

No Design Indaba Conference and Festival in 2021

Design Indaba, the annual design conference and event, will use 2021 as a year to plan and execute a number of significant Do Tank projects and launch its new Design Indaba Inside offering. Therefore, The Design Indaba Conference and Festival will not take place in February 2021.



Design Indaba founder Ravi Naidoo

2021 will be used as a well-deserved sabbatical and strategise for 2022. The Design Indaba Conference and Festival celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2020 – a phenomenal milestone for this landmark event.



Exclusive! Design Indaba 25-year interview with Ravi Naidoo

24 Feb 2020



Offering an explanation for the change, Design Indaba founder Ravi Naidoo states: “It makes no sense whatsoever to cut and paste a pre-Covid model onto a post-Covid world. So, we’re taking the time to do some healthy exploration to generate a future model that can continue to usher in a better world through creativity, which is the very premise of Design Indaba.”

Going virtual is not a viable option

Social distancing requirements combined with the physical limitations of Artscape Theatre Centre in Cape Town (Design Indaba’s venue for some years now) also mean that an event at the scale of the Design Indaba Conference and Festival is

not feasible. While virtuality has provided some recourse for the events industry at large, it is not a viable option here due to the conference and festival concept and size.

“Many people have asked us if we are planning a virtual conference for next year,” Naidoo continues. “While we did of course consider this route, we ultimately felt that it would dilute our experiential, theatrical event, and we really did not want to reduce it to a series of talking heads on a screen. That, coupled with the Webinar fatigue everyone is expressing, led us to the conclusion that we would not want to do anything in half measures or disappoint expectations – our own and that of our community.”



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Angie White 28 Feb 2020



Instead, 2021 will see the Design Indaba Do Tank kick into concerted action. In the past, the Do Tank has completed a number of significant upliftment projects - over 200 different ventures in fact - that demonstrate the power of design to improve lives. Notably, these include the Design Indaba 10 x 10 Housing Project, Arch for the Arch, and instrumental involvement in the development of the Zeitz MOCAA over a period of 10 years.

“We have a number of new long-term projects that we’d like to bring to fruition in 2021,” says Naidoo. “Many of them entail a lengthy process of council permissions and stakeholder consultations, and we’ve already invested several hundred hours of our time. Once due process has been followed, we can’t wait to announce them to the public during the course of 2021.”

The new Design Indaba Inside offering

The Design Indaba team has also launched the new Design Indaba Inside offering, which creates capsule Design Indaba events within companies. Design Indaba Inside takes the form of tailored, stand-alone workshops that harness the power of the Design Indaba’s global network – a powerhouse of the world’s most revolutionary and progressive thinkers. The aim is to problem-solve specific issues that a company is dealing with and create bespoke solutions.

“We’re here to aid agencies and their corporate clients through the strategic advantages that we can bring to the table. We match specific Design Indaba Speakers’ expertise to the problem at hand, and then get that person or persons in the room with us, the agency and the company in question, inside that company,” explains Naidoo.

“Workshops are immersive, expansive and strategically curated to resolve business challenges. Sought-after design leaders are assembled to apply their creative minds to a business’s unique challenges, leading interactive insight sessions with the business team and its agency.”



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There’s healthy precedent for this move. In June 2013, Design Indaba co-ordinated a Design Lab for Virgin and The Jupiter Drawing Room (Cape Town), to develop a way forward for the global brand. Design Indaba facilitated the participation of four of its Conference Alumni, including Andrew Shoben (UK), Sissel Tolaas (Berlin), Joel Gethin Lewis (UK), and Marije Vogelzang (Netherlands). Recently, in November 2020, Design Indaba Inside completed two hands-on, co-creation workshops, one for a huge financial services brand with designers from New York, Chicago and London, and the other for the Province of the Western Cape with a designer from the Netherlands.

Due to the co-ordination and preparation required, Design Indaba will be able to accommodate only eight Design Indaba

Inside events in 2021. “It’s like doing a mini-conference each month,” quips Naidoo. “But we’re excited to bring our concept to external teams and companies in a way that upholds social distancing but also affects real positive change within organisations.”

In addition to Design Indaba Inside, Design Indaba’s regular offerings will continue. There’s a weekly free newsletter mapping the world’s design trends and regular YouTube premieres of exclusive content covering talks from previous Design Indaba Conferences, and an ongoing series of fresh interviews with past Speakers, highlighting their latest projects and thinking.

What’s more, Design Indaba is about to release its #DI2020 content. “We feel blessed to have been able to host our 2020 event in February, just before global lockdowns came into effect. It means that we were one of the few major creative festivals that could take place in physical format in 2020. But now, we’re focusing on the digital distribution of these assets – as always, we share these with our compliments. Look out for the online series launching soon,” invites Naidoo. The #DI2020 series will be available via Design Indaba’s YouTube channel.

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