# Chapter 3
# Design Is ~~Not~~ for Us: Engaging a New Audience for the Design Museum by Changing Their Expectations

**Sophie Boonen, Martijn van der Heijden and Elisa Giaccardi**

**Abstract** Current visitors of the Design Museum in London can be roughly divided into two types of people: experts with a background or specific interest in design and novices that are new to design. User studies in the museum revealed a lack of engagement with the novice visitors, which mostly has to do with their attitude when they enter the museum. They have relatively low expectations about their visit, assuming design is 'just not for them'. This chapter argues that in order to engage them, the museum should lower the perceived exclusiveness of design, broaden the amateur's view on what design can be, and create a lasting experience outside of the traditional museum visit. This alternative approach resulted in the proposal for a design intervention in the form of a 'Design Library'. Lending out part of the design collection to visitors enables self-documentation of user experiences through a mobile application. Collected stories are made available to (novice) visitors in the museum, broadening their definition of design. At the time of publication, the Design Library is still only a concept. Nevertheless, this project shows an interesting approach for a museum to change novices' attitude towards the subject, and thus, their expectations before they enter the exhibition.

## 3.1 Introduction

The Design Museum in London is a museum devoted to contemporary design in every form. In November 2016, the Design Museum moved from Shad Thames to the former Commonwealth Institute in Kensington, 34 years after its founding by Terence Conran. The move brought the non-governmental museum closer to the

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cultural heart of London. It also gave the museum more space for exhibitions, retail and leisure. The goal is to attract a larger and wider audience, in line with the Design Museum's mission 'to inspire everyone to understand the value of design' (Chanter and Van der Heijden 2015). This ambition is not limited to its building. The museum aims to be 'the world's market square for ideas and design thinking, where audiences and professionals gather' (Chanter and Van der Heijden 2015).

As a step towards the move, the Dutch agency Fabrique designed the museum's new website in 2014. This was the start of a longer cooperation, including the design project executed by Sophie Boonen that is presented in this chapter. Boonen executed this project between September 2015 and June 2016 as her graduation project for the Master programme in Design for Interaction at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering (IDE), Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands.

The design process followed a design thinking approach: creative problem-solving by investigation, ideation, iteration and reflection. The focus of this project was to take user-centred design as an approach for developing ideas for engaging a larger audience with the Design Museum. The outcome of this project was the design of a service, the Design Library, which remains a concept at the time of writing this book chapter.

In this chapter, we first describe the project challenge in Sect. 3.2. During the project, studying related literature and making a comparison of museum exhibitions were all part of defining the project challenge. We give theoretical background to get an understanding of the notion of 'design expertise' and 'the role of objects in museums'. Section 3.3 highlights one of the many user studies conducted as part of this graduation project. The outcome of the user study led to reformulating and specifying the set project challenge, as described in Sect. 3.4. During the ideation phase of this graduation project, many possible solutions were created. Then iteration followed, a process of refining the concept with increasing fidelity. The solution—the Design Library—is presented in detail in Sect. 3.5, as well as how we evaluated its design. The data that resulted from the evaluation were used to determine further improvements of the concept (discussion at the end of Sect. 3.5) and draw conclusions in Sect. 3.6.

## 3.2 Defining the Project Challenge

At the outset of the project in 2015, the Design Museum and Fabrique had set the goal of improving the visitor experience in the then still unfinished new museum. In order to define a more specific project challenge, Boonen applied a combination of literature research and interviews with stakeholders.

An interview with Josephine Chanter, Head of Communications and External Affairs at the Design Museum, points out that visitors of the Design Museum can be roughly divided into two groups: expert and novice visitors (Chanter 2015).

1. **Expert visitors** are the (professional) design loving audience. They are familiar with different types of design. Their previous knowledge provides a frame of reference to understand and value design.

2. **Novice visitors** are a new audience that may be less familiar with the world of design. They often use a very limited definition of design—usually expensive furniture and/or fashion. They also have little experience in 'reading' it.

The museum's mission implies that the museum must attract and serve both these audiences. Also, attracting more 'design novices' becomes more important in view of the higher costs incurred by the new, larger building in Kensington.

### 3.2.1   Engaging Novice Visitors

Reaching this wider audience has been a challenge for the museum in the past years. Chanter remarks that the current reputation and programming of the museum is relatively specialist. People who visit the museum 'are mostly either people who are particularly interested in design or interested in the specific subject of the temporary exhibition' (Chanter 2015).

Attracting visitors to the museum is one challenge, engaging them when they do come is another. The museum's front of house staff notices a lack of engagement of novice visitors with the exhibitions. Chanter confirms this, as she refers to visitor surveys from recent years (The Audience Agency 2014). They revealed that a majority of Design Museum visitors tend not to come back after their first visit, which is an indirect result of a lack of engagement. Only 15% has visited the Design Museum before during the past year, for other museums in London that number is 31%. In order to truly engage visitors, the museum needed more than a new building.

The challenge formulated from a user-centred perspective was to create a product or service that inspires visitors who are new to design and motivates them to engage with the museum. This led to looking into the mechanisms of knowledge of and appreciation by these two types of museum visitors. Research about novice and expert visitors in a natural history museum provided more insights into the role of interaction with objects (Palmquist and Crowley 2007). As visitors become more expert in a certain field, they develop more sophisticated inquiry and begin to understand objects within their context—a larger system of interaction. Novice visitors often understand museum pieces as an individual object of study, unable to imagine them in their context or associate them with developments in society. This might result in visitors missing important bits of information and product features.

In one of their journals, Bollo and Dal Pozzolo (2005) describe how the 'ordinary' museum visitor behaves in an exhibition. They state that ordinary visitors might not know why certain objects on display are important at all. So in this case, with expertise comes intelligence, absorbing information better, knowing why designs are important and what designs are more interesting for the visitor personally.

This brings us back to the research of Palmquist and Crowley, who notice that expert visitors behave in an independent manner whereas novices expect the

museum to guide their interpretations. When the museum does not provide this guidance, visitors need to focus a great part of their attention on establishing ways to interpret the experience and information. As a result, the general audience will not notice the details that tell the story about the other values of the product: its usability, how it was produced, etcetera. Let alone what sets it apart from other similar products, or what the impact was for its users or even society at large.

