

# Queen of the Indaba

With a schedule busier than most CEOs and trailblazers on the planet, Lidewij Edelkoort makes time for *Advantage* writer Daniel Scheffler to talk about the Design Indaba, her life and what drives marketing and design today

**PROBABLY THE** Design Indaba's most prevailing and established speaker, and most dartingly tendentious, is Dutch-Dame Lidewij Edelkoort. Known to South African audiences as Li, and maybe even prophetess Li, the ageless nomad has been coming to SA for more than a decade and has become an imprint at the annual conference. So much so that many of the attendees of the prized Design Indaba that seek out one talk are intent on just hers.

## HANGING AROUND

Li started her career 'hanging around' as she calls it with student comrades and then began working at a department store in Holland called 'De Bijenkorf'. She speaks ardently about how this time of her life was inspiration-deluxe and how meeting people from every possible backstory, age and race gave her sagacity and allowed her madcap to flourish. One of her mentors at the time was Annie Apol who worked at the store doing styling and forecasting and under this incredible instructor, her dreams, her ideas and her ambitions just flourished. But Li's ability to gain insights and pull together information for a greater cause started at a much younger age; in childhood when she was

'living in her own universe' and created 'castles in the sky'. She attributes a lot of her creative spirit to her parents, who only sent her to pre-school at age six, letting her roam freely in her own make-believe world of inventive visions.

## BELIEVING IN SA

Li speaks about SA fondly, a place she comes to for retreat and refuge – in particular the luxury safari lodges Singita. And so her Design Indaba talks often speak about how SA's lessons to the world range from 'improvisation and supreme talent all the way to optimism and generosity'. Li believes in SA. Even with its 'slower time', she revels in how much dynamic maturation she has seen in the country since her first coming.

What makes the Design Indaba relevant, not only to designers and creatives, is the exposure of creativity that founder Ravi Naidoo brings yearly to the little village of Cape Town. With a belief that creativity will 'fuel an economic revolution', and people like Li Edelkoort bringing their visions, the conference exposes marketing gurus, strategy writing professionals, publishers, writers, film makers - and the rest of the advertising-marketing-branding-creative industry that has by implication fused into one big enterprising origination.

## A SIMPLE CUP OF COFFEE

Li's two-part trend seminar this year at Design Indaba, in Cape Town and Johannesburg, focused on textiles and happiness. In her 'House of Textiles' section she looked at the human reaction to an online virtual existence and the desire for emotional and tactile happenings. "More than ever we are wanting to feel again, we want to belong to something bigger than ourselves and that means touch will become something we actively seek out" Li said. Her observation that people are seeking hugs, even more than sex perhaps, is something that has been driving a lot of her research. So where sex will always sell? She has a strong feeling that tenderness and romance, as per her trend talk of last year in New York titled 'Romanticism' will fortify. The second section of her talk, 'Bliss' a more spiritual route was explored where the appreciation of a simple life and being 'in the moment' was emphasised. "A simple cup of coffee, or stroking your cat", Li says will be conjoined as imperative to the pursuit of happiness. 'The ordinary extraordinary phenomenon' is what she calls it. Using nature as her inspiration the talk discusses what are the

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## LI EDELKOORT

presents

# earth matters

lifestyle trends that are coming over the new few months. “These trends affect everyone” she says – from the creative, to the suits, it permeates everything.

### JUST PAYING ATTENTION

Big agencies, mega fashion houses, government offices and powerful individuals attend her talks all over the world, and Li somehow manages to effortlessly stride through it all while maintaining a (marginally) healthy lifestyle, eating a BLT sandwich for lunch, and spending time reading as much as possible at night before bed for instance. Her company, ‘TrendUnion’, with offices in Paris and New York, churns out a weekly updated website called ‘TrendTablet’, a beautiful and visually overloaded publication

named *Bloom*, tons of seminars and of course the exhibitions and consultations. Her range of work and in particular her trend books she says are “perfect tools for entrepreneurs, designers in emerging economies, stylists, students and DIY enthusiasts”.

So some call her a soothsayer and believe that trends are not to be conjured up or created by an individual or organisation, but Li says, “I’m

no witch, I’m just paying attention”. Pragmatic and energised as that sounds her job, or her insightful job, does have elements of less science and more feeling, or sensation. But so does marketing, and naturally all design, as much as we live in a world of commerce and it has become transactional beyond control the essence of Li’s work is to encourage others to do just that – pay attention.

As receiver last November of the Prince Bernhard Cultuur Fonds in Holland, the award is a perfect fixative of her contribution to design and fashion in her home country, but also abroad. The prize, a knighting of Dutch kind, is the largest private cultural fund in Holland and aims to promote culture in Holland. A rather exalted feat, but as Li Edelkoort proves every time at Design Indaba, you may not be a believer but you’ll be thinking about what she’s said and that by implication means you’re paying more attention.

**To read more on Li and her work, go to [www.trendtablet.com](http://www.trendtablet.com)**

