant a lot not just to South Africa – the official host nation – but to Africa as a whole, with teams such as the local South Africa team and Ghana in particular making a memorable impact on the tournament.

New stadiums were built and existing ones refurbished, the vuvuzela horn became a new football icon and local wayfinding and police strategies were rethought to meet the needs of fans descending on the developing nation. But, in the rush to get everything ready and change perceptions of the country, no one thought to chart the legacy of the World Cup on South Africa and beyond.

No one, that is, apart from Zahiru Asmal, a South African who battled with the authorities to get her legacy project Designing South Africa recognised. That breakthrough has been made and her drive has got her on to speaking platforms alongside the likes of South African President Jacob Zuma.

The project involved inviting international media to experience aspects of the World Cup, from branding and architecture to boosting South Africa’s standing as a travel destination and staging an exhibition of the event. Reports are being drawn together as a book/documentary and the exhibition will travel via London to Brazil – host of the 2014 Fifa World Cup.

Asmal’s experience as an organiser at seminal South African design fest Design Indaba and Pororo’s Experiment stood her in good stead. She is perhaps better known in the UK for her work with architect David Adjaye, whose photographic show on Africa has toured with her help.

Car company Audi has made this listing many times before, largely on the strength of work by its now defunct Audi Design Foundation, which worked with students and young designers to help developing nations and, more recently, to promote sustainability in the UK.

Audi UK reluctantly decided to close the 13-year-old charitable foundation last year and bring its social responsibility activities in-house. But that has not stopped it or its chief executive, Jeremy Hicks, who was very involved in the ADF’s Sustain Our Nation programme and has continued to build the company’s profile through design.

The Hot 50 selectors were at pains to exclude from this citation the Audi AG-backed Outrace installationsited in Trafalgar Square as the centrepiece of the 2010 London Design Festival. Commissioned by the car firm’s German business, the piece by designers Clemens Weisshaar and Reed Kram featuring robotic arms famously used in the production of Audi cars was generally deemed a disappointment.

In the future greedy humans colonise the planet Pandora to harvest its rich minerals with complete disregard for the planet’s eco-system or the 3m-tall, blue-skinned indigenous people, the Na’vi tribe, who live there. Hero of the day and paraplegic human Jake Scully, played by actor Sam Worthington, is transformed into a Na’vi avatar to gain an understanding of their way of life. Battle commences, relationships and love occur and good conquers evil (evil being the humans here).

While the storyline is nothing new, with the plot being told countless times before (think: Dances with Wolves in the rainforest of Fern Gully), Avatar has revolutionised the way we watch film, as the cinematic experience becomes more of a visual journey.

Avatar is the brainchild of director James Cameron, who for years has been pumping millions into the evolution of 3D cinematography. Avatar has become a blueprint for Hollywood blockbusters – from now on, films may well be classified as ‘pre-Avatar’ and ‘post-Avatar’.

The Barclays-sponsored cycles are sturdy, but nonetheless well-designed to cater for the broad spectrum of potential riders. The branding has provoked much debate in the design world, with the likes of Identica chief executive Franco Bonadio protesting that a bit of corporate discretion would have gone a long way when promoting Barclays’ sponsorship.

A backlash against the ‘invasive’ corporate branding saw “F*** Barclays” stickers adorning the bikes. This, on a more positive note, has led to the first customisation projects (see DW Blog, 25 September 2010).

Looking forward, there are plans to expand the scheme, with a further 2000 bikes and 4200 docking points confirmed, along with plans to roll it out across London’s East End.

Love them or loathe the Boris bikes, there is no denying that the scheme is a successful community engagement project and a valuable addition to London’s public transport system.

“Anyone familiar with iPad magazine apps, for example, will have encountered Popular Science by Bonnier R&D. Few will be aware that the idea behind this pioneer of online publishing was created ahead of the iPad launch earlier this year. Berg was approached by Bonnier in October 2009 to envisage what the next generation of apps could be like on the assumption that Apple had a new tablet device up its sleeve.

The iPad launched at the end of January 2010 and the Pop Sci+ app just a couple of months later. This ability to pitch to the unknown with confidence and expertise is what sets Berg apart from many of its peers – even in the digital sector – and has earned it a place here.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

The British Museum has long been a patron of good design. Its exhibitions are invariably well portrayed through design – take, for example, the current Book of the Dead exhibition, designed by Land Design Studio. Last year saw the opening of four new British Museum shops, designed by the then Small Back Room creative director Callum Lumsden, to add to a growing portfolio of good design. But it was a different kind of project that puts the museum in this year’s Hot 50. British Museum director Neil MacGregor took to the airwaves last year with a series on BBC Radio 4 to tell A History of the World in 100 different kind of project that putsthemuseum inthisyear'sHot50.

