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shanghai surprise

expo 2010 in shanghai keeps millions of visitors wondering just how green china can be

By Martin Palicki

In the interest of full disclosure, I need to state that Expo 2010 was the first World's Fair I attended. That doesn't exactly make me an expert (see sidebars for more expert commentary). But the majority of the expo's attendees, Chinese nationals, have likely never attended an expo either. So, like them, I was seeing what an expo has to offer – what vision of the world it projects – for the very first time.

The scale of the expo is enormous, and one cannot help but be amazed at the human cooperation and ingenuity involved in pulling it all together. But as you drill down into each pavilion's experience, the message – and oftentimes the medium – is disappointingly bland.

First, a little background: Though the Expo taking up residence in Shanghai, China hasn't

been very big news in the Western world, it is of paramount importance in Asia, particularly China. Many viewed the 2008 Olympics in Beijing as China's introduction to the world, and the 2010 Expo as its first major entry into the global community. Though the Expo is a PR machine for China to relate to the world, it really functions as a beacon of progress within its own country's borders. The Chinese are experiencing newfound economic prosperity and have entered, en masse, into the tourism and travel market. China's expansive geography and ballooning population, combined with well-developed rail and tour-bus systems, make it the ideal "vacation spot" for its own people. About 95% of the expo's visitors are expected to be Chinese, many of whom have probably never even been to Shanghai. China has heavily promoted the Expo within its borders. From its national TV stations, to ads on buses and trains, and even displays at

cities across the country, the nation seems to be living the Expo for the next five months. Officials estimate the combined attendance at the fair to be a staggering 70 million (Shanghai's entire population, for comparison, is only around 19 million). That breaks down to roughly 250,000-500,000 people per day – about the same number of people who visit all of the 11 Disney parks worldwide each day. (According to the 2009 Global Attractions Attendance Report produced by AECOM and TEA, in 2009, the combined Disney parks received over 10 billion visitors, which equates to 315,364 visitors, globally, per day.)

The expo is roughly divided into three areas. The Huangpu river divides the expo, with the Pudong side of the river hosting the international pavilions. The Puxi side houses

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The Chinese pavilion rises up on the Pudong side of the Expo. Even though the pavilion is enormous, entry is by special ticket only, which are often handed out within minutes of opening each day. Photos by Martin Palicki, unless otherwise noted.



Notes From Expo 2010 Brent Young, Super 78

Beams of lights blasting into the night sky. Blue glowing elevated roadways. Structures that defy gravity and logic. A scale so large that 250,000 people couldn't close its gates. This is Day 2 of the Shanghai World Expo. And unfortunately for me I only have 12 hours to see as much as I can.

As with any exhibition the first days have their pluses and minuses, and Expo 2010 was no exception. On the plus side everything is shiny and new; the paint is still drying and in some cases is still being applied, nothing is worn down (especially the eager young delegates from around the world) and the general ambiance, is all still fresh. Mother Nature lent a helping hand - by Shanghai weather standards the opening 3 days were some of the most beautiful I had ever seen in China.

The minuses were the normal kinks and quirks of a sometimes paranoid, and self-conscious government putting on an event for all the world to see. Like the Olympics, heavy security, crowd control, and logistical mismanagement seemed to be pervasive. Nonetheless, it didn't seem to phase the throngs of people who came to enjoy the day and learn about the world. None of these annoyances were slowing me down - there was more than I could see or do and food and drink were everywhere. The energy of the Expo was magnificent, overwhelming and intimidating.

When it comes to media I'm always on the hunt for the next game changer. What gets me going is either a clever unexpected combination of show elements or a mix of humanity and technology. The single most important ingredient for me is media that tells a story. The wooden themed Chilean pavilion offers one vignette about a typical Chilean couple living in a typical city apartment. It is an authentic slice of life video presentation displayed in a very well controlled environment. The unexpected twist about this piece is that once the media presentation is complete you notice that above you is the actual apartment hanging upside down in every detail. It's a window into the culture and a complete surprise.

Another stand out experiential media piece is in the German Pavilion. The Energy Source is a massive spherical pendulum covered in high density LEDs that react to the sounds of the audience. At one point the orb morphs into a giant eye that spins around the room searching for the loudest participant in the crowd. It is a very cool art piece that I'm sure will inspire future media projects (It has for me!).

In what is called the Theme building there is a incredibly gloomy and despondent exhibit called Urban Planet that tells how urban development is influencing the speedy destruction of the world. To drive this point home at the end of the walk-through guests enter a massive show room with a high-resolution earth turning from blue and green to a brown and grey. This earth exhibit is digitally projected on a 100 foot semi-sphere with more high end projectors than your local cineplex. It's clear that the good people who make and sell pro projection and server equipment had some banner years in the run up to Expo. HD, HD portrait, 180, 270, 360 degrees, dome, water, fog, people, 3D, 4D...if it had a surface you could find a projection on it. There was so much projection I began to wonder how you could have an expo before the digital wonder boxes.

By midday I became a bit weary of all the media and projection I felt a bit disconnected. And I think the guests did too. For example, at the French pavilion Chinese guests flocked to take their picture in front of a sever gone into screen saver mode. I think amongst the rows of avant-garde swing and tilt soft focus camera work this digital gaffe might have come as a relief (comic or otherwise) to the guests. It was clear that there was a shortage of quality engineers and integrators. Many pavilions could have benefited from a consultation with experienced technicians or special venue content providers (i.e. Electrosonic or Super 78). In general there were too many exhibits where the quality of the content and display technology just didn't live up to expectations.

I was hoping to see some glimpse of the future. The Toyota robot playing a violin is cute. The world's largest 3D theater was impressive, the 3D liquid table in the China Pavilion was neat but mostly analogue. Where is the revolutionary stuff? I wanted to see something even more immersive, like advanced augmented reality, not the novelty stuff of today, but where this game changing technology is heading. Where is the holographic projection, laser projection, the Skype of the future? How about a new way to incorporate social networking into the expo? Or something that could keep the Expo experience alive after you left?

Ultimately, if you're reading this article then the Shanghai Expo is a must see. No doubt in my mind you will enjoy the experience and its wonderful reference. And as experience designers know you must experience it for yourself, nothing written will begin to do it justice. My biggest regret is that I didn't have more time to explore everything the expo had to offer.



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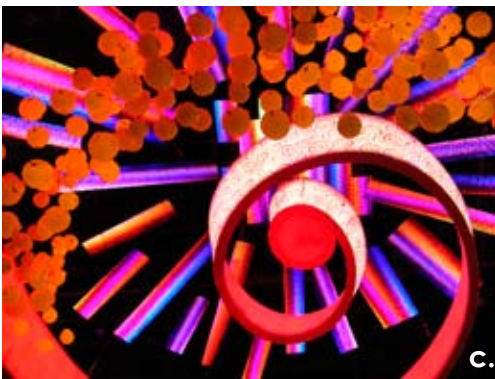
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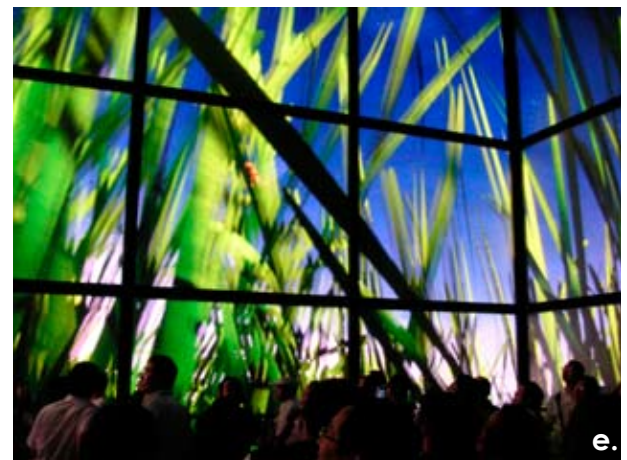
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d.



e.

- a. A performer interacts with the moving balls at the Chinese Industries Pavilion
- b. The bamboo cathedral of Vietnam
- c. It's whimsy and smiley faces at the Oil Pavilion
- d. Even the highways of Shanghai are adorned with color-changing LED lights
- e. Inside the Magic Box at the State Grid Pavilion with projection surrounding guests

Five Things I learned from the Expo by Martin Palicki

1. The real planetary problem we face isn't pollution or consumption, it's population. If there is one thing the Expo made perfectly clear, it is that there are too many people in the world. Overcrowding and inadequate resources go hand in hand, and with fewer people, many of the world's other problems dissipate as well.
2. The Chinese like Chinese food. Many international pavilions offered great dining experiences with food from their native country, but the restaurants were almost empty. Instead, Chinese fast food outlets like KFC and Uncle Fast Food were constantly packed.
3. Our grandchildren will wonder what an incandescent light bulb is. LED lights were so pervasive throughout the Expo, and used in a variety of creative ways, it seems like the days of the good old light bulb are numbered.
4. Queue management is a skill not everyone understands. The entrances to the Expo are built to handle the 500,00+ visitors each day. They are massive, and they include lots of queue. But every day, even at the times when there was no line, the full queue was in use, forcing everyone to walk back and forth ad nausea just to get to the entrance. Once inside, many pavilions had drastically underestimated how much queue was needed. Additional lines were created, but instead of keeping the entrance in the same spot, the queue often began on the opposite side of the pavilion and sometimes hundreds of feet away from the pavilion, making it difficult to figure out which line went to which attraction.
5. The Chinese love a good story. And they won't put up with anything less than a good story. At pavilions where a storyline was weak, or the emphasis was on visual intrigue rather than a narrative, Chinese visitors would get up and leave en masse, even if it meant disrupting the environment for other guests.

the corporate-sponsored pavilions, and a somewhat separate section on the Puxi side contains the urban living case study area, where various global cities are supposed to have built their ideal city dwelling, though most seem like moderately funded tourism advertisements.

INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

With the majority of the Expo's space devoted to the international pavilions, they are the most popular section of the fair. The iconic China National pavilion sits dominantly as the heavy centerpiece for the Expo, both physically and figuratively. Each country positions itself in relation to China, sometimes seeming to appeal to political relations, others to encourage tourism. Nearly 200 countries are represented at the Expo, with exhibits ranging in size from a small booth in a shared space, to pavilions the size of a small stadium. Most fall somewhere in the middle, and most sport eye-catching architecture.

The majority of international pavilions fall into three categories:

PROJECTOR-FEST – This typical pavilion is short on text, and relies on projected images and movies for nearly all its content. Images are projected on just about any surface you can imagine, with content seeming to take a back seat to creativity. Without much context, and with so many pavilions using projection, images start to blend and messages are lost. Also popular are interactive projections, where guests wave their arms to make things happen on the screen. While popular with the Chinese, their contextual connection to the country is often, at best, tenuous.

THEN & NOW – Very popular with smaller pavilions, the narrative throughout the pavilion simply tells the story of how the country used to be a provider of X in ancient times, but now they are a modern country that produces Y, where Y= something Chinese people need or want (often related to energy consumption). While some pavilions, such as Qatar, blend this storyline with some theming and decent information, others, like Pakistan, reek of propaganda.

ARTIST'S DELIGHT – In these instances, the artist/architect clearly got total control over the pavilion. While oftentimes visually stunning, many pavilions lack any significant information about their country and instead seemed to be merely a giant sculpture guests can walk through. Hungary's pavilion consists exactly of one large chrome sculpture surrounded by wood 4x4s suspended from the ceiling, continually rising and falling. An interesting curiosity to be sure, but not very Hungarian. In contrast, the Vietnam pavilion was essentially a bamboo cathedral, with a relaxing pond in the middle. While the content for Vietnam was minimal, the design and interior at least *felt* like it was moderately Vietnamese.

