

Blog

Eco Hero: Jane Withers, founder of Wonderwater

HJ Taskis | 13.09.12

In our latest edition of our Eco Hero series, we talk with [Jane Withers](#) - founder of [Wonderwater](#) and the visionary behind the [Wonderwater Café](#).

Jane is a design consultant, curator and writer based in London. She has written several books on design and architecture and regularly teaches and speaks on design internationally. Jane was the deputy editor of Elle Decoration from its launch in 1989 until 1999, prior to establishing her own design consultancy in 2001, which boasts a clientele of major international companies.

Her passion for design and the global water supply has manifested itself into creating the Wonderwater Café project. Now in its third pop-up, the café is in the heart of the Shoreditch Design Triangle (hosted by Leila's shop) for [London Design Festival](#). You can read more about the café after Jane's Q&A.



Tell us, in 20 words or fewer, about Wonderwater - what's your mission?

To harness the imaginative power of design to communicate critical water issues.

What motivates you?

Working with visionary designers who can change the way we think about the environment.

What is your greatest achievement to date?

I always dream it's the next one...

What are the challenges you face?

Getting businesses and the public to engage with water issues.

What are you working on that's getting you fired up and excited?

Wonderwater Café launched on Wednesday this week. It's being hosted by Leila's Shop in Shoreditch - in the very heart of the Shoreditch Design Triangle. Following the success of the Helsinki and Beijing Wonderwater Cafés, it's extremely exciting to be bringing the café to the London Design Festival.

As well as Wonderwater we have 4 Cromwell Place in Brompton Design District opening next week. It's a vast town house as a temporary home for a dozen projects by designers who work in everything from flour and water to code and software but really think differently about everyday life.

Where do you want to take Wonderwater next?

As well as developing projects and exhibitions, we want to build it into a web destination for imaginative thinking around the future of water.

What can we, as individuals, do to make a difference?

Think about what we consume and its impact.

If you were Prime Minister for a day, what would be the first thing you'd do?

I'd start the day by reinstating public water fountains and commissioning wonderful new ones.

What's the coolest project or product you've come across, and inspired you?

There are so many but one would certainly be Clan du Neon, activists who protest against excessive illumination of commercial signs. Their films are great, marauding bands in fluorescent wigs who dance down a swish shopping street turning off illuminated shop signs. The movement has taken off across continental Europe but not in the UK so far.

Can you recommend a life- or game-changing book for our readers?

The Eyes of the Skin would certainly be one - a short essay by the great Finnish architect Juhanni Pallasmaa, a call to restore the human and sensual in architecture.

Another would be Leonard Koren's Undesigning the Bath - an earthy animistic celebration of our relation to water and water cultures. A reminder that water is not just industrial H₂O, but a miraculous liquid we should value and enjoy.

What do you listen to when you're cooking dinner?

BBC Radio 4

What's the best advice you've ever been given?

"Find a way to do the things you really care about."

Can you leave us with who'd be your Eco Hero?

Buckminster Fuller. A true visionary. So many of his ideas were half a century ahead of his time, we are only beginning to realise their value.