## 3.2.2 Theoretical Background

Two considerations provide insight into why the Design Museum experiences difficulties in engaging novice visitors. The first one is expertise: who decides what is good and what is bad design? Aren't we all users of design and experts of our own experience? The second consideration is the ownership of objects: what is the difference between an iPhone in the museum and the one in your pocket? The majority of the Design Museum's collection consists of industrially designed products in categories of furniture, kitchen appliances and consumer electronics. These objects were sometimes produced by the thousands and can possibly be found in many (British) households. However, there might have been remained only a few copies of a particular object over the years, carefully collected by curators of the museum. To borrow the expression from Chenhall and Vance (2013), we could say that they are '(almost) unique objects'. So why would you go to a museum to objects that are not unique?

### 3.2.2.1 The Definition of 'Good' Design

To the general audience, 'design' is often synonymous with expensive interior objects and fashion. People expect that the museum will teach them what is good and what is bad design. Chanter states that visitors often look for a timeline with the best cases of design (Chanter 2015). At the time of this project, the Design Museum offered neither of the two.

The question is: what is good design? Is it beautiful? Useful? Original? Innovative? There is not one definition of 'good' design; there is not even one definition of 'design'. Thus, the Design Museum wants to show a diverse view on design, covering a wide range of design disciplines. As a museum, they want to allow people to form their own opinion on design.

The Design Museum focuses on the impact of designs on the users, environment or society, for example. Sometimes it will put on a fashion exhibition, a field that fits the popular definition of design. Yet within the exhibition's subject, the museum still takes an uncommon angle. For example, the Paul Smith exhibition (Design Museum 2014) featured the designer's sources of inspiration rather than his products. In other exhibitions, some of the exhibited projects are less tangible and somewhat abstract, like the more experimental 'Designers in residence' projects

(Design Museum 2016). This makes it hard for novice visitors to understand their meaning and value. These visitors also have less specific design-specific knowledge to refer to.

### 3.2.2.2  'Almost' Unique Objects

It seems contradictory that design is too ordinary to merit a close look, yet too rare to be touched. Almost all designs in the Design Museum are displayed behind a glass wall (Fig. 3.1) or inside a glass box (Fig. 3.2).

To make visitors see the value of an object, the museum often uses the notion of defamiliarisation.

'After a while we just become completely familiarised and habituated to our environment, so we stop seeing things. What the museum does, it fractures that habituated looking, so that you can look fresh and see new. It should enable visitors to look differently at design', explains Helen Charman, Head of Learning at the Design Museum. Defamiliarisation was defined by Viktor Shklovsky (1917). He states: 'The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar" to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged'. This may work for art, and putting a design into a museum will make people look at them and consider their beauty. But in a museum, visitors are free to explore the exhibited objects.



**Fig. 3.1** The design museum traditionally displays a collection of objects and images behind a glass wall

**Fig. 3.2** Some objects are placed inside a glass box or with a 'please don't touch' sign

So they are also free to 'ignore' them, to take in only part of the information or not to take any notice of it at all.

According to Tisdale, museums only need objects 'if they do something great with them' (Tisdale 2011). He states that exhibitions should be not only educational but also unique, memorable, moving and provocative. He points out the limitations of a 'plexiglass-and-velvet-ropes approach' that favours the visual over other senses. The obvious way to experience the uniqueness of a product is to use it, to touch the object and try it out. But this is not yet possible in the museum, for obvious practical reasons.

### 3.2.3 Context Research

Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 gave insight into how novice and expert visitors behave in exhibitions. But the visitor experience consists of much more than the actual exhibitions (Giaccardi 2012; Giaccardi and Plate 2016). It also includes exploring collections online, attending events, interaction through social media, checking reviews on websites such as Tripadvisor and purchasing objects in the Design Museum Shop. All these activities have the potential to open up the visitor experience to a more personally meaningful relationship with the objects *inside* and *outside* of the actual exhibition (Giaccardi 2012). Technology enables these personal experiences and meanings to be embedded into the objects themselves,

making these experiences and meanings accessible to ordinary people. Thereby new shared spaces of interaction and values are materialised in the interaction *with* the physical object (Giaccardi and Plate 2016).

## 3.3 Methodology

The design challenge stated in Sect. 3.2.1 led to the main research question: how to inspire novice visitors and motivate them to engage with the Design Museum? In order to get to know the Design Museum's visitors and how they experience the museum as a whole, an explorative field study in the museum's old building took place in October 2015. At the time of this study, the Design Museum had three exhibitions going on: 'Designs of the Year 2015', 'Designers in Residence' and 'Life on Foot': an exhibition of shoe brand Camper.

To begin with, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six leading staff members of the Design Museum, from the departments of Curation, Learning and Research, Communication, Retail, Visitor Experience and Building. They were asked about their explanation of the value of design for people's everyday life, the uniqueness of the Design Museum, the role of their department for visitor engagement and their ambitions for the new museum. This was followed by 4 days of visitor research through observations in the museum and its surrounding area, visitor surveys and interviews, street interviews with potential visitors, shadowing a visitor through the museum and self-documentation of the museum visit. Research outcomes in the form of survey results, interview transcriptions, audio, video and photo recordings were gathered and coded with tags. All information was organised through an analysis on the wall. Triangulation of data resulted in conclusions and design opportunities.

This study led to several insights, some of which were not surprising to the Design Museum and some would not be relevant anymore when moving to a new building in a completely different part of London. However, one of the used research methods revealed particularly interesting outcomes and had a significant impact on the further proceeding of this project. Therefore, the method and findings of this study are highlighted here.

### 3.3.1 Self-documentation

On average, visitors spent about 1.5 h inside the former Design Museum, including their visit to the restaurant and museum shop (Chanter 2015). We were interested in how visitors spend these 1.5 h in the different areas of the museum. The method we focus on in this section is self-documentation, which is a powerful method for observing processes over a longer period of time; it allows the researcher to see how

visitors see their museum visit. It focuses on naturally occurring interactions and routes through the museum and is therefore more suitable in this context.

This study was conducted with a group of students from Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom). Out of a group of 20 students, 4 of them (3 males and 1 female) were given instant cameras to document their visit in photographs (Fig. 3.3). The easier it is to self-document, the more likely it is that participants will complete the exercise. So the participants were given cards with instructions on what to take photographs of.

The research question ('How to inspire novice visitors and motivate them engage with the Design Museum?') is about *inspiration*, *engagement* and *novice visitors*. The questions that the participants were asked reflect these topics as well as the different stages of a museum visit (before, during and after the visit). The questions included are as follows:

1. *What was unexpected?*
   To find out more about the visitor's image of the experience **before** their visit
2. *What would you like to take home with you?*
   To know what's worthwhile to keep **after** their visit
3. *What inspired you most?*
   What do visitors appreciate most **during** their visit?
4. *What is your connection with design?*
   Are they novice visitors or expert visitors regarding the topic of design?



