



by Gordon
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Birth of the Design Museum of Scotland V&A Dundee

SATURDAY 15 September 2018 will see thousands descend on the City of Discovery for the official opening of V&A Dundee, Scotland's first museum dedicated to design and the only V&A museum outside of London. According to its website, V&A Dundee "will provide a place of inspiration, discovery and learning through its mission to enrich lives through design. For the first time and in one place, V&A Dundee will explore Scotland's design heritage – its past, present and future".

V&A is the 'brand name' for the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was originally known as the Museum of Manufactures when it was instituted in London back in 1852. The royal moniker was adopted in 1899 when Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone for a new building in her last official public appearance. Today, the V&A proudly proclaims itself to be "the world's leading museum of art and design".

For Dundonians, the new V&A Dundee has been a long time coming. It was back in 2010 that the new museum first started to attract widespread attention when a public 'consultation' was held on the six shortlisted designs. Visitors to the exhibition, held in Abertay University, were invited to cast their votes on their preferred design, and the winner was... drum roll... not the magnificent building about to open on the Dundee Waterfront! Intrigued? All will be revealed...

The competition had been announced at the start of 2010, with initial submissions required by mid-February. 122 designs were submitted by architects worldwide and, over the following few months, a panel of judges whittled that list down to that final six. The designers shortlisted were:

- Steven Holl (USA)
- Sutherland Hussey (Scotland)
- Kengo Kuma (Japan)
- Delugan Meissl (Austria)
- REX (USA)
- Snøhetta (Norway)

Each architect was then required to produce detailed design concepts and models to go on public display at the Abertay

University exhibition during October 2010. Visitors were invited to offer their feedback and rank the designs. The public duly chose the all-glass design submitted by New York architects REX but, during their analysis phase, the judging panel discovered that a similar building was going up elsewhere. In their determination that it was crucial for Dundee to have a truly unique building they settled on Kengo Kuma's design as the winner.

With the decision made, the people of Dundee, broadly speaking, got behind the project seeing it as the 'jewel in the crown' of the entire waterfront regeneration – a massive project scheduled to take 30 years and due for completion in 2031. The vision for the Dundee Waterfront project is officially described as:

"To transform the City of Dundee into a world leading waterfront destination for visitors and businesses through the enhancement of its physical, economic and cultural assets."

The original background study for this project was undertaken as far back as 1998, with the completed masterplan being published in 2001. This plan outlined the underlying ethos of the project as being to reconnect the city centre to the waterfront. Big infrastructure commitments included improving facilities for walking, cycling and buses, reducing the effect of cars and parking, creating a pair of east-west, tree-lined boulevards, and the construction of a new railway station and arrival square.

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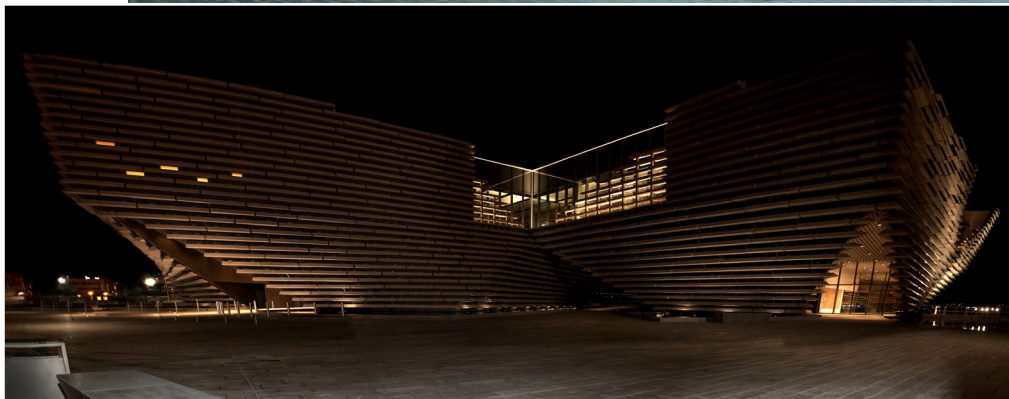
Since then, as anyone visiting Dundee would have seen, in addition to everything directly associated with the construction of V&A Dundee, there has been constant redevelopment of the extensive site. Hidden to the naked eye, railway tunnels have been strengthened to support the new roads and buildings, and vital storm water drainage systems have been created. More visibly, the infamous 1960's Tayside House has been demolished, along with the Olympia Leisure Centre and the unloved 1950's railway station. New roads have appeared, including realigned bridge ramps for the Tay Road Bridge, and the new railway station and hotel complex has been built along with several other hotels and waterfront housing developments – the list is huge, and the improvements are much better seen live than described in words!

