

The background is a complex, abstract architectural design. It features a series of white, angular, and curved structures that create a sense of depth and movement. Interspersed among these white forms are sharp, triangular and rectangular shapes in a vibrant gold color. In the middle ground, a silhouette of a person is walking away from the viewer down a path that leads towards a bright, golden light source, creating a strong sense of perspective and journey.

WOW

worlds of wonder


**experience design
for curious people**

Erik Bär & Stan Boshouwers

WOW
worlds of wonder



installation by Salvador Dalí in Figueres, Spain



*“Our thoughts shape
our spaces. And then
those spaces return
the favour.”*

– Stephen Johnson –

1

WHAT

2

WHY

3

WOW

1.1 WORLDS
OF WONDER

15

1.2 EXPERIENCE
DESIGN

27

1.3 BEGINNERS' MINDS

37

1.4 THE WOW MOMENT

51

1.5 THE WONDER ZONE

61

1.6 EXPERIENTIAL
JOURNEYS

71

2.1 DESIGNING FOR THE
EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

91

2.2 FACILITATING
TRANSFORMATION

107

THE REAL THING

120

AUGMENTED REALITY 1.0

124

UNDER THE HOOD

128

ARCHITECTURE,
SCENOGRAPHY,
MUSEOGRAPHY

132

1ST PERSON
PERSPECTIVE

138

A CASE FOR
CURIOSITY

142

RELIGION
FOR ATHEISTS

146

3 WOW

4 HOW

5 NOW

PATIENT
EMPOWERMENT
150

SERIOUS PLAY
154

SEEING WITH
NEW EYES
158

FROM MAGIC LANTERN
TO VIRTUAL REALITY
162

MAKER SPACES
168

POETIC DESIGN
172

4.1 THE BIG IDEA
181

4.2 CONCEPT
DEVELOPMENT
189

4.3 PLANNING
199

4.4 THE EXPERIENCE
DESIGN TEAM
207

4.5 STORYTELLING
215

4.6 DESIGN
225

4.7 COST CONTROL
241

4.8 OPERATION
251

NOW, IT'S UP TO YOU
261

KEYWORD INDEX
264

CREDITS
265

COLOPHON
270



INTRODUCTION

This book is about experience design. About creating spaces to inspire people and share stories. This aim, whether pursued by the narrator or the visitor, is as old as humankind. From the caves of Lascaux and the solar temples of Malta to the Museum of the Future in Dubai, it's clear that when humans design a space, they imbue it with a story, and that they have done so since the dawn of time. Some of those places even *embody* human memory. They are full of characters and codes, or use light and space to create certain effects. This happens in the churches of Reims, where edifying parables are depicted on stained glass, on Moscow squares, where bold architecture shows the people who's boss, and in galleries that want to tempt the public to come and marvel at their treasures. It's as present in 18th century English landscaped gardens as it is in contemporary public attractions. You'll find it in theatres, shops, and everywhere else we love going for an experience. The creators of these spaces have learnt how to immerse visitors, using architecture, theatrical techniques, interior design and any other approach that will help create the experience they envisioned.

A BLIND SPOT

If you consider how widespread the practice of using spaces to tell stories truly is and how ineradicable the desire to visit them, it's surprising that *narrative architecture* isn't a first-year course in architecture programmes, or that there's no such thing as *spatial storytelling*. It's true, though: no such field currently exists. The profoundly human tendency to bring people together and immerse them in a joint experience has never been studied systematically.

This book is a modest attempt to do just that. Our company creates Worlds of Wonder, and we've struggled to explain just what we do ever since we first began. It's a curious paradox: we create spaces that tell stories, but it's difficult to tell our own. After more than 25 years of pioneering work, it seemed that the only way was to write our own introduction.

Writing this book has been an exhilarating experience, as it has turned us into students of our own school. Of course, it's not something we're just doing for ourselves. The demons and desires of our clients and peers in the practice of developing experience centres show strong similarities, and if you look at matters in the long run, you'll see that the development of such projects follows relatively fixed patterns. A book chronicling the highlights and pitfalls of this new field seemed like a good idea.



EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Organisations are rapidly becoming more interested in this approach, as many of them are experiencing a growing need to involve their customers in their ambitions and in the world behind the product. They understand that the traditional methods of the past just won't do when it comes to enticing and inspiring their audience. They might have heard someone mention the term experience design at one point or another, but no one *fully* understands what it entails.

Experience Design (XD) doesn't have a very strict definition. If you google it, you'll get bogged down in a mire of definitions, so it's best to steer clear. The concept, however, is extremely popular. 'Experience' is such a common benchmark in the world of design that the term risks becoming meaningless. In all sectors where spaces play an important role, from retail and gastronomy to urban planning, museology, recreation and even natural development and heritage, *experience* is a key term. It might be useful, then, to define what we're talking about.

Of course, this also means we have to consider an immense space that has only emerged relatively recently: cyberspace. In the world of virtual portals, marketplaces, brands and apps, experience is almost more important than in the old-fashioned physical world. The *User Experience*, abbreviated as UX, is the key metric for qualitative design. Although we think that virtual and physical spaces are subject to the same psychological laws when it comes to experience, this book is concerned primarily with the latter. Physical spaces where real people go for real encounters have certain strengths that virtual spaces simply do not (at least, as of now). This book addresses these strengths.



HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

We will try to find out why now is an especially promising time to set up an experience centre, as well as exploring people's reasons for visiting them. The former will help clarify which requirements these places must meet and the latter will explain how to increase their appeal. We will then use a number of examples to show how you can get Worlds of Wonder to work for you. Finally, we'll describe a number of methods that have proved useful in developing such places. To use a fashionable term, this book is our way of sharing the source code of our profession with anyone looking to get started themselves. The field is so big that it would be small-minded of us to keep the little knowledge we have to ourselves.

This book will cover a collection of topics that might seem incoherent at first, including art, health food, spirituality and the lives of the ancient Romans. We'll talk about leasing cars, roasting coffee and sustainable energy. About nanotechnology, children's hospitals and archaeology. You might not want to know very much about all of these topics. But ultimately, it's about the underlying profession: the ability to turn all these topics into an immersive experience. We're now starting to see the outlines of this profession, and as long as you have a capacity for curiosity, we think you'll find it exciting. When you look closer, coffee beans turn out to contain the same ingredient as a leased car, and you'll find the same ingredient in archaeology and nanotechnology. We'll call it '*interestingness*', the mysterious influence that some topics exert on our minds. The fact that this isn't a real word either, says a lot.

THE BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS.

Part one defines the most important terms used in this field. On top of that, we investigate the foundations on which it seems to stand. Among other things, we'll give you our personal account, explaining how we found ourselves in this business and what we learned along the way. It is called **WHAT**.

The second part considers the big **WHY** of experience design. We share our vision of what makes it attractive and illustrate this with some case stories and an interview with the man who first identified this field.

The third part, **WOW**, shows different types of application of the World of Wonder approach. We will highlight some examples based on their specific functionality, meaning or impact.

Good news for those with a more practical mind: part four, **HOW**, contains a step-by-step plan for developing an experience centre from the first brainstorming session and initial designs to the financial reports and operation of your very own centre.

Dotted through the book, you'll find **deeplinks** that point you to underlying authors and visions and **cases** that illustrate our thoughts.

All photos in this book are taken from our projects, unless stated otherwise.



NEW LANDMARKS

We think experience centres will play a significant role in the future, one that used to be fulfilled by cafés and the village well, as meeting places where people share stories. These places fulfil a need. More than ever, we see a thirst for communality, meeting people, explanations and understanding, which will help us to make sense of the apparent chaos in which we find ourselves, the changes at hand and the breathtaking challenges we face together.

We think that experience centres will start playing a special role in the future, a function that used to be fulfilled by churches, cafés and the village well, as meeting places where people could share stories.

Within this forcefield, experience centres can become meaning-filled landmarks. They can be the place where organisations explain their intentions, places to discover other people's ideas, or places to fall in love with the world again. That might sound incredibly pompous, especially for a field that, until now, didn't even have a well-defined name. It can be uplifting to remember, however, that it's no less real then when someone in Lascaux decided to paint an ox on a wall. As far as we know, they didn't talk about it too much, but that doesn't make it any less valuable.







The history of Worlds of Wonder,
the origins of experience design and
the authors' vision on WoW moments.

WHAT

“Everything that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination, because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed.”

– Joseph Addison, 1712 –



Utopia, exhibition for the Dutch Architecture Institute, NL 2019



WORLDS OF WONDER

what are they and what
can they do for you?

Narrative spaces are created by different types of organisations, but their purpose is one and the same: conveying an idea or a story. Because visitors literally walk around in that story, all sorts of subjects can be made accessible. In this chapter, we are going to investigate the architecture of wonderment. In this context, space doesn't only represent the story, but conveys a sense of delight about that story. It's like walking around in the imagination of a curious mind. Hopefully, this will fuel your own curiosity, one of the greatest human faculties. It makes Worlds of Wonder very suitable for strengthening engagement.

BACKGROUND

Worlds of Wonder are used by museums, for example, looking to share complex stories about art, science, or history. Visitors who don't know much about a topic can digest huge amounts of information in one go in these places. A growing number of companies are using this approach to let their visitors experience their brand values. Because all brands want to tell a story nowadays and because these stories simply won't fit into a commercial or internet banner in their entirety, brands create a space where their visitors can experience them in full. These applications have a rich background: religious institutions have been using them for centuries. If you look at a church as a World of Wonder, you'll see what purpose the grand architecture and the stained glass windows serve: they're meant to get you in the mood to internalise a great Story. You'll find an equally ancient example in classical garden architecture, both in the rational or romantic style (the quote on the first page of this chapter dates back to 1712, but it might as well be modern experience design lingo). Both styles say something about the values and vision of the owner. With churches and gardens, it's not about transferring facts but about sharing a mindset. The intention is for the creator and the visitor to meet at a high level of communication. This is a characteristic feature of all Worlds of Wonder.

TERMINOLOGY

In fact, creating a World of Wonder (WoW) is like simulating the world experienced by a curious mind. Looking at it from a more literal perspective, it represents a wonderful environment, or wonder world. There are different names for it in different fields. In theatre, the concept of 'narrative space' is used to describe the mindset that the audience shares with the makers. In English, the same concept is also called a *story world*, while the Dutch refer to it as a *beleefwereld*. The Germans sometimes use the word *Raumwelten* (space worlds), in the United States you'll come across an *imaginarium* every now and again and the French use the word *scenographie*. You might also run into an *experium* or hear the phrase *3D storytelling*. In theme parks, these spaces are known as *themed environments* or *immersive spaces*. In the corporate world they're simply called *experience centres* or *experiences*. Museums still use the term *exhibition* to refer to a growing range of narrative spaces. All these words mean approximately the same thing: a space in which visitors undergo a directed experience with a certain content. In this book, we use all terms interchangeably.



WONDER

In a World of Wonder, imagination is king. These places awaken the imaginative faculty of their visitors, which starts to resonate with the story. This is where WoWs distinguish themselves from classical exhibitions and information centres, which are all about conveying facts and teaching their audience. This is not the whole story in a World of Wonder, where the intention is to inspire the audience by encouraging them to engage with a newsworthy story or idea. Wonder is the core part of a World of Wonder, the experience of surprise that makes a strong and lasting impression.

The main underlying idea is that people become more intelligent, more creative and more enthusiastic when they are in awe. Wonder sharpens the senses, encouraging them to feel and taste. It engages the brain to get to the bottom of everything around us and switches on our ability to form a mental picture. On top of all that, it's just a lovely thing. Wonder opens you up to the beauty of the world and lets you give in to new experiences and acquire entirely new ideas.

There is a great need for this. Ideas, inventions, brands, political ideologies, organisations and cultures are all the product of the human mind and they are only useful to the extent that they are also supported and understood by other people. That's where imagination comes into the picture: we might not realise it, but an increasingly large part of our world is becoming virtual. And we're not just talking about bitcoins.

Creating a World of Wonder is like simulating the world experienced by a curious mind.

VIRTUALITY

Take old-fashioned money, for instance, surely one of the more mundane parts of our existence. Money is imaginary. It's made up of coins and paper, or even of bits & bytes. More fundamentally, money is made of agreements. Money works because we share the underlying idea of money collectively. Try using a dollar bill to buy a banana from a baboon. You'll have a hard time fooling the monkey. The dollar bill only has meaning in the human world, because humans collectively believe it has value. This is a great evolutionary advantage. Money makes trading a lot easier, as long as we all believe in it.

The power of collective imagination doesn't only apply to money. Imagine taking the banana from the baboon for safekeeping, promising him that he'll get ten bananas in return when he's in monkey heaven. You will not succeed. The monkey simply doesn't 'do' heaven, no matter how beautifully you may present it. This is very different for people. It has been shown time and time again that people can make even the most demanding sacrifices for no other reason than the promise of some imaginary reward in the future. As far as we can tell, we are the only species that is capable of doing this to such an extent.

The examples of the monkey and our strong collective beliefs were both taken from an historian from Israel named Yuval Noah Harari. In his books, he states that our ability to imagine, the capacity to believe in concepts that we share with each other, is crucial to our success as human beings. After all, there's an immense multitude of concepts between money and religion that we humans have thought up and have actively fostered since: brands, organisations, rules about how we deal with each other, ideas that determine who has authority, values that govern our joint efforts and plans that see us unite behind the promise of a better tomorrow. Our world runs on these concepts, and they're all so obvious that they almost start to seem real. In fact, though, they simply do not exist outside of our collective human imagination.