**Fig. 3.3** Students were sent through the museum with instant cameras and the task to capture their visit in three photographs

**Fig. 3.4** Afterwards the participants of the study were interviewed individually inside the museum cafe

The participants were asked to write down their reasons and motivations behind the choice of photographs they captured. Furthermore, they were interviewed afterwards (see Fig. 3.4), to extract the deeper values and meanings behind their answers.

### 3.3.2  Findings

Findings of the self-documentation study are summarised here and are contrasted with findings from observations and conversations with other visitors, as well as museum staff members. Since the main research question is around engagement,

**Fig. 3.5** A collection of photographs taken during the photo study with comments from participants

outcomes are structured according to broad engagement measures like time, overall enjoyment of exhibitions and depth of exploration (Fig. 3.5).

1. *Time spent*

Participants that were asked to self-document their visit with a camera spent more time in the museum's exhibition area than their fellow visitors without a camera.

2. *Enjoyment of the Design Museum compared to other museums*

Based on the observation of students in the gallery, it seemed that they enjoyed the exhibitions. This was confirmed by them in the interviews. The students mentioned the Design Museum being the most interesting museum of their study trip so far (which also included the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum).

3. *Enjoyment of exhibitions*

Observations in the museum showed that the exhibition space of 'Life on Foot' did not attract many visitors. Most visitors interviewed mentioned the highlight of their visit being 'Designs of the Year', the exhibition that was the most straightforward one of the three. It shows an overview of award-winning Designs of the Year 2015.

The 'Life on Foot' exhibition attempts to unveil the social, cultural and environmental impact of a life on foot. It has sketched concepts, prototype product and as-yet-unreleased pieces on display.

But ordinary visitors do not see this and express that they find the exhibition too commercial and just saw 'a bunch of shoes'. They missed the idea behind the exhibition, did not see the relevance of objects in the room and missed out on the main topics. It seems that people already walked in without having a clue what they could expect from this exhibition.

Participants of the self-documentation study showed a specific interest in the 'Life on Foot' exhibition. They seemed to look longer and more closely at exhibited objects and took many photographs in this exhibition space.

To illustrate this with an example (see Fig. 3.6): to the question 'What was unexpected?' participant 1 responded with a photograph of a Camper shoe prototype out of coconut, as he explains: 'I never thought you could make shoes out of coconut. That's just a whole different thing. I really like materials and manufacturing so this really appeals to me'.

4. *Depth of exploration*

Participants were immersed in less obvious parts of the exhibitions and devoted attention to understanding more abstract or conceptual designs by reading stories
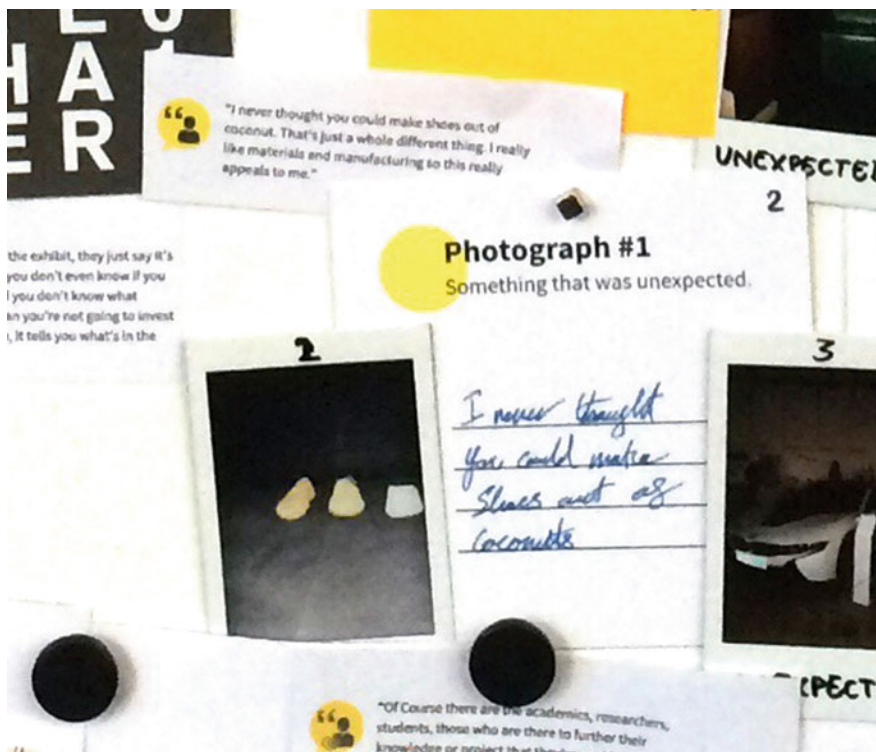


**Fig. 3.6** Something that was unexpected: a pair of coconut shoes, 'I never thought you could make shoes out of coconuts'
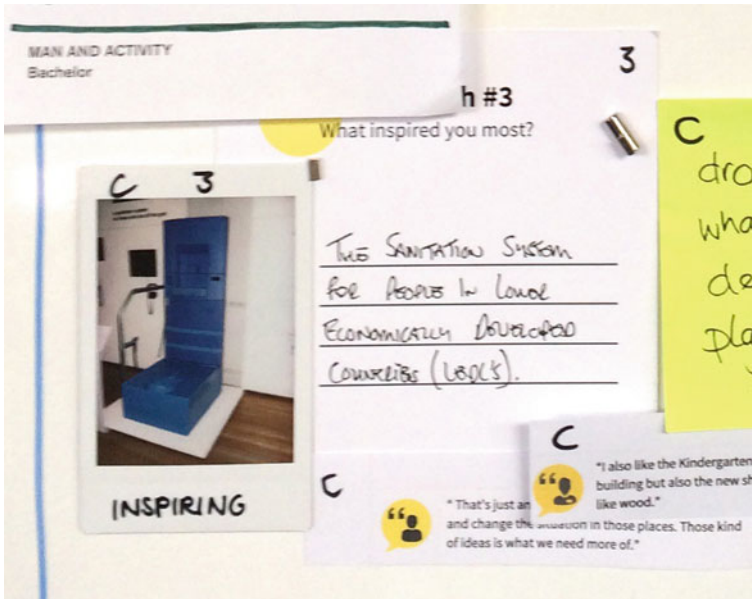
**Fig. 3.7** What inspired you most: 'the sanitation system for people in lower economically developed countries (LEDCs)'

behind the objects. Participant 3 photographed a sanitation design for developing countries, one of the less straightforward designs in the exhibition of 'Designs of the Year' (Fig. 3.7).

