

Design for Planet Fellowship Exchange

Introduction Episode Transcript

Alisha Morenike Fisher (00:21)

Welcome to the Design for Planet Fellowship Exchange, a series of thought-provoking conversations bringing together the collective intelligence of our fellows. This is part of the Design Council's design for planet mission, which aims to galvanize and support the UK design community to address the climate crisis.

I'm Alisha Morenike Fisher, a multidisciplinary polymath of sorts, practicing in the fields of design, landscape, green buildings, and emerging technology.

So, Cat Drew is the Chief Design Officer at the Design Council, where she champions design for planet by bringing together practitioners from across the design economy, to develop new regenerative practice and create the conditions for designers to do their best work.

There is great work boiling up with Design Council's design for planet mission, which launched back in September, how did this all come about?

Cat Drew (01:09)

Our Design for Planet mission came about because we were really thinking about our role, where we are uniquely placed to act, and what is most needed right now. The Design Council was set up in 1944, to use design to rebuild the post war economy. But the biggest challenge today, for the whole of humanity, is the climate crisis. And that is towards which we need to harness the entire creativity and talent of the design industry.

And to some extent, you might say that designers have been part of the problem: consumerism, producing things that people may not always want. But they can also be part of the solution. We know that, for example, 80% of the environmental impact of new products is determined at the design stage. 60% of carbon emission reductions require behavior change. And who else is great at that making things that people desire and want? 40% of carbon emissions is from the construction industry, and architects and urban planners are a massive part of that. And on the flip side, 33% of cost-effective carbon reduction can come from nature-based solutions, which landscape designers are perfect to do.

And there's 1.97 million people working in the designer community, plus a further 2.5 million using design skills in their work. So, this is a huge resource to leverage.

And of course, many designers have been doing this for a long time. There have been pioneers of green, eco, sustainable and now regenerative design. But there are many more designers who are motivated to design the planet, but who either don't know how to, don't have the opportunity to, or both. So, our mission is to support and galvanize all of them.

Alisha Morenike Fisher (02:52)

And what is the role of Design for Planet Fellowship in this mission?

Cat Drew (02:55)

The Design for Planet Fellowship brings together designers from across different design disciplines, who also have their tentacles outside design, to share examples and best practice of design for planet, and then use design as a way to synthesize all of this knowledge to develop a new set of principles and practices, not just one, but many that others can learn from.

We talk a lot about the fellows being knowledge weavers, and design being an important piece of glue that can bring together lots of different types of innovation and knowledge in one place.

Alisha Morenike Fisher (03:31)

We talk a lot about the climate and biodiversity emergency. Why design so important to address this?

Cat Drew (03:36)

We think design has three major roles to play. One in creating resilient and adaptive places with communities, making sure that they are designed with people and nature, and can adapt to change and thrive throughout.

We also think that design is crucial in regenerating natural resources with Mother Nature. So, working in a circular way to keep materials in the loop, but also using design to regenerate more natural resources. And making sustainable behavior that easy and inclusive and attractive choice. So not just creating things for people to endlessly consume but supporting business to make things that help people live in more sustainable ways.

Alisha Morenike Fisher (04:23)

And how does design need to shift to do this? So what are the wider systems in terms of change that are needed to enable this to actually happen?

Cat Drew (04:30)

Design does need to change. The practice of design, which has for the last 30 to 40 years been very centered on individual people and target groups, has to think more systemically. We need to move from not just being people centered, to planet centered. Not just looking at individuals but looking at the collective.

It needs to move from a linear form, which is quite extractive in just taking resources and making products that people throw away, into something that is much more circular and even regenerative. Not just keeping things in the loop and reusing materials but regenerating them.

The value needs to be not just economic, but also social, environmental, and democratic. And finally, we have to broaden our understanding about who designs and what knowledge we value, to include nonhumans and natural species, and also community and indigenous knowledge.

Alisha Morenike Fisher (05:28)

So Cat, what do you think that listeners to this podcast series will learn? And what do you hope they will take away from it?

Cat Drew (05:34)

I would love podcast listeners to take away two things.

First of all, examples from across design practices and beyond about how to design for planet. And second, the really important power of design not just to make things but to be that knowledge weaving practice of bringing together different types of innovation and knowledge, the intelligent collision, gluing it together and synthesizing it into something that lots of other people can use.

It's been, for me, an incredible privilege to be able to listen to and learn from all our fellows over the workshops that we've been doing with them. They've all taken time to record a podcast for you so you can enjoy that process too.

So, I really hope that you listen, learn and feel motivated to share that with others so we can continue this learning in a bigger space.

Alisha Morenike Fisher (06:31)

That is Design for Planet Fellowship is hosted by the Design Council, the UK's national strategic advisor on design. The Design Council team are Bernard Hay, Cat Drew, and Lucy Wildsmith.

The Design for Planet Fellows are Dr. Tayo Adebawale Professor Carole Collet, Sarah Drinkwater, Finn Harries, Nat Hunter, John Thackara and Josie Warden.

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You can find out more about the fellowship and further resources at designcouncil.org.uk.