**Aloha - An Inspirational Trip at Hawaii**
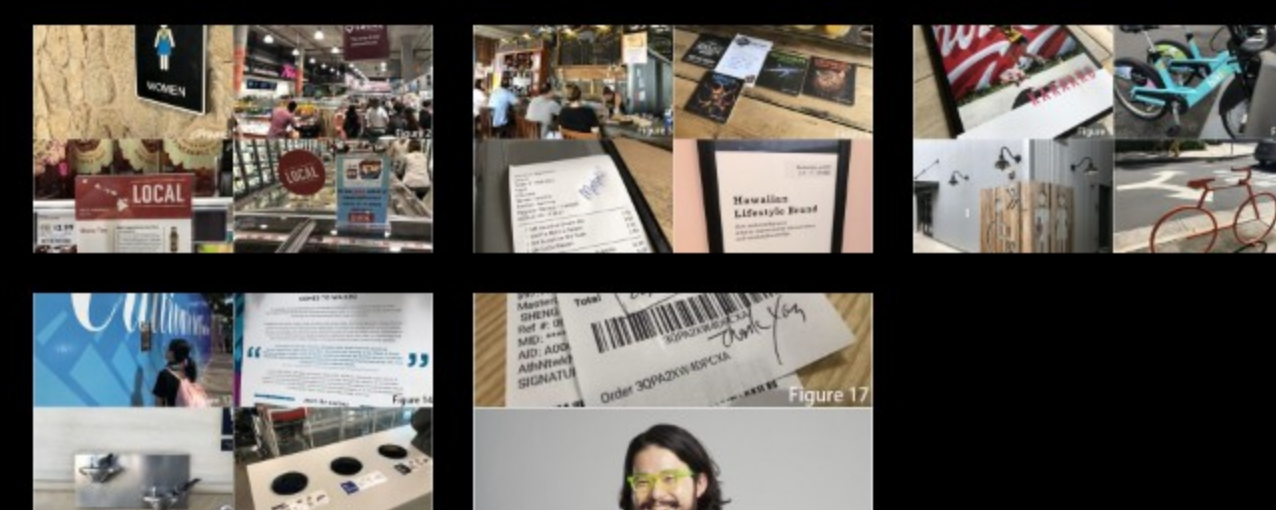
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During the winter break, I finally have some spare time away from the cold winter on the MIT campus. "He that travels far knows much" said by Thomas Fuller, which is true to me. Travel for me as well as for most other people is one impactful way to get inspired and to reset yourself. The new environment makes a change of my normal routine and ways of working. I enjoy the short trip to Hawaii, not only because of the great weather, blue sky, not-too-hot sunlight there, but also its unique culture and diverse ethnic. The article is to record some interesting observations during the trip and share my initial thoughts and reflections on three themes: Celebrate the Local Culture, Design for the Public and Invisible User Needs.

I. Celebrate the Local Culture
I still remember when I arrived at the airport, the first memorable signage was the restroom. The figure man and woman all wore Hawaiian clothes (Figure 1). During the trip, I experienced many different ways of how local people/businesses celebrated and sold Hawaiian culture through designing product packaging, curating store experience, crafting the slogan, and even training the staff.

Around 5 o'clock in the afternoon, I went to the local supermarket which was packed with people. You can obviously tell from their outfits who were locals and who were tourists. I was attracted by the dark red label said: "We love LOCAL – The best from around here." (Figure 2). As a tourist, I was not seeking the items I can purchase online or in Boston, but the local unique food, objects, design, craftsmanship, and culture. In this supermarket, the store purposefully highlighted the local item ranging from craft beer, bread, tea, and other foods (Figure 4). I took a closer look at the content on the tag, which wrote a story of the local product by indicating its geological location. Take one of the Hawaiian local tea varieties as an example, the Shaka Tea. Its tag informed me that its founders were Bella Hughes and Harrison Rice and the tag also stated that "We want to share with the world our herbal, Māmaki teas, Māmaki is an ancient superleaf only found and grown in our islands, which has been revered for centuries as a health benefit." The extra explanation text made my shopping experience informative and delightful (Figure 3). Another item I purchased was Honolulu, the local craft beer brand. At first sight, I was impressed by the visual design on the can of a beautiful sea creature (Figure 6). Compared with other mass-production brands, it stood out on the display not only because of its dark red tag that says "local" but also its graphic design. Out of curiosity, I decided to visit the Honolulu store to discover more about the local beer brand story.