After the self-documentation study, participants started discussing with each other what they liked in the museum and why, which made them more aware of their opinions and values in design.

Participant 2 was reminded of his past by some of the objects he saw in the exhibition. For the question 'What would you like to take home with you?', he photographed a set of assembly chairs from the Designs of the Year exhibition. He added to that: 'I like wooden things. I guess I'm just really raised with the idea that you can make a lot of things with wood. My dad always used to say; "If you want to have something, see and try if you can make it yourself first"' (Fig. 3.8).

### 3.3.3   Conclusion

The findings suggest that the Design Museum can have an influence on people's experience by providing clarity on what can be expected and by guiding the way they look at their exhibitions.

By telling the students to look for something 'unexpected' and 'inspiring' they already enter the exhibition with the impression that the museum will be inspiring,

**Fig. 3.8** Something you wish you could take home with you: set of wooden chairs, 'It is all made by different designers so that's quite unusual'

new and different. By handing over the camera, they were basically given the role of a design expert. You give them a symbolic permission to judge and critique the exhibitions and increase their confidence to say something about design.

So it is not only about what visitors can actually experience in the new museum, but also and perhaps more about what they expect to experience there. The more visitors enter with an open attitude, the more likely they are to engage with the museum. The research points out that novice visitors can be motivated to engage with the Design Museum by influencing their expectations.

## 3.4 Managing Expectations

For an important part, visitor behaviour is determined by expectations prior to a visit. Novice visitors do not get enough out of their visit and are often unsatisfied with the exhibitions because they have no idea what to expect. So in order to engage these visitors, the focus should be on the expectations before a visit instead of the experience during a visit. There lies an opportunity in designing and

managing expectations. Managing expectations, however, is a broad term and can be done on different levels.

There are different types of visitor expectations. They can come from internal beliefs as well as from many different factors in the environment. Expectations come from former experiences, word-of-mouth, needs, values and opinions, the marketing mix of museums, the image of design and of museums and the Design Museum's market communication (Ojasalo 2001).

One might argue that products or services should always meet customer expectations or needs in order to achieve customer satisfaction. However, sometimes the visitors' expectations might be unrealistic, infeasible, unproductive or unjustified. In such cases, the Design Museum has to cope with visitors' expectations in a different way. It needs to shape and alter them so that the museum experience is evaluated more positively (Sheth and Mittal 1996). In other words, putting people in the right mindset for engaging with their exhibitions.

Raising expectations, however, requires striking an effective balance of high and low expectations. The danger of setting high expectations can be dissatisfaction about the visit—e.g. visitors have the expectation that 'design is a big thing, so London's only Design Museum will also be BIG'. When the actual museum is smaller than expected, visitors might be dissatisfied. On the other hand, an example of a low expectation is 'in museums you often have to read a lot and be silent, so it will be boring'. The risk of low expectations is that it might prevent people from even going to the museum at all.

The targeted audience segment of novice visitors most likely has low expectations about their visit, since they are new to the Design Museum and have little experience in the design field. When seeing the words 'design' and 'museum', all kinds of associations arise in the visitor's head. They may think of museums as heritage, history and things from the past. For most people, the idea of design is limited to fashion, furniture and consumer goods. As a result, they see design as something exclusive they cannot relate to personally. In other words, they think that: 'design is not for us'. This generates low expectations about:

1. **Accessibility:** they perceive design as exclusive and expensive.
2. **Impact of design:** think that design is just about pretty things.
3. **Personal benefit:** cannot relate design to their personal interests or own life.
4. **Lasting effect of their visit:** do not expect to get something out of their experience that lasts after their visit.
5. **Their own creativity:** they are not confident enough to share an opinion about the value of design.

### 3.4.1   Desired Mindset

What the Design Museum needs is an audience with an open mindset, but what is that mindset? Here, we wanted to connect back to the Design Museum, since they

have been figuring out the answer to this question for many years. In the permanent design exhibition developed for the new Design Museum, they aim to warm up novice visitors for the rest of the museum.

The new Design Museum's permanent collection display is called 'Designer, Maker, User'. Alex Newson, curator of this exhibition, states objectives and messages about the value of design from the museum's perspective (Newson 2015). These objectives are written around four pillars of design that form the desired mindset:

1. **Design is everywhere**: Everything is designed: from the architecture of our cities and the typography that defines our street signs to the objects that we use every day. Sometimes design is even invisible.
2. **Design impacts our lives in many ways**: Design is about technological change, consumer choice, commercial manipulation and cultural expression. It has ongoing economic, political, social and environmental impact, sometimes unwanted.
3. **Design is a process**: Design combines creativity with a systematic approach to problem-solving. It starts with a brief and ends with a solution, but in between, there are many different stages. It is a collaborative process with people such as designers, engineers, manufacturers, strategists and the client.
4. **Design is happening now**. Design reflects and changes the world we live in. The future of design is full of possibilities, and the way things will be designed and made is changing—it is continually evolving.

### 3.4.2   Reformulating the Challenge

The reframed project challenge is to create a product or service that shapes the visitor's expectation 'design is not for us' into 'design is for us'.
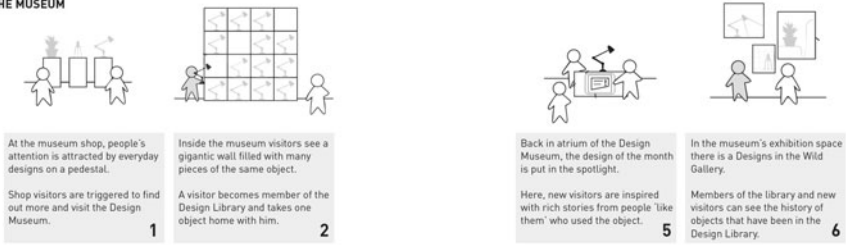
With the four pillars of design in mind, we looked for a design intervention to be designed by Boonen. The objective of the ideation phase that followed was to generate ideas that don't interfere with the content of exhibitions and create something that stays, when temporary exhibitions come and go. To be disruptive and to not let ideas be restrained by the space in between the walls of the museum and to extend the experience to before and after the actual museum visit.