Of course, a few pavilions seemed to have the perfect blend of whimsy, entertainment and information, with an eye towards keeping the line moving. On the large scale side, Spain's stunning pavilion is a fast-moving walk-through attraction that highlights Spain's past, present and future through theming, projection, live dancing, and a giant robot baby. On a smaller scale, the simple Sri Lanka pavilion offers one giant room with examples of the country's art and architecture, a chance to sample inexpensive Sri Lankan food, and

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What's Worth the Wait? by Ed Wills

Although the waiting lines for Pavillions at the Worlds Fair in Shanghai varied from as little as a few minutes to check out the simplistic interior of Hungary's, to as much as 4 hours for the disappointing Saudi Arabia pavillion, the 90 minutes in line for Morocco's pavillion is well worth the wait. In addition to viewing Moroccan craftsmanship in the fine architectural detailing, you'll find opportunities to feel the textures of their woven fabrics, experience the smooth finish of their leatherwork, and inhale the spices frequently used throughout the country. Showcasing the craftsmanship of Morocco's artisans, the pavillion provides a great way to appreciate the Moroccan culture. If you are expecting large panoramic shots of Morocco's topographical features, you will not find them here. However, if you seek an inviting courtyard and warm smiles from ushers who guide you through Moroccan's cultural path, you will not be disappointed.

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The Art of Queue Jumping

When you think of the Chinese arts several examples may come to mind. The “Art of War” by Sun Tzu, written in the 6th century BC. The “Three Perfections” a combination of harmonious calligraphy, painting and poetry found in beautiful Chinese scroll paintings. The “Peking Opera” a two hundred year old theatrical tradition that combines music, performance, dance and acrobatics.

A lesser known but no less highly evolved art is the “Art of Queue Jumping.”

The Chinese norms of what’s “right” or “wrong” for queue line etiquette are, of course, uniquely Chinese. Special events in China, like the Expo 2010 Shanghai, can attract enormous crowds in orders of magnitude greater than what you might see elsewhere.

Wait times for some of the pavilions are three to four hours long or even longer! On a good day, without any creativity in the art of queue jumping, you might see only three pavilions after braving ten or so hours in line!

What would you do if a third of your visit was spent waiting in line for one pavilion?

You might get a little creative with your “queue minimization” as well. Here are some of the best and most humorous “queue jumping” techniques we witnessed at the Expo. Many surprised us for their unique combination of audacity and creativity. And more seriously, this offers a look at how, in order to serve international clients, designers need to understand and design for their audiences to ensure the best guest experience possible.

NOTE – We know you would never indulge in these antics. However, for the purpose of this article, we are going to assume you are the visitor. Hence the employment of “you” in the examples.

Jumping the Kid – The technique uses your kid as an “advance man”. How it works: Your small child “accidentally” wanders away, snaking his/her way through the queue advancing just far enough so that you can see him/her. You begin yelling at your child, “you’re a very bad boy or girl.” As you yell, your entire family pushes its way through the queue line to retrieve the child, inserting yourselves as far forward as possible. Once you reach the child, repeat.

Constant Walking – Using this technique, you move forward, as if oblivious to the other

people around you in line. How it works: Walk through the queue line at a steady and quick pace, even if the line has stopped. This constant movement is similar to the way Chinese street traffic moves in a constant flow of energy, vehicles and people. In the same way, the people in the queue line naturally want to flow and not stop. If someone confronts you, act oblivious and continue walking at pace, making little to no eye contact, and advance your way through the queue.

Screaming Old Man – The technique is used by elderly men and women to advance to the front of the line, so if you’re older than 75 listen up! How it works: Go to the front of the pavilion queue or the pavilion exit and begin yelling. As the staff and supervisors gather, crank up the volume and begin waving your arms like you’re trying to flag down a passing jetliner. This instantly creates a commotion in the queue line. In order to maintain order and as a sign of respect, the younger staff members or supervisors will usually reward you by letting you enter the pavilion with no further wait.

