

From howlingly horrible to neck-hair-quiveringly sublime, this year's Design Indaba Expo had it all, writes **Veronica Wilkinson**

WHAT THIS year's Design Indaba Expo 2011 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre lacked in size, it certainly made up for in sass, spunk and products ranging from classic to grittily innovative.

Not only was Cupcake Country offering you your cake to keep (in colourful felt and beads), it was also tuned in to the topically relevant issue of calorie counting, and the popular aboda range of cutlery design evoked notions of instruments of torture.

Perhaps intentionally addressing feminist issues and excessive consumption; its stall formed part of the Department of Trade and Industry's promotional pavilion.

But then, as we all appreciate, taste and aesthetic are so often individually exclusive realms of choice. When it comes to the beautiful, Angeline Masuku's basketware (also part of the dti pavilion) displayed examples of the natural fibres used to make her finely crafted and geometrically patterned utilitarian objects of beauty.

For those who believe that babies should be felt and not heard, (Panda-eyed moms and dads please read this with tongue-in-cheek), award-winning artist Ronél Jordaan's felt baby bubble; a suspended, felt-padded but structured alternative "cradle" hung in front of star-shaped felt sound-proofing that can be attached to the walls of nurseries provided an interesting interpretation of the simple, labour-intensive Mongolian felting methods she employs.

From the maquettes of megabuck mansions designed by sophisticated architects like Van Der Merwe Miszewski, to the brave but unrefined brass of African chair designer Raymond Masara with his hand-written signage, there were surprises aplenty at every end of the design spectrum.

Some of these came in the form of old tin baths recreated to form padded seats – all it takes is a removable upholstered wooden panel, and even ordinary tin buckets fitted with cushions to make seats – again a simple but brilliant concept seen at Recreate, Visi and the Cape Craft and Design Insti-



OTHER-WORLDBLY: A maquette from Van Der Merwe Miszewski Architects.

PICTURES: VERONICA WILKINSON

Bizarrely BEAUTIFUL

tute's stands.

Getting back to architecture at One City Two Worlds, part of the corrugated iron structure surface featuring an aspect of one world was pasted with a famous local pilchard-in-tomato-sauce brand that doubled as wallpaper; and at the Hillcrest Aids Centre Trust T/A Woza Moya stall, the same brand worked as decorative shelf papering. Woza Moya featured cascades of colour in beadwork that extended to upholstered surfaces and was simply breathtaking.

Pilchards, as the protein of the people, was a recurring motif at the expo, with the best example from the underwear and swimwear label Baie Nice, whose quirky take on beefcake features a handsome black model wearing underpants with the word "Langa" written across the codpiece – how that may have

spiced up the lives of 16th century Breugels we'll never know.

They also do a cute line in gender bender underwear advertising. Ed Suter's kitsch but retro style deserves a mention simply because it's not only clever, but colourful and fits in with the 1970s feel of the show this year.

I heard matrons who should have had the bags under their eyes patented, gushing about nostalgia and temporarily crumpling onto the beautiful mosaic four-seater couch near the entrance; a project started by photographer Karina Turok who initiated the first "Safe Spaces" campaign by Rock Girl, an organisation founded to recognise the need to educate and empower women and the general population about violence towards and the abuse of women, through art.

Hot on the trail from the dodgy

to the delightful, bright knobby recycled strips of fabric on hessian – accessories and craft kits from Montebello's Mielie were not quite as sophisticated in terms of finish as Zimbabwe initiative's Shumba Inc's handmade felt and bead designs, but the contrast was stimulating to the eye.

As an oriental representative of our rainbow nation, the only Ori-African stall I found was Alice Ng's eastern-inspired clothing and accessories.

An inexperienced, first-generation Chinese born in South Africa in 1989, Ng studied at the Elizabeth Galloway School of Fashion in Stellenbosch and is determined to make her mark on the local fashion scene. She is based in Newcastle, KZN.

This is the Chinese lunar year of the rabbit and Tanya Laing's Soot-

cookie Ceramics bunnies are the epitome of "magies vol, ogies toe" (tummies full, eyes closed), the sort of satisfaction one associates with comfort. A little more ethereal were the flat pink-and-white metal rabbits at Tintown which can be used decoratively with imagination and flair. Also in a light-hearted but exploratory vein I found Pierre Le Roux red tittie-toaster and ballsy furniture design very '60s – but loved it anyway.

Communications, both established and new, like the edition of *Mahala 2* provided in our generous press kits, provided insights that could bridge gaps in perception about contemporary South African perspectives.

From its presentations about available education, accessible fashion, furniture, jewellery, craft, ceramics and both the howlingly horrible to the neck-hair-quiveringly sublime, this Design Indaba made me feel optimistic because of the innovation and adaptation showcased to the public.

My only quibbles are that the light in the convention centre was poor, the numbering on the stalls difficult to follow, and the unmarked inclination of the white elevation to the Absa gallery, which tripped up many an unwary visitor.

Design Indaba is hoping to host the World Design Capital 2014 bid – visit www.designindaba.co.za and see what you think.



GOING FISHING? Baie Nice brand underwear and swimwear.



COLOURFUL: Dreams for Africa chair by Woza Moya. Pictures: supplied



ALL EARS: Ebony and ivory ceramic bunnies from Tanya Laing at Sootcookie.