## 3.5   The Design Library Ecosystem

Based on the research and thinking presented above, Boonen designed the concept of the Design Library to address the design challenge. The concept was created in an iterative, spiral-like development design process as is common at IDE (Roozenburg and Eekels 1995). Over a period of 4 months, ideas were generated, compared, selected and tested based on the project requirements. The three most

**The Design Library**

AT THE MUSEUM



At the museum shop, people's attention is attracted by everyday designs on a pedestal.

Shop visitors are triggered to find out more and visit the Design Museum.                                      **1**

Inside the museum visitors see a gigantic wall filled with many pieces of the same object.

A visitor becomes member of the Design Library and takes one object home with him.                             **2**

Back in atrium of the Design Museum, the design of the month is put in the spotlight.

Here, new visitors are inspired with rich stories from people 'like them' who used the object.                **5**

In the museum's exhibition space there is a Designs in the Wild Gallery.

Members of the library and new visitors can see the history of objects that have been in the Design Library.   **6**

AT HOME

At home or at work for example, the user can start playing with the object.

Over a longer period of time he experiments with the object and forms an opinion about his experiences.        **3**

He is triggered to share his opinion about the lamp by the Design Museum.

Through the Design Library app curators, designers and other users ask thought provoking questions.            **4**
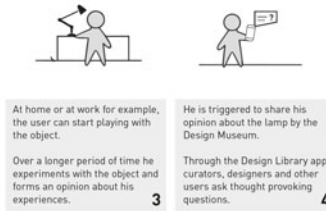
**Fig. 3.9** Scenario of the Design Library in use

promising concepts were elaborated upon and presented to the Design Museum, IDE tutors and Fabrique, and finally, the chosen concept was detailed.

The schedule in Fig. 3.9 gives an overview of the Design Library concept: a service for museum visitors to borrow design objects. An app on their phone allows them to log their experiences with the object. Stories of different users around the same object are collected in a central database of design experiences. Visitors of the Design Museum encounter these stories through two free exhibits at the Design Museum, the Spotlight and the Design in the Wild Gallery, and in the museum's Shop.

### 3.5.1  The Design Library

The concept is designed to address needs of both expert and novice visitors and fits with objectives of the Design Museum itself:

1. It allows expert visitors that most likely are motivated to join the library to experience iconic, otherwise possibly exclusive design objects at their homes.
2. It shows novice visitors a diverse and democratic view on design, it proves that design is also for them, improving their appreciation of the museum's displays.
3. It creates a new service for the Design Museum, builds a valuable collection of data and generates visibility outside the museum building.

We envisage this works as follows. The Design Library needs active participants who are enthusiastic about taking a museum object home with them. At first, these participants will mostly be the design loving audience. By taking an object home from the museum, people can experience how it impacts their own life over a certain period time; experiencing real use, rather than only reading about facts such as material characteristics or the designers' biography. The Design Library enables exploration, learning to appreciate design by experimenting yourself.

As a result, the museum experience is extended to people's homes. It will make them feel more attached to the museum, stimulating lasting relationships between the Design Museum and its visitors.

By allowing visitors to take objects out of the museum, the museum's visibility is increased. It can reach and attract people who might not even go to museums usually: a novice audience.

By bringing design to the crowd and showing that the user is an expert, the Design Museum can show empathy with the big public. Instead of just giving background information about the designers, design process, materialisation and manufacturing of a product, the user's experiences should be included in the story of design. The user-generated content (videos, images and stories of use) enables the Design Museum to show multiple viewpoints to a certain object or topic and create a complete image. People want to see experiences of 'people like them'—people with families, business travellers or couples. Visitors are basically handed over a pair of designer glasses. Not only does it make the story more complete and rich, but it also triggers novice visitors to form and share their own opinion.

The following paragraphs describe the different elements of the Design Library ecosystem in more detail.

### 3.5.1.1  The Design Library at the Museum

Within the publicly accessible area of the Design Museum in Kensington, visitors are exposed to the physical embodiment of the library: a gigantic transparent wall which shows iconic design objects. The library is used to draw the visitor's attention and facilitates storage of the objects as well as distribution to the different users.

The Design Library's collection would start with everyday consumer products that are recognisable. But 'good' design is not just about form and function. For the Design Museum, good designs can also be 'controversial, promising designs that are ground-breaking in the way you interact with them' (Newson 2015). Ideally, the collection has a balance of things people would actually want to buy and, on the other hand, rather abstract objects, developing prototypes or even types of non-physical designs.

### 3.5.1.2 The Design Library App at Home

How long people can keep an object at their home will depend on the type of object and frequency of use. Imagine, for example, that someone borrows an Anglepoise desk lamp (Fig. 3.10) for a month. In return for borrowing the lamp from the museum, users will document their experiences by using the Design Library app.

Over the course of the loan period—in this case 1 month—the application shows comments, notifications and questions. The app enables the museum to pose specific questions to specific users at any moment in time. It triggers users to think about their experiences more thoroughly.

Every few days a curator from the Design Museum poses a new question to all users of the object. At the start, questions will be about observing surface characteristics, but after a week or so, users will be stimulated to take a closer look at the object and how they use it in their context. An example of a question asked to users in their first hours with the object is: 'How did you feel when you held the object for the first time?'. After a while, questions about the actual use and experience can be asked: 'In what angle did you position your Anglepoise lamp?'. It becomes even more interesting when the user is asked to use his own creativity and interpretation, to give the user the idea that he or she is becoming an expert: 'How would you redesign the lamp?'. Questions should allow for deeper inquiry of objects and be open, in order to have a variety of answers, which allows for new perspectives.