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Credit Rapid Visual Media

But back to V&A Dundee itself – how did that idea come about, and why Dundee? Well, as it happens, the concept has its origins around 40 years ago. In 1977 the then Principal of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Myer Lacombe, tried to involve both city and regional councillors in his innovative plans for a major design museum in Dundee. Earlier this year Matthew Jarron, Head of Museum Services at the University of Dundee, discovered the Lacombe plan while researching for the University's *Designed to Inspire* exhibition, currently displaying in the Tower Building's Lamb Gallery until 10



October, which celebrates the city's heritage in design. He says, "Little is known about Lacombe's plan, and it didn't seem to get as far as drawings or models, but we do know that he tried to get Dundee councillors and the Tayside Regional Council interested but his ideas were never developed. This is just one example of how central Duncan of Jordanstone has been to the history of design in the city and to its rebirth as a cultural hub".

Matthew notes that, while there is no connection between Lacombe's plans and the V&A Dundee project, it is remarkable how closely his idea matches. Lacombe later reflected, in 1993, "I believed that Dundee had a unique opportunity to have a great architectural landmark on Riverside Drive which could take the form of a museum/gallery housing a collection of internationally acclaimed 20th century masterpieces of design and craft... In my view the Tay estuary needed – and still needs – a major architectural landmark at the entrance to the city, one comparable to the Sydney Opera House, for example". Prescient or what?

The Art College merged with the University of Dundee in 1994 and, three years later, changed its name to Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in order to more accurately reflect its curriculum. In 2006, almost 30 years after Lacombe's initial plan, a casual conversation in the University late one evening started the ball rolling once

again. Some stories are best told by the people who were actually there, and this is one...

Professor Emeritus Georgina Follett, then Dean of the Art College, was in conversation with the University Principal, Alan Langlands, and the Secretary, David Duncan. Georgina recalls, "We knew how good Duncan of Jordanstone was, there was never any doubt in our minds, but what did it need to make it world class on a permanent basis? I said I'd really like a *Tate Britain* kind of thing, but not the Tate because there's too many of them! I wanted a V&A. By sheer coincidence, it turned out that David Duncan knew the V&A Director, Mark Jones, so contact was made and that was the start of the journey.

"We did a lot of research, including meeting with Bilbao Ria 2000, the people responsible for bringing the Guggenheim to Bilbao. What was fascinating was that Bilbao had gone to Glasgow, as the City of Culture, to start their project, so it was a really nice circle coming back to Scotland. They were fantastic, they shared absolutely everything with us. They said we had to have an international architect, as we were never going to attract people initially with just exhibitions, and that the building had to be stunning. Then the longevity was dependent on your partner, the V&A in our case, putting in major, wonderful exhibitions. So initially architecture, then content. Fantastic advice.

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Dundee Railway Station



Maggie's Centre, Dundee



"First of all, we had to make the inspiration and the vision arguments, which were about identity, transition, moving the city forward, about longevity, sustainability, heritage. Once we had won that we then had to go through a process with the government, a gateway process, and build a business plan, and that plan had real facts and figures with very strong economic arguments. It was a difficult journey but I'm going to say this loud and clear – the local MSPs have been phenomenal in their support. We presented to three culture ministers at Holyrood and finally, in Autumn 2008, we met with the First Minister, Alex Salmond. We presented the case to him, the regeneration argument, the cultural argument and the University argument and he just turned around and said, 'make this happen'. And that was the turning point of the project. Alex Salmond put the civil servants behind it, he supported the processes and it was no longer pie in the sky, it was grounded."