Bump and Jump – This technique uses your rolling luggage to create a distracting decoy. (Note: You can also use your umbrella, handbag or body to create the same effect.) How it works: Go to the expo with a small rolling luggage bag. As you enter the queue line, shift your luggage bag in front of you, not behind. As the queue begins to move, use the luggage bag to constantly push into the heels of the person in front of you. Be patient and use constant pressure. Continue this action until the person in front of you gets annoyed and allows you to advance in the queue. If the person in front of you gets angry, shift immediately to the Constant Walking technique and advance in the queue anyway.

I Didn’t Know This Was a Line – To use this technique, go to the very front of the line, wait and just insert yourself into the flow of people. How it works: Find your way to the very front of the queue, right near the entrance to the pavilion. As people start to flow into the pavilion, you merge with the flow of people gaining immediate access with very little to no wait time. If someone confronts you say, “Oh, I didn’t know this was a line.” An obvious lie but, naturally, no one wants to create confrontation so they let it go. (This technique can also be used at taxi queue lines in Shanghai.)

Passport Exit Jumper – First, you need to understand what an Expo Passport is. The Expo Passport looks and feels like a real passport and comes in several colors. The goal is for you to collect “passport stamps” for every pavilion at

the World Expo. The Expo Passport is incredibly popular! The Expo is now selling insert pages and additional Expo Passport goals are being developed. It is the number one selling item at the Expo and everyone is doing it. So get ready to collect as many “passport stamps” as possible in a day! How it works: Here you use your “passport stamp” as an excuse to gain entry to the pavilion through the pavilion’s exit. Many of the pavilions will just let enter through the exit to get the “passport stamp.” Once in the pavilion, you can experience the pavilion in reverse order. Another variation of the Exit Jumper technique is to use the restaurant or shop as an excuse to enter via the exit.

Lift and Insert – Another very popular technique is to lift or crawl through the queue line barrier to gain an advanced position in line. How it works: Find an area of the queue where there is no guide. Lift or crawl through the queue line barrier inserting yourself directly into the queue. You can even do this with your entire family and group! Your chances for success are quite high, as many people in line will say very little or nothing and let it go to avoid a confrontation. If a guide catches then they you may have to leave the line, but this is quite rare.

Design Tips

The best queue lines at the Expo 2010 Shanghai are designed with an enclosed (solid) queue line structure. The pavilion entrance should be protected. They should not be immediately accessible from a main plaza. The queue itself should be a narrow single file line for control. A single person width discourages many of the queue jumping techniques above.

Other design techniques that help include providing a well-shaded and comfortable queue area, designing in separate entrance lanes and seating areas for visitors with special needs, elderly and parents with small children and providing entertainment (music, media, interactive games, performances, etc...) for those waiting in line. With the enormous crowds, there is a higher rate of wear and tear on all surfaces. Make sure that all queue areas are built with very robust and durable materials. Also, provide large recycling cans throughout the queue line, if you don’t the trash will pile up!

A combination of these techniques will help your attraction in China maintain order and provide a quality show experience for everyone. So be creative!!

live artisans practicing their native crafts. Similarly, the Oman pavilion is heavily themed to Oman's environment, and is informative on frankincense, one of the country's top commodities.

Noticeably absent from the international pavilions were any formidable attempts at addressing ecological or conservation issues beyond claiming to have employed green construction practices within the pavilions. One has to wonder, however, just how "green" a sea of temporary buildings can actually be.

Furthermore, there is no mention of any sort of geopolitical conflict and most countries narratives are thoroughly cleansed. Uzbeks and Kazakhs apparently make better neighbors at the Expo than they do in real life. Even North Korea is represented, complete with rainbows, fountains and a gazebo – yet no mention of its troubles with its neighbor to the South.

