

After 30 hours of flying, nothing wakes you up like your imminent death

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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COSTA RICA: Costa Rica has night colours you feel you have never seen before. And the intoxicating smell of burnt sugar cane turns evenings into a cloak of potential. I was taking this all in as our driver was going through the Costa Rican jungle in our taxi panel van at speeds that would have given him poll at Monza.

It was at this point he decided to fall asleep. As we veered off the road towards oblivion, five international creative directors discarded their world-weary coolness for sheer terror. One of them grabbed the wheel and we lived. I felt incredibly lucky to be judging the ADC the following day.

The ADC is the oldest ad show in the world. It was formed to show commercial art could be beautiful too. At its heart, the show has always been about craft. It has always been about ideas and things being well made. This core philosophy is even more relevant today than it was when the ADC started in 1920. And, I can't stress this enough, will be critical to our industry's survival in the future.

So, what is getting in the way? I think we are choking on our own jargon, packaging, explanation and case studies. We are lost in the description of things. We are constantly giving context and explaining the background. We use a lot of words like innovation, interactive, digital etc. We need to experience things directly. Not the word but the object or idea. Labels are not things.

The truth is simple

Our future is not just about packaging things or thinking things. It is about making things.

The problem is every person on the planet now has the power to make things and broadcast them. So, there is only one thing that separates a creative from the other six billion people on the planet. Craft.

We have to use our craft to be better than anybody else on the planet to remain relevant. We have to care more.

To make an idea beautifully is one of the most satisfying parts of our business. It is through this lens we looked at the work at the ADC. And when we did, we noticed a few things.

Firstly, it is staggering what some agencies enter into ad shows. Absolute shit. What that tells me is some agencies no longer know what great is. There is not just a gap between average agencies and great ones, there is a chasm. When you

look at the current advertising landscape this has serious implications to a lot of agencies surviving.

Making rubbish look better

Secondly, I think case studies are the Botox of advertising. There are certain entries that have more craft in the case study than the idea or execution. They make rubbish look better. This is going to become a big problem going forward.

Lastly, when you judge you look at a lot of work pretty quickly. You look at work like a consumer. And when you do, great work stands out. The work that's going to win is pretty obvious. The formula hasn't changed and never will. Clarity. Surprise. Craft.

In the end, whether you call it television, content, non-broadcast, viral film or anything else is irrelevant. What *is* relevant is that you feel something when you see something memorable.

What has been interesting is looking at how craft is changing. It is reinventing itself. There are whole new sections of craft that didn't exist five years ago which make judging challenging but the future exciting.

Seeing the work and the effort that has been put into it showed me a simple way this business can get its self-respect back. Be better than anybody else.

Judging the ADC reminds me of why I got into the business. It rewards people that have tried harder or pushed further. It rewards people that haven't done things in the fastest way or the most efficient way. They have rewarded people that have done things the right way.

Craft. A simple word that reminds you that creativity is not a thing but a way.

Thanks for showing me that once again ADC.

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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