The Honolulu bar was located near Kakaako, one of the new creative communities (Figure 5). The friendly bartender told us that not every ingredient was produced here, the hops and other few ingredients were imported. But the brand and the artists were all from Hawaii and they wanted to celebrate the local creative spirit. I saw the brand wanted to curate the bar experience through the design of the can, the coaster, the hat, the T-shirt and other small items. The brand also collaborated with local artists and put their works on the wall for sale. Even the behavior of the bartender was designed. It was very common when the customer swiped the card and got the receipt back. But when I got my receipt, I saw she wrote "Mahalo", which means "Thank you" in Hawaiian language, on it (Figure 7). The reason I still cannot forget the story now when I got back home typing it is that I didn't understand "Mahalo" at the moment when she handed it over to me. I asked her about it and she replied to me with a big smile. There's something very subtle here. Most people probably knew the meaning or just ignored it. From a service design perspective, the bar experience design needs to take into consideration most of the touchpoints that will interact with customers in the store.

When I passed by DFS (Duty-free Store), I sought for a local lifestyle brand in order to know more about Hawaiian aesthetics. One store tagline said "Hawaiian Lifestyle Brand – that creates indigenous artistry empowered by cultural values and ancestral knowledge.", which indicated the local brand has an awareness and actually wants to promote the Hawaiian lifestyle (Figure 8). Since both words of culture and lifestyle are very abstract and hard to grasp for the outsiders and the tourists in a short amount of time, the brand needs to make more efforts and extend the culture element beyond selling clothes or showing slogans. Translation of the local culture into commercial behavior needs to be careful and it has to be nourished in an authentic way. When I flipped these photos back to MIT, I felt super excited because what I actually got from the trip were not physical products like the local tea, the craft beer, the T-Shirt or the souvenirs, but people's stories, all the conversations and interaction that made my shopping experience memorable and shareable.

II. Design for the Public
Every time I travel, I will spend most of the time staying at the public space e.g. park, street, creative communities. This time, I spent around 1.5 days at Kakaako, a new local creative community with a mixture of different types of tenants e.g. restaurants, clothes, coffee shops. I got one copy of Kakaako magazine, published by the Kakaako creative community, from the store (Figure 9). It told the history of the place and recommended some unique stores for the tourists. One useful info I knew from the magazine was that Biki, the locally shared bike brand, provided a 1-hour free audio guide tour, navigated by its app, which told the story of each graffiti in the Kakaako creative community (Figure 10). It is one of the great examples of how culture can be packaged and sold to people in an approachable and seamless way.

At the corner of the main building in Kakaako, the designer smartly applied the scale of the restroom signage to make it into an interesting graphic with the contrast of the wooden material underneath the aluminum plate as a background. If people look from afar, it seems nicer being naturally embedded in the context without losing the message (Figure 11). It reminds me of another great example in Hawaii: the wayfinding of the bike parking (Figure 12). People can see the bike icon made of a metal tube very often on the street in Honolulu. I think this is also another smart design combining wayfinding with its actual function. This is a design that intuitively sends out the message "you can lock the bike here" to people and its metal structure can help people lock their bike.

On my way to Waikiki beach, I passed by the construction site speared by the thin wall with a few small windows (Figure 13). People would stop walking and try to look inside, even though there were only a few excavators and construction materials. Because people would pause a bit, the following corner was attached with a board providing the info of the art and artists' story about the graphic of the wall (Figure 14). I appreciate the smart way to make magic by redefining the wall from a separator to a meaningful and beautiful canvas for the artist. When planning the public space, the designer needs to consider multiple aspects. In this case, if the designer only views the wall as a space divider, who is going to care about the people outside the construction site? It not only needs to ensure the safety, the fundamental function, but also take the view of the landscape, the feeling of the citizen, and the harmony of the city into consideration.