But even with all of the international pavilions' rosy-colored glasses firmly in place, it pales in comparison to the narratives being told on the other side of the river.

BETTER CORPORATION, BETTER LIFE

While much smaller in size than the Pudong portion of the Expo, the Puxi side houses all of the corporate pavilions and, arguably, some of the better experiences the Expo has to offer. Similarly, most information is presented through projection, and the buildings here, decidedly more box-y, are almost exclusively lit in LED's.

Some pavilions are simple showcases of the corporate parent's products. Coca-Cola and Aurora, China's chief producer of jade stones,

are two perfect examples. While the Aurora pavilion begins with an enlightening short film about how jade was given powerful status within Chinese culture, the "product" oriented pavilions are at least transparent in their brand building goals. The absolute worst of these is the Japanese Industries pavilion. Eight different Japanese companies created a pulsed walk-through pavilion where guests spend about 90 seconds in each theater watching some type of projected show about how that company's products are changing the world. Items such as soy sauce and porcelain toilets are spotlighted in each room. While each theater does employ a different projection technique, by the third of fourth room, the audience grew restless and started exiting the show early – not the best response desired from an attempt at brand building.

There were some interesting exhibits here. China Aviation offers a short trackless dark ride, China Telecom utilized American companies BRC Imagination Arts and Electrosonic to develop a handheld device that interacts with various A/V show elements, and China Industries presents a captivating show with hundreds of softball sized spheres suspended from the ceiling that move up and down to create visually stunning patterns and shapes – none of which have anything to do with creating a better city or a better life.

In fact, the Expo's theme is largely unaddressed in any meaningful form from the corporate pavilions. In the instances where hopes for a better future are raised, the solutions given for how to achieve it range from "dream about it and it will happen" to "magic will fix things if we all work together."

Very little attention was given to developing any sort of green sustainability. Though



The Chinese Industries Pavilion, like most of the corporate pavilions, makes good use of LED lights on their interior and puts on an interesting, if not confusing, show inside.



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pavilions tout how environmentally friendly they were constructed, at the same time, barge after barge of coal floats down the Huangpu river, further signifying how out of touch with reality the Expo can be.

Perhaps the biggest offender is the Oil pavilion. China's nationalized oil industry put big money into the popular pavilion that houses exhibits on oil extraction and all the great things oil is used for. But the highlight is a short 4-D film that relies on the typical gags and effects to send a very clear message: You need oil to survive, and therefore you need us to provide it to you. One sequence in the movie shows what life would be like without oil. Everything from cars to clothes disappear, and the actors are left defenseless and bemoaning their own existence. On the one hand, the portrayal is startlingly honest – the industrialized world as it exists today would cease to exist without oil, and most people take for granted how much they depend on oil to live. But the film also completely neglects to address the costs of oil consumption, the risks of oil exploration, and suggests no solutions for addressing any of these problems. At an Expo promoting better cities and better life in a country that is faced with huge air pollution problems, an oil pavilion that does not even acknowledge the damaging effects of oil consumption on the environment is a massive failure.

Perhaps I, in my Expo naiveté, am expecting too much. But aren't World's Fairs expected to be cutting edge? While there have always been commercial aspects and whitewashed elements in an Expo, shouldn't there be an exchange of ideas, a challenge to the status quo, and an exploration of how the future can be improved? All of those are absent from Expo 2010. Instead, the whole site seems like one giant tourist trap, designed to attract people, engage them for a day, and hope that they come back tomorrow and spend some more. Perhaps that is the hidden answer to the Expo's challenge of creating a better city and a better life. As we move to a post-industrialized world the one industry that any locale can promote and utilize to create a better life and city is in fact the heartbeat of Expo 2010: tourism.

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Top: Stamped architecture, like the Poland pavilion pictured here, is prevalent at the Expo.

Middle: Spain's handmade woven exterior is breathtaking and one of the more distinctive pavilions.

Bottom: Inside North Korea's pavilion, there's nothing but sunshine, rainbows and fountains!