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Though most probably don’t fit in with the design community’s take
on what constitutes design – in the way a similar series by the
Victoria & Albert Museum probably would – MacGregor’s selection
raised debate about the relevance of the objects in relation to the
technologies and social expectations of their day. That surely is a
great way to encourage interest in design of all genres in our
information technology-driven era.

ANTHONY BURRILL

A prolific 2010 for graphic designer Anthony Burrill cements his
place in this year’s Hot 50. It began with widespread applause for his
recent exhibitions, including a collaboration with product designer
Michael Marriott, The Right Kind Of Wrong, at London advertising
Another solo show, In A New Place, ran at Kemistry in London’s
Shoreditch last summer and a group show,.pick me up, which
exhibitions range from ‘Oil and Water, Do Not Mix’, following last April's BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. He was commissioned by communication
agency Happiness Brussels to produce the limited-edition poster, which raised funds for the clean-up operation.

Burrill’s work is distinctive, using an interesting mix of materials and
processes, showcased in his collaboration with Marriott on the trophies
for the 2009 Brit Insurance Design Awards at the Design Museum.
Looking forward to this March, we see Burrill take the lead role at
Pick Me Up, which returns to London’s Somerset House for a second
year. He will set up residency at the graphic design exhibition where
he intends to invite special guests to create new work.

Burrill has an ability to keep things simple while retaining humour
and personality in his work. Combining this with openness to new
opportunities could lead this conceptual designer anywhere.

BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION

As clients go the British Heart Foundation is one of the best. This is
demonstrated by its impressive haul of awards, and especially its
success at the 2010 Design Week Benchmark Awards where it was
named as Client of the Year. The charity has achieved numerous
accolades at the Benchmarks, previously winning Best of Show in
2009 for its campaign The Small Creature, for which Hat-Trick Design
created an initiative to help children come to terms with bereavement.
Its accomplishments say a lot about the commissioning strength of
BHF design manager Louise Kyme, who is responsible for more than
500 design commissions each year. At the start of 2010, Kyme invited
independent consultant Jan Casey to sort out the charity’s first
consultancy tender, showing that the BHF’s success is not just about
award wins, but its ability to build enduring relationships too.

Hat-Trick Design was made the lead consultancy after winning the
Design Week award, but the BHF continues its success by working with
other award regulars such as B&W Studio, Marc & Anna, and Magpie
Studio, among others. The charity’s Mornington Crescent head office
in London is set for another busy year as it prepares to celebrate its 50th
anniversary, and there are also plans for a new website.

It is great to see good design being used with such sensitivity, helping
to raise public awareness of heart disease as well as giving advice,
information and reassurance to sufferers and their families.

NEVILLE BRODY

If 2010 belonged to anyone it was surely Neville Brody. The hugely
successful Anti Design Festival staged in London in September owes
its inspiration to him; he was appointed head of the Royal College of
Art’s newly renamed School of Visual Communication (a job he took up
this month); he joined D&AD’s executive committee; and he was
shortlisted for the prestigious Prince Philip Designers Prize.

Despite all this, Brody has been a bit quiet within the UK design
community since he made his impact in the late 1980s through
magazines such as Arena and The Face. This is despite major projects
by his consultancy Research Studios for The Times London, LG and
D&AD, for which it created the annual in 2008.

But the ADF changed all this, not just in promoting Brody and the
illustrious team he put together for the event, but in developing a new
manifesto for communication design. Brody calls for a return to risk-
taking and experimentation, blending print, interaction and even 3D
design in the process as a reaction to the ‘safe’, slick branding.

This bodes well for design, particularly given the influence he is set
to wield in the immediate future through his position at the RCA.

JULIA CASSIM

Anyone who knows her bears testament to the dedication of
Julia Cassim to inclusive design.

A senior research fellow at the Royal College of Art’s Helen
Hamlyn Centre since 2000, she has brought together creative
communities across the world to work with disabled or aging
people to understand their needs and seek to remedy them
through design.

Her inclusion in this year’s
Hot 50 listing – the HHC and its
director, Professor Jeremy
Myerson, have made it into the
ranking in previous years –
honours her personal
involvement in the annual DBA
Inclusive Design Challenge, which
celebrated its tenth anniversary last year. Organised until now with the
Design Business Association, the challenge has gone through a
rethink, and takes the form of a
24-hour challenge this year. It
will still involve designers
and consultancies working with user
groups to address issues
relating to inclusivity.

For the UK design community
the Inclusive Design Challenge is
one of the most visible
manifestations of Cassim’s
work. But her influence extends to ‘challenges’ across the world
and her audience extends
beyond designers to colleges,
businesses and charities
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She is also a visiting professor
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