Design for the public is a complex challenge and it is definitely not easy to tackle. I think designers should keep learning from experiences of both success and failure in the past and keep getting immersed in the public space with people to be empathetic for different stakeholders. The ultimate goal is not designing for the public but rather designing with the public.

III. Invisible User Needs
The water dispenser you see in the following photo was taken by me at Pearl Harbor. I was impressed by the historical sites, the people and the great warships and took many photos as tourists normally did. But this photo (Figure 15) triggers me the most. I cannot help but ask myself a series of questions: "Who is the real user of the product? How could we precisely identify the invisible user needs?" There is no doubt that the water dispensers are designed for human beings, but interestingly I saw many water dispensers in Hawaii packed with birds and doves seeking for water. Should we re-think the water dispenser design catering to the needs of other creatures? Should we re-think other potential "users" of the water dispenser?

Here is another example of the trash bin design. I took the photo in Whole Foods, a local supermarket. It was a simple design, a trash bin with three holes (Figure 16). When the design team came up the idea of a white rectangular shape product with the same three holes, they didn't consider the three holes for different purposes. Therefore, it was funny to see the supermarket staff add extra labels on the product, which deviated from the original simple design language. Before the designers claimed the design itself should be clean, pure and simple, we have to clarify the purpose of the design first: Who are the target users? How do people use the product? How to maintain the product? Why do we do what we do?

The last example I want to share is about my invisible needs. People easily take things for granted in their daily life. The staff kindly helped me write down the suggested tips on the receipt and handed it over to me (Figure 17). I got the receipt and it occurred to me that I was seldomly aware of the useful info on the receipt. Normally, I just calculate by myself. In some situations, the invisible solution is good, whereas others don't. It heavily depends on the target user and the purpose of the design.

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Figure 1 – Restroom signage with Hawaiian characteristics
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 2 – Local supermarket with the big flag of "LOCAL"
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 3 – A local product with the "LOCAL" tag
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 4 – A local product with the "LOCAL" tag
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 5 – A local craft beer brand - Honolulu
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 6 – A local craft beer brand - Honolulu
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 7 – The receipt with a handwritten "Mahalo"
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 8 – The tagline of local clothes brand
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 9 – Kakaako creative community magazine
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 10 – The shared bike brand - Biki
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 11 – The signage of restroom
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 12 – The signage of bike parking
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 13 – The construction site wall with a few windows
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 14 – The info of the arts and artist shown on the board.
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 15 – The water dispenser designed for human beings or birds
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 16 – The trash can in the local supermarket
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)
Figure 17 – The receipt with handwritten suggested tips
(Source: Sheng-Hung Lee)

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About the Author (Figure 18)

Sheng-Hung Lee, IDSA, is a designer, maker, educator, MIT AgeLab researcher, MIT xPRO course experience designer and Vice Chair at IDSA Boston. He is inspired by multiple domains of knowledge, different perspectives, and he thrives on creating new value for clients on multi-disciplinary teams. He is trained as an industrial designer and electrical engineer, and his approach to problem solving is influenced by his passion for how design and technology impact and can be integrated into society. He was invited to be a jury member for multiple international design competition including IDEA, Spark Design Award, IDA Award and A' Design Award and Competition. He is a member of World Design Organization (WDO), Asia Designer Communication Platform (APD), Taiwan Society of Technology and Sociology, Phi Tau Phi Scholastic Honor Society, and China Technical Consultants Inc.

Lee graduated with a double Bachelor's degree (Hon.) in Industrial Design and Electrical Engineering from National Cheng Kung University (NCKU), Taiwan. His work has won prestigious awards including IDEA (Gold), iF Award (Gold), Braun Prize, Core77 Design Award, Red Dot (Best of the Best), Spark Design Award, and European Product Design Award (Gold). His works have also been showcased in Dubai Design Week, Venice Design Week and the Cooper Hewitt museum. In 2019, He won a designer in residence scholarship sponsored by the Germany government, EMMA Creative Center and Pforzheim University to stay and to exhibit his design at Stuttgart. Lee taught product design at Fudan University Shanghai Institute of Visual Art and Detao Masters Academy as adjunct Associate Professor from 2015 to 2019.