

**“THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION DEMANDS THE REAL THING AND, TO ATTAIN IT, MUST FABRICATE THE ABSOLUTE FAKE.” —UMBERTO ECO**

**WHAT? THEMERICA** is an in-depth study of **thematic design** as a visual vocabulary that will explore **thematic environments** from around the world. This includes the architecture of theme parks, resorts and hotels, retail spaces and restaurants. **THEMERICA** traces the history of theming from Coney Island to Disneyland, Las Vegas to Dubai—from an innovation in entertainment to a global design phenomenon.

**WHY?** Thematic environments are a bold new format: they affect how we think about culture and history. Sociologists, historians and architects have commented on their impact, yet there is currently no comprehensive study of theming as a unique design language. As a book, **THEMERICA** will be pitched to publishers, and will appeal to professionals, students of design and the general public.

**HOW? THEMERICA** includes archival research, interviews, and field observation of theming meccas such as Las Vegas, Dubai City and Disney parks around the world. The book will consist of both original and supplemental writing, culled from interview transcripts and commissioned essays. Design professionals will be pestered. Forgotten visionaries will be vindicated. Academics will be accosted. Vacations will ensue.

**WHO? Dave Gottwald** was born and raised a short drive from Anaheim’s Disneyland. His undergraduate work was in history at California State. Dave has worked in graphic design for over nine years, including as principal of his own multimedia firm. Currently he is a graduate student attending the Academy of Art University.

**CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROJECT.**

Agree to commission an essay. Grant an interview. Share your expertise. De-mystify. Clarify. Debate and digress. Participate on my blog. Get on board. **THEMERICA** needs your perspectives, unique insights, and experience.

[www.themericia.org/blog](http://www.themericia.org/blog)



### MFA THESIS FORMAL ABSTRACT

Theming—designing immersive, holistic environments that narrate through the seamless integration of architecture, interiors and graphics—is a prime design movement of the post-war era. With roots in the iconography of late nineteenth century World's Fairs, Tivoli Gardens of Denmark and Fred Thompson's Luna Park at Coney Island, thematic design was perfected with the opening of Disneyland in 1955.

Frustrated by architects unable to realize his vision, Walt Disney hired Hollywood studio art directors—skilled in cinematography, set design and storyboarding—to develop his park. The painting had replaced the drafting. In the years since, as the approach has proved popular and profitable across the globe, thematic design has come to fundamentally challenge the primacy of the architect in conceptualizing built environments.

*Themerica* is the first design history compendium to address theming not only as a cultural force, but as a movement with its own language. Drawing on the direct observation of retail districts, restaurants and theme parks—from Las Vegas and Southern California to Asia, Europe and the Middle East—as well as interviews with leading practitioners, I trace the lineage of theming from multiple sources, and speculate on future trajectories.

Theming has evolved from the quaint ersatz of Disney's Main Street U.S.A. to the lifestyle-centric desert daydreams of contemporary Las Vegas and burgeoning Dubai. Spanning a vector between two extremes—pure simulation and pure brand—I chart thematic environments and place them in interdisciplinary context, revealing the shared principles and design techniques that will define twenty-first century placemaking.

## MFA THESIS TRAVEL DETAILS

In March of 2007, I presented my midpoint proposal to an MFA graphic design thesis committee at the Academy of Art University. Upon acceptance of my project, I began my research to compile the first-ever visual history of thematic design.

A large part of Themerica has consisted of first-hand field research of major sites of thematic design. Since I am a California native, I've had the opportunity to examine diverse examples of theming in retail, entertainment and dining environments without traveling very far. My observations have included extensive photography and notes which have formed the basis for my thesis work. In order to write a compelling narrative, and become an authority on theming, I felt I had to visit numerous examples around the world for myself.

Part of this journey included visiting all eleven Disney theme park around the world, and with good reason—the Disney organization not only perfected the language of thematic design with their first park in Anaheim, California (1955), but they have successfully exported their product to three continents. Using the stateside parks as a sort of 'control group,' comparing and contrