

# 48 One of My Top Ten Days

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I wake up in my (*Wallpaper* magazine top ten) hotel and look out the window. It's a stunning view, so I take a photo and realize it's similar to one I noticed on the (Dopplr traveller recommendations top ten) website. I decide to upload it quickly to my blog, where I'm doing a reportage of my trip visiting the emerging design capitals of the world, but there seems to be some problem linking my (*Wired* magazine top ten latest gadgets) phone and the (top ten by market capitalization) mobile network connection. So I go straight down for breakfast. On the way my phone vibrates and it's my friend Dan who has just flown in for the exhibition opening that we are both attending tonight. He suggests breakfast at a café a friend of his recommended, who is originally from this city but is now in a (top ten by billings *Business Week*) consultancy, which involves travelling a lot, and, according to Dan, makes an effort to share his local knowledge with his friends via Facebook. I check where the café is on the map on my phone and as I set off, I notice a couple of other venues that have popped up, prompted by the (*Global Foody* magazine top ten) recommendation engine I signed up to.

After breakfast I decide to buy a packet of coffee. As we wait while it's ground and bagged, we check out some of the other beans available in the café's monthly (top five staff picks) menu, which come from several different countries, some ethically sourced and some organic, according to the logos, but you never know. I tweet the producer's name quickly to see if my Twitter followers know the beans. Then it's time to head to the museum for the invitation-only private view before the official reception later this evening. This is a new design museum, which has been endowed by a (*Forbes* magazine top ten) philanthropist and a few other (*Corporate Social Responsibility* journal's top ten) corporate sponsors. The design world does not yet have a critical mass of museums, fairs, festivals, or private galleries, so I am not sure if today's event will attract the right people. But here we are.

While Dan catches up with a (top ten by mentions in *Monocle* magazine) gallerist, I wander round the show on my own. I know much of the work, mostly iconic pieces by well-known (Phaidon's top ten bestselling) contemporary designers but there are also a couple of more idiosyncratic works by names I'm not familiar with. My phone is again having problems connecting to the network, so I have to rely on the press pack the museum prepared, which cites a journalist who writes for a (top ten by international sales) newspaper, a (top

ten Amazon non-fiction bestseller) historian, and a management scholar from a (*Financial Times* MBA rankings top 20) business school. Including the last is unusual. The design world tends to keep itself at one remove from scholarship that de-emphasizes the particular qualities of artefacts, which is what designers are celebrated for attending to. At least that's what I think and probably so do my (top ten by numbers of followers, connections, and friends on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook) colleagues and peers. But I learn from reading further in the press pack that a strand of innovation management does pay attention to objects and so, presumably, this academic is from that world.

The museum has a small bookshop where I spend time looking at the predictable collection of glossy (top ten by advertising revenue) magazines, mixed with a few hand-printed fanzines which have more of an anti-aesthetic and are not even in English. Definitely need some of them. One of the books is about the museum itself. As I flick through it I decide the architecture is impressive, giving plenty of space to the objects on display but conveying a sense of unspectacular modernity which fits well with the rest of the (top ten by awards and commissions) architect's oeuvre. I already have a couple of other books about this architecture practice, so decide not to get this one. Or not here, anyway. Maybe when it pops up on Amazon.

Once Dan is free we look round the exhibition together, this time trying out the new interpretation system the museum has installed, a co-development with the local (national top ten by research income) university and a (top ten by global revenues) IT company. The assistant gives us each a handset with an earpiece through which we can listen to a commentary in three languages and also leave our own comments which will later be uploaded to the website, presumably checked for obscenities and defamation. I see one of the curators watching us as we get a bit frustrated with the handsets. We go and talk to her to find out why they set it up in this way. This turns into a longer conversation about curating strategies and designing interpretation systems based on ideas of co-production with users rather than telling them how to experience the show. They have also copied the lo-tech feedback system used at a (global top ten by visitor numbers) museum in London for its annual art prize exhibition. This invites visitors to make handwritten notes on small cards that are put up on a huge wall, providing a range of responses to the artwork. Although the show we are viewing is not yet open to the public, quite a few of the cards have already been filled in and put on the wall, presumably by the staff to get things going. Dan playfully fills in one of the cards, writing on it the name of a designer who is not even in the show and adding five stars and a web address for his online auction house. Lunch is laid on in the museum's restaurant, which is surprisingly good, lots of locally sourced ingredients and a small deli where you can buy produce, with its own bags which I see quite a few of the visitors and those of us with the press pack are carrying around.

After lunch I pop out to have a look around the city, which I have never visited before. There's a museum I have always wanted to see with a particularly good (BBC History website top ten) Roman mosaic that I remember my stepfather mentioning from a trip here when he was a student. The museum is currently showing an exhibition of (Wikipedia top ten historically significant) scientific inventions, although as I scan the images on the hoarding outside I have to question how they picked that curator. I decide not to go in after all. Instead I wander in the direction of the old city that, according to my pre-trip research, mixes high-end international fashion boutiques with independent, local retailers. Piped all around this area is whatever the current (top ten iTunes chart) hit is, some awful grime that does not sit well with my desire to be a *flâneuse*. I drown it out by listening to my smartphone, so the choice of music is driven by recommendations on Spotify, not a local facilities manager. As I walk around I note the considerable amount of building work taking place, evidence of the city's emerging role as a (top ten foreign direct investment) holiday destination following the (regional top ten by passenger numbers) airport extension a couple of years ago.

Then it's time for the official opening of the exhibition. There are speeches by the mayor, the benefactor, the museum director, and some rent-a-celebrity who apparently likes culture. I'm sure I saw him a week ago on someone else's arm at an art biennale. I keep looking around to see how many of the designers whose work is shown in the exhibition are here. I do not recognize anyone so am not sure if the funds ran dry or whether they just decided not to come. Maybe I'm missing something somewhere else. A couple of other people here today have been tweeting. I wait to see if any of them have got anything to say about the show.

With some other people I slip off for a quiet dinner. We pick a restaurant that one of them went to the previous night, although I can't find out anything about it when I look it up. I share my observations from my walk around the city and am interested to hear my companions' views. Considering I woke up quite ignorant about what this city had to offer, I am delighted with my discoveries. I decide not to post anything on my blog, to keep this city unknown a little bit longer.