**Fig. 3.10** An Anglepoise desk light from the design museum's collection (Source The design museum © Anglepoise)

**Fig. 3.11** Visual interface design of the Design Library application
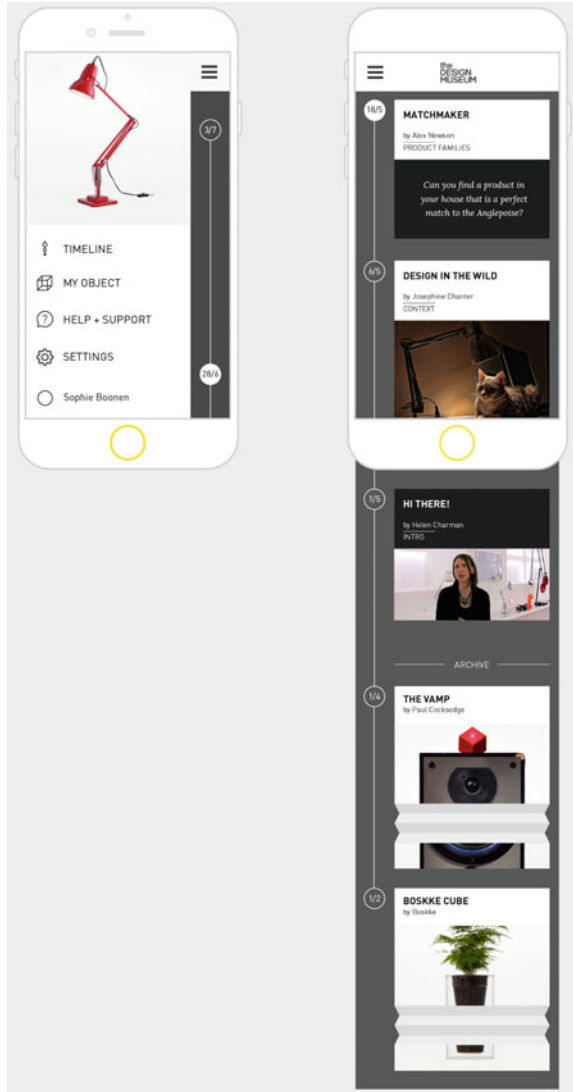


The interface is designed around a timeline symbolising the loan period, see the image below (Fig. 3.11).

### 3.5.1.3   An Experience Database of Stories

Stories in the form of images, videos and text are gathered in an online database of experiences. Assuming there are multiple people actively using the application, a

collection of experiences around an object is built up over time. This can generate valuable insights and knowledge on how different people use and value design objects, to the benefits of visitors, scientific staff (from curators to education), designers and design historians. Knowing its visitors is a valuable asset the Design Museum can have for designing a more powerful, engaging and user-friendly experience.

#### 3.5.1.4 The Spotlight

The Spotlight is a place at the heart of the museum, in the atrium, where user-generated insights around borrowed designs are displayed. New visitors can see what 'people like them' think of a certain design object, instead of having an authoritative voice of the museum or the designer telling the story. This is the spot where novice visitors are shown that the value of design is context dependent and should be seen in relation to its users and surrounding objects.

Practically, the object of the month is placed on a pedestal and a digital information layer in the form of a display is added to the object. This display continuously shows user stories in a random order. Visitors can interact with the display by swiping through stories. They have the option to filter results based on the kind of upload (image, video or text), time and place of upload and characteristics of the user such as gender or age (Figs. 3.12 and 3.13).

#### 3.5.1.5 Design in the Wild Gallery

While the Spotlight focuses on one specific design object, the Design in the Wild Gallery shows an overview of various objects that have been used by people so far (Fig. 3.14). The gallery consists of collected images of objects in their 'natural environment', resulting from pictures taken by users of the Design Library.

It shows novice visitors that design is for 'all of us' and everywhere around us. People recognise the same object in different environments, the natural surroundings of people's homes. The exhibition is co-created by users of the library,

Inspire me with ANYTHING from ANYONE uploaded from ANY PLACE on ANY TIME .

| ANYTHING | ANYONE | ANY PLACE | ANY TIME |
|----------|--------|-----------|----------|
| MOVIES | MALES | KENSINGTON | MORNINGS |
| PICTURES | FEMALES | LONDON | EVENINGS |
| STORIES | FAMILIES | UK | MONDAYS |
|  | DESIGNERS | EUROPE | SUNDAYS |
|  | TEENAGERS |  | THE FIRST DAY |
|  |  |  | THE LAST WEEK |

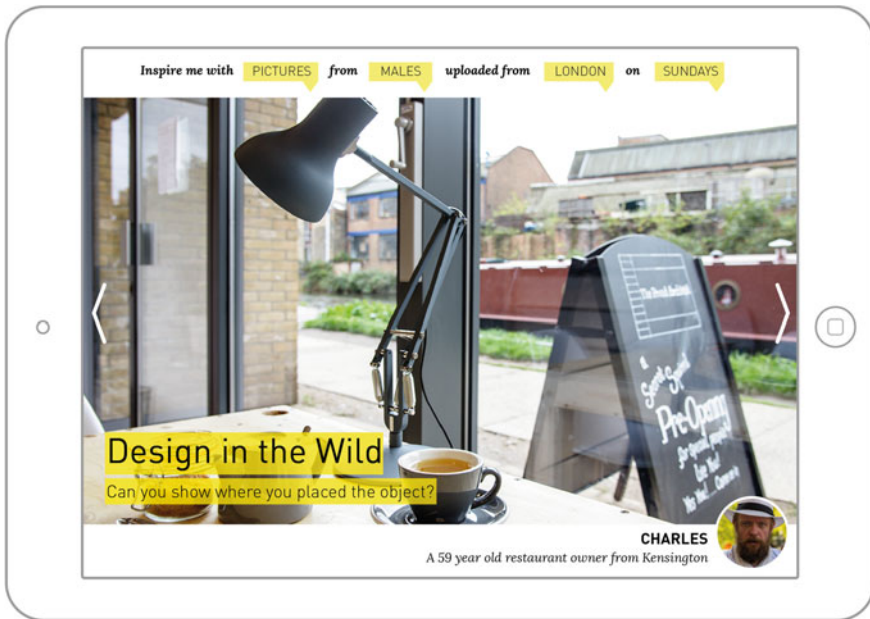**Fig. 3.12** Browsing through user stories by filtering on demographics and kind of upload

**Fig. 3.13** Visual interface design of the Spotlight display

establishing a long-term connection with the museum. This is a permanent gallery: in this way, their image can become part of The Design Museum forever.

#### 3.5.1.6   The Design Library Promotion in the Shop

The new museum has two museum shops: one inside the museum's building and one inside the neighbouring apartment block: the Design Museum Shop on Kensington High Street. This shop forms a bridge between the museum world and the outside world; this is the place where new (possible) visitors come across. It is an excellent way of involving people passing by, who might not have been going to the Design Museum before. A smaller depot of the Design Library here can make people aware of the existence of the service.

### 3.5.2   Evaluation of the Design Library

After creating the concept, Boonen organised a user test with visitors, as well as a review session with museum staff, with the goal of gathering feedback, identifying aspects of improvement and getting useful insights about developing services like this for museums.

**Fig. 3.14** Artist's impression of 'Design in the Wild' gallery

### 3.5.2.1  User Test with Prototype

In order to have feedback from real users, a first test of the Design Library has been performed. We decided to focus the test on engaging the novice audience with the Design Museum, as this was the design challenge defined during the project. With this user test, we wanted to find out whether the concept would change the visitors' mindset: can the Design Library broaden people's view on what design is? Moreover, will it increase their ability to look at design in a critical manner?

The prototype consisted of an iPad app showing a collection of stories from the user's point of view on one single object. These stories were fictional, based on different people representing the novice audience. The digital prototype was used to demonstrate the service's potential in a way that it mimics an actual working app. The iPad and physical object were then placed on a table, giving visitors the possibility to swipe through user stories and touch the object.

The evaluation involved visitors who visited the exhibition and consisted of one question before entering the exhibition and a short questionnaire after their visit. In particular, the questionnaire was structured into various parts, regarding:

1. Definition of design: before user test,
2. Definition of design: after user test,
3. User experience,
4. Willingness to participate in service and
5. Background/level of design expertise.

During the evaluation study, people with different backgrounds were interacting with the prototype, all of them coming into the museum with an idea of design that was relevant to their own personal context (Fig. 3.15).

We found that people trusted the story better when the amount of reviews is high or when the story comes from a friend. One of the participants in the study responded: 'It's kind of like looking to reviews on Amazon but then a better or more reliable way of getting information out of people who actually used an object in their normal life. That's what you normally do, you talk to friends…'.

Participants mentioned that the stories helped them to put things in perspective. When they saw the comments, they realised how objects are actually used and what



**Fig. 3.15** Find a product in your house that is a perfect match to the Anglepoise

its benefits are to the people who wrote the stories. People mentioned to be interested in the different ways objects are used. A visitor imagines: 'I think you get an appreciation for more the functional side of design. […] Like a bike for example, it doesn't just sit there, you actually use it. So the design is used to make a physical experience better'.

There are products or services that you can only understand after you have used it for a while. One of the Anglepoise light's strengths is its constant spring mechanism, which enables freedom of movement and perfect balance. So its value is in the way you interact with it—'If I had the chance to borrow something, it would help me to understand what design really means instead of thinking that design is a style thing. For most people it is just about aesthetics'.

The Design Library is also supposed to trigger users to form and share their own opinion about design. Visitors immediately responded to the stories presented, what they thought about the object, or what objects they would like to borrow and experiment with: 'I might add some opinion about the lamp. I have one but to be honest I rather won't use it. Because I finished my studies three years ago. I used it for studying at night. But the lamp stays'.

Having a consistent design made the interface easy to interpret for users. However, using such a visual style also had an unwanted effect: users perceived the stories as too 'designed'—it did not feel like the comments came from real people. It is important to show that the displayed stories are genuine and not made up or steered too much by the Design Museum.

A sign indicated the possibility to touch and swipe through the stories on the iPad. Visitors were hesitant in interacting with it and only did this when encouraged more explicitly by the researcher.

Most visitors spent only a few minutes in front of an exhibited object or display. In this time span, visitors were not able to make sense of what they saw on the screen. First of all, there was too much text on each individual slide of the prototype. Visitors were not given an overview of comments or people having used the Anglepoise light. They need an ability to zoom out and see the overall result. Finally, there was no clear link between the display and the exhibition on show.

### 3.5.2.2  Review Session

In addition to this user test, a group discussion was held with eight employees from different departments of the Design Museum. Here, the main question was whether they were interested in the service and what it would mean to their own department.

The sessions started off with a presentation of the service in its entirety. Employees were then invited to give input on what should be kept and changed, for each part of the elements as laid out under 'Concept'.

The idea of the Design Library generated interest and enthusiasm among the employees. Employees even started brainstorming on the spot on their ideas for scaling up the concept or applications in other fields.

Rebecca Hossain manages the museum shop and during the creative session with staff members from the museum, she said: 'You can read all you like about an Anglepoise, but once you get it home you think: "Oh… so that's what it is!"'. In other words, the service helps 'selling' design.

From the creative session with staff members, it became clear that this concept benefits the Design Museum in learning more about their physical audience as opposed to their digital audience. It is a way to start a conversation with people, a way in: a poster.

For staff, it would be interesting to see a range of different users—in terms of demographics—using their products. David Houston, who is producer at the museum's Schools Programme, mentioned: 'What I find interesting is how an 8-year-old understands why certain things are important to adults. Why are certain things important for certain people? Who uses that, who's that making life easier for?'.

Alex Newson, one of the museum's curators, emphasised the importance of an authoritative voice of the Design Museum. To the prototype, he responded: 'Different people will respond in different ways. As an organisation, we need to make sure that we give a variety of voices back to people'.

From the museum's perspective, the main point of attention when taking this idea a step further is that the Design Library should not be too suggestive in framing the visitor's mindset. Newson responded: 'You can force visitors into only making one decision and trick them into thinking they've made that decision themselves, when actually that's the only option they had to come to. You can narrow down the options by the information that you give them'.

Employees remarked on the advantages of a service that creates many touch-points with the museum's audience, more than a traditional activity like a guided tour, a first-time visitors' kit or an introductory movie. However, when asked which person or department would be in charge of the Design Library, no conclusion could be made among the people present.

### 3.5.3   Discussion

The design as tested proved to elicit a positive response from people as well as to stimulate them to think more critically about their own opinions and values. However, this was not only through showing the user-generated stories but also through asking them questions in person. Explaining the service to visitors is all part of the time they need to invest in the experience. Time and attention span are scarce resources, so the service should be as simple as possible.

The proposed design opens up more questions, like how does the museum make sure objects will not just disappear? What if a visitor wants to join but is not living in London? And how will the stories be archived? This section does not give an answer to these questions; yet, it positions the concept against related work and discusses the potential of the idea as well as recommendations for further research.

Some visitors will be sceptical about the user's perspective and are more intrigued by the knowledge of the Design Museum as a research institution. For example, the Brooklyn Museum gives visitors the possibility to pose questions to their team of experts at the museum. Via an app, which is simply called ASK, visitors can message questions to curators about works of art (Browne 2014).

Allowing visitors to extend the museum experience to their homes is something that has been seen before. An inspiration for this project is the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum in New York, which lets its visitors add a digital record of an object to their personal museum collection (Cooper-Hewitt 2014). Through the use of a pen, they make it easy and intuitive to collect and store information.

The Design Library ecosystem employs one part of its audience to create the content for the other half. As we found out, user-generated content appeals to people and stimulates them to take a new viewpoint. Some museums have been welcoming the amateur's voice inside the museum—for example, the Portland Art Museum with its Object Stories project, but mostly the visitor's contributions are limited to online (Portland Art Museum 2010).

