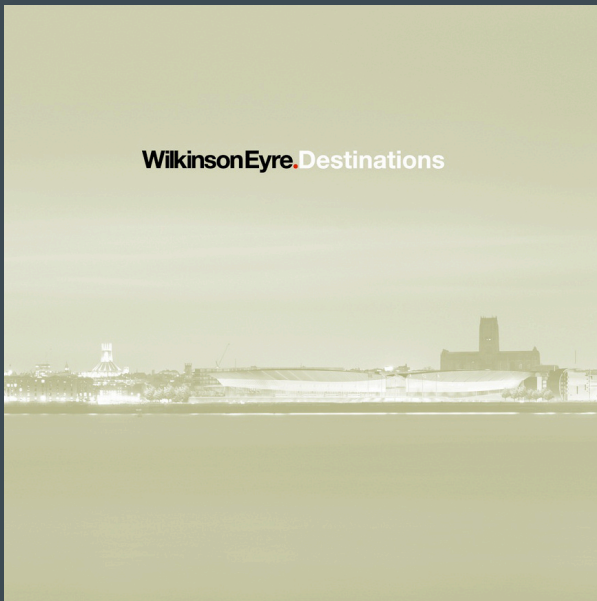


Stephen Feber wrote the lead chapter for Wilkinson Eyre's recent book on creating destinations.



We're travellers first, settlers second. Though we started creating cities about 10,000 years ago, anthropological evidence suggests we've been exchanging objects for at least 100,000 years. Our sophisticated modern cities obscure a deeper human truth, that we love to move across our planet. But it's more than utility that drives this instinct to travel; alone amongst the species we are supremely curious, a natural rhythm of discovery and reflection, journey and destination is etched in us, so deep that no corner of the Earth has been left unexplored. If few of us today are pioneers, we have still need to travel and, as much as we need to move, we need to arrive; we need goals to draw us forward. In short, we need destinations. Just as naturally, we tell stories about the process; the movements of plot,

character, suspense, sequence echo the rhythm of the journey. A common thread of narrative joins fiction and travel.

When Wilkinson Eyre create new destinations they understand this need to work with the truths of human nature, to create architecture that supports the rhythm of human exploration and provides the material of story telling. At Magna the challenge was to deal with a derelict steel mill in a post industrial landscape to help regeneration in South Yorkshire. This meant creating a successful visitor attraction in which exhibits and buildings were in harmony, where the whole was truly more than the sum of the parts. Though an important goal was to show science and technology in action through new engineering and interactive exhibitions, making memorable experiences for visitors was of paramount importance. What we remember we talk about and good word of mouth is an incredibly effective marketing tool. This is the first rule of destination creation; however clever and complex the design thinking, it has to be capable of being summed up simply by a visitor. At Magna the sheer scale of the building, deftly handled by careful detailing, often prompts the evocative headline 'It was awesome'. This is followed by stories of vivid experiences; sweet marketing music.

The second rule is about suspense. No great story is told in the first sentence and in attraction design, like fiction writing, it is essential to create tension. Though its huge size is the most obvious thing about Magna, it is experienced in a pattern of revelation and concealment. From the first approach, the building shows itself to the visitor and then hides behind earth banks. Even when alongside, in the car park, the length of the building is revealed but not the depth. The approach from the road begins to engage the visitors' curiosity and once inside a series of large and small spaces and sequences of spatial compression and expansion engage the instinct to explore. The variety of spaces, iconic structures and rich exhibition areas were designed to offer a range of narrative pace and a variety of challenges to the different sections of the Magna audience. The contrast between the open and closed volumes is heightened at Magna by the use

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of interactive sculpture, deliberately woven into the fabric of the building, rather than applied as 'art'. These hotspots of experience are linked throughout the building by a carefully designed light and soundscape. The result is a multi sensory tapestry, exactly the rich, deep experience which is a stimulus to discovery and the anchor of recall.

Because such complexity of space, sound, light and structure could easily have become fragmented, a key factor in Magna's success was the creation of an integrated design team spurred by the simple goal of making a beautiful and useful science centre. The building and its exhibitions were treated as one, with interactive experiences for children and adults at the core. Although there was an emphasis on creating a single product the goal was also to create spectacular peaks in the visit, which could support a marketing campaign, stressing the differentness and challenge of the Magna experience, summed up in the single phrase 'Off Limits!'. Behind the simplicity of the advertising promise stood the reality of a complex but integrated design. This is a third key lesson; for a brand to be established, a strong, value for money product and simply understood promotion must be in step. Visitors hears stories before arriving; the place has to make them come true and create new ones in turn. Magna achieved this and delivered as a destination.