By now the benefits to Bilbao of their Guggenheim outreach museum were well documented. The potential parallels with Dundee were well founded, and the University's V&A ambitions found great synergy within the developing Dundee Waterfront project. Yet any ambitious infrastructure project, as we know only too well from recent experiences of the Queensferry Crossing and the Scottish Parliament, attracts all kinds of negativity and fault-finding from the naysayers. V&A Dundee has been no different, attracting criticisms ranging from budget overspends to late delivery. And yet, here we are with an iconic building ready to open this month with the eyes of the world positively on Dundee and on Scotland.

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Georgina Follett passionately extols the importance of V&A Dundee, saying "One of the arguments I hold closest to my heart is benchmarking Scotland's creative culture and design internationally. I think that will put us on the world stage in design. It hails transition and change. We see an influx of young creative practitioners and designers locating in the city. It's about aspiration, inspiration, and showing people what world class work is like. I hope this building and its contents takes leadership of that agenda for Scotland."

"I think the waterfront redevelopment is wonderful. And don't forget we've got Frank Gehry's building too, Maggie's Centre – there is beginning to be an architectural heart in the city. People want distinctiveness, something that's idiosyncratic not generic, and Dundee is very good at that. It feels with its heart a lot. The *Beano* exhibition at the McManus is an example of an exhibition that should tour, but we don't yet have that reputation and that culture. If we can begin to build that into what we do then you begin to export Dundee around the world again, replicating the jute thing. A lot of the creative people in London are from Scotland, and that's because we haven't had a centre that holds people. If you can build that centre, then we don't lose that talent."

Hearing and feeling that passion from one of the instigators of the V&A Dundee project is inspirational, yet Georgina Follett has one criticism as opening day approaches, which she characteristically tempers with a hope for the future. "The sign in front of the building says V&A, not V&A Dundee, and that's a bad thing. We need to see the V&A Dundee branding. It's a mark of respect and the recognition that we're part of that organisation. Cultural identity is so important. The V&A are not paying for this, Scotland is and it's the generosity and the commitment and the vision and everything. Over time I think you will see a transition. We always knew we were landing an alien spaceship in Dundee, but that alien spaceship allows us to give V&A Dundee cultural integrity from day one. Over time as our experience, knowledge, confidence, and culture grows then why not the Design Museum of Scotland?"

Why not indeed! Interestingly, Georgina Follett was completely unaware of Myer Lacombe's 1977 vision. On learning of it during our conversation she said, "That's fascinating, I had no idea. Lacombe clearly had precognition, maybe that's why our team felt it was just meant to be". Dundee has a rich history and heritage in design, ranging

from the first wireless radio broadcast, the first adhesive postage stamp, the earliest form of aspirin, and many more inventions through to recent times including ATM cash dispensers and digital games. All of this was recognised in 2014 when Dundee became the first (and still only!) UNESCO City of Design in the UK, becoming part of a creative global community which includes Beijing, Berlin and Montreal among others. Several prestigious publications have recently listed Dundee as *the place to visit*, with the *Wall Street Journal* describing it as 'Scotland's coolest city'. Sounds about right, making it the perfect location for V&A Dundee to blossom into the Design Museum of Scotland!

V&A Dundee's sold-out opening weekend will kick-off on Friday 14 September with the 3D Festival, a celebration of design, music and performance. Headlining the event are Primal Scream, Be Charlotte and Lewis Capaldi. V&A Dundee will be operating normally from Monday 18 September. Opening hours are 10am–5pm every day, and admission is free.

Pics courtesy of Shutterstock and V&A Dundee.

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The DCA, Dundee

Slessor Gardens