The success of the Design Library is of course dependent on enough lenders sharing their experiences. However, we do not think that a paid crowdsourcing approach, as described by Van der Lans et al. in Chap. 7, is an option here; to get real experiences, people need to use the objects based on their own motivation, not because they're being paid.

Engaging visitors with different levels of knowledge and affinity has been and will be a challenge for most museums. The traditional approach has of course been to design exhibitions from different perspectives and levels of interpretation, and to organise guided tours and educational activities. Technology has created other ways to change the experience inside the exhibition space, like mobile wayfinding guides (e.g. the Marble Museum application—Ciavarella and Paternò 2004, or Fabrique's app for Tate—Fabrique 2016) and multimedia tours (e.g. the Van Gogh Museum tour—Museums and the Web 2015).

The Design Library adds another strategy to the pallet: change novices' attitude towards the subject, and thus their expectations before they enter the exhibition. It is somewhat similar to the sneak peek of a movie; however, the Design Library is not even connected to a specific exhibition, which significantly limits required investments.

In contrast to the museum experience described by Panagiotis Apostolellis et al. in Chap. 2, the Design Library deliberately is not meant to be a digital museum experience, and it does not involve gameplay. The Design Museum is already relatively focused on engaging their digital audience and is quite successful in this. But in terms of the people who literally drop through the door, they were not yet quite capturing that, reporting on that and acting on it. The power of the Design Library lies in how the different parts are used together. It is not about only thinking in digital or physical but about delivering a product ecosystem that serves the visitor journey across physical and digital environments, using multiple devices that are already available in our world.

The museum should give its visitors the tools to make a decision, while thinking clearly about what kind of and how many tools to give them. By choosing certain objects and asking certain questions you curate their experience. In a way, creating the Design Library is like curating an exhibition and still is work for professionals.

The Design Library demonstrates the potential for museums to go outside the physical museum building into people's homes. Looking at it through the lens of communicative ecologies (see Sabiescu et al. in Chap. 16), the Design Library forms a bridge between the communication in a locality (the museum) and people's way of life. Of course, museums are popping-up outside their primary locations regularly. Yet temporary presences in unused shops, on squares, in schools are always group activities. In this project, however, the library user enjoys a personal interaction with the museum, through the borrowed object and the app. This works perfectly for a design museum, as it collects relatively inexpensive objects, which can be easily transported and used at home. At the same time, no museum we know offers something similar, lending the concept great communication value. Would it work for other types of museums? Maybe not in lending out objects, but the idea to get something at home could work. What about museums of medicine or a zoological museum offering you a monthly exercise that will teach you more about your own or your pet's body?

Finally, it's worth reflecting on why the Design Library still is only a concept, not a reality. As the evaluation with staff proved, the new service is hard to fit neatly into existing museum structures. We think developing new services requires a holistic approach and someone in charge of it all. An example is offered by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Fabrique developed their multimedia tour on request by the learning department, but operation staff hands out devices, the tour is promoted by the communication staff and referred to by labels hung by interpretation staff. Thus, the entire content, operation, promotion, renting out and returning was part of the design assignment. Fabrique's project manager stayed on as coordinator afterwards. This led to one million visitors using the tour (5 euros a person) in 2, 5 years (Van Gogh Museum 2017). Appointing a Head of the Design Library would be key for organisational success.

## 3.6  Conclusion

The uniqueness of the Design Museum is its contradicting nature: placing not so unique objects on a pedestal in the museum. This appeared to be something that was hard to understand for novice visitors who depend on the museum for guiding their interpretations.

The conducted user studies pointed out that especially these novice visitors could be influenced by the museum, changing their image on what can be expected inside. Currently, their image on design is limited, and they think that the Design Museum is just a place where you can see historical furniture behind glass. Design is not only about exclusive and expensive things, but it is about the everyday objects and environments we live with daily. Design is for all of us.

The Design Museum has the chance to lead the way and set the standard for a twenty-first-century design museum. In order to truly engage a wider range of people with the new Design Museum, they should not just offer a smooth and lovely museum visit. In the long run, it is not only about collecting the right objects and curating a blockbuster exhibition. There lies an opportunity in collecting stories, from the people themselves. Our project has repeatedly shown that people will be interested in hearing these stories. People value objects that bring back personal memories, objects that elicit an emotional response.

The Design Library is a great way of enabling active participation of visitors; there is always a reason to come back to the museum. Furthermore, the service touches upon different layers of visitor engagement. It allows visitors to discover, look at and appreciate design objects, and feel the need to collect them. Then it enables them to own museum objects for a while, in order to understand the topic of design better. Eventually it stimulates them to immerse in using the object and discuss its value with fellow users. Eventually, they can share their opinions and experiences with other people, to let them also appreciate design.

The idea was received positively by staff members, people involved in the project and most importantly the visitors. The idea of the Design Library is intriguing. It speaks to everyone; it is a service that is easy to imagine yet unexpected to be existing in a museum.

One of the most innovative aspects of this project was the user-centred approach, which led to a design intervention that crosses several museum departments. During the project, people from different departments were involved and thereby forced to think together about what they want to achieve as a museum. It encouraged the Design Museum's staff to reflect on their organisation structure and to think about the museum visit in a different way. Putting the user at the front of the experience makes it rich, and it seems to make sense for a design museum.

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**Martijn van der Heijden** works as a strategist at Fabrique, a strategic design agency working internationally out of the Netherlands. He has worked on many museum, cultural, travel and retail projects. Yet he remains curious to discover new strategies that fit each new client. Whether it's a museum like Tate and the Design Museum, institutes like the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and Southbank Centre or festivals like Edinburgh International Festival, Lowlands and Operadagen Rotterdam. Martijn has spoken on UX and museums at conferences like SXSW Interactive and MuseumNext. He blogs irregularly on Medium. Martijn has a MsC (cum laude) in Industrial Design from TU Delft, where he also currently advised the MuseumFuturesLab.

**Elisa Giaccardi** is Chair of Interactive Media Design at Delft University of Technology, Department of Industrial Design, where she leads the Connected Everyday Lab. She is one of the recipients of the TU Delft Technology Fellowship for top female scientists, and a speaker at TEDx on the Internet of Things. She is the editor of Heritage and Social Media (Routledge 2012) and author of the chapter "How memory comes to matter: From social media to the Internet of Things" (in the book Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture, Routledge 2016). From her pioneering work in meta-design and participatory technology to the role of the non-human in the Internet of Things, her design research reflects an ongoing concern with design as a shared process of cultivation and management of opportunity spaces.