A more complex fourth component of destination is the thread that links place and history. Real power comes when past and future are correctly weighted in the design, striking a balance between the native old and the exotic new. At Magna the given forms of the retained steel mill structures are not aped in the science centre but used to create a design palette for the new elements. A strong sense remains of steel making and of South Yorkshire as a particular place. For local people, this respect for the past helps identification and ownership. At the same time they value the science centre's focus on the future, seeing it as an important educational resource for children and grandchildren; an essential for audience building.

In the North East the Tyne bridges stand as heroic structures, evoking a great engineering past. Yet they also have a quality of possession and personalisation; people like them, sometimes naming them like a mantra as they cross the river on the train. The Millennium Bridge captures this genius of place yet, in a way that none of its predecessors can manage, it marries the organic and the mechanical.

The double elliptical form is intrinsically pleasing and structurally efficient; balance and lightness allow the bridge to rise elegantly, when river traffic requires it. Form, function and materials all work together to give an integrity and honesty of purpose, which is tangible because visitors and residents get so close to it. The random nature of the bridge opening is important too. If this were a theme park bridge it would open on the hour, with a programme of interpretation to boot. The fact that it is unpredictable reinforces both its utilitarian purpose and adds to the slight sense of mystery that surrounds it. The lighting scheme adds to this, changing colour in a way that is alluring for adults and magnetic for children.

Put all these things together and the Bridge has become a destination in it itself. It links past and present through engineering, tapping into a pride in making things which is a common root for local people. It works, too as a signpost to the hotels, residential development and restaurants on the river which has grown into a critical mass, with the Sage and the Baltic as key recent additions. They are all part of a longer process from the 1980's with the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation cleaning up and restoring the river, an improvement in public

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realm which triggered a wave of investment and land price rises. Development values have tripled in the past five years with flats at the Baltic selling at 100% premium over similar apartments downstream. This public-private dialogue has been essential to the development of the area which has become culturally and commercially self reinforcing. The bridge hasn't caused all this to happen but its beautiful structure has come to stand for the new richness of the cities, giving a real underpinning to their symbolic linking and acting as the badge for the new Newcastle-Gateshead brand. Fitness for purpose is linked to a resonance with place, history and destination.

In a city destination, the architecture of the streets, of closed and open spaces, iconic buildings, thresholds and transitions mark out not just a pattern for navigation but the skeleton for the traveller's narrative. Sometimes the intrinsic armature which grounds this is strong; the historic core of Newcastle Gateshead provides a street pattern of great richness and variety. How individual travellers forage within this, how far they risk discovery or stay with the known, is a matter of choice but the City's form helps both the adventurous and the timid make sense of it. Sometimes, as in Swansea National Waterfront Museum, the clues to creating destination are there but are weaker.

The site is on the northern fringe of Swansea's Maritime Quarter, and forms an important link between Swansea Bay and the City centre. At the heart of the Nineteenth Century dock development, it is a literal pivot in the town's history standing between its pre industrial past and post industrial future. As industrialisation helped sever the human link between city and sea, so the new museum, landscaping and transport links are helping reconnect them. Here, the design vocabulary evokes history without becoming a 'heritage' pastiche. The curving form of railway tracks appears in the new landscaping and influences the setting out of the car parking. The layout of the new galleries follows the line of the old revetment wall which carried a high level track through the site, letting the buildings interlock like the carriages of a train. In a more distant echo, the building is clad with three types of local slate, recalling the mineral wealth shipped from the docks in the heyday of the port. Although part of the architectural Intervention has to be robust some of the responses are delicate and exact, almost subliminal. The result is a destination that is of the place and yet distinct.

Whereas Swansea weaves historic clues into a newly effective whole, the arena on Liverpool's King's Waterfront is a stand alone icon, a new focal point for the city's cultural celebrations in 2008. The arena has to work hard to be a destination. Separated from the city centre by distance, a dual carriageway and down river from the Albert Dock complex, the design needs a powerful presence. The form of the building achieves this with its unfolded wings and central 'hinge' it has three things important in a new destination: an immediate, singular presence, both from land and water; a place of congregation, offering, like a shopping centre people as part of the show and, lastly, it a venue for events. In the tradition of the docks and ocean liner terminals before it, the arena stands as place of spectacle on the Mersey. Without the permanent exhibits of an attraction the arena's drawing power is partly the internal theatre of

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its events and partly the shape of the envelope; both comforting and compelling, acting as sign and symbol.

Ultimately destinations that work have the heart beat of a memorable journey. They have richness and depth that allows them to hold tension and provide fulfilment for a range of audiences, offering a variety of experiences later to unfold in traveller's tales. When they encourage a cluster of complementary uses, even in unpromising post industrial landscapes, they can turn locations into destinations. To understand this and create a design that puts it into play requires a creative will and collaborative intelligence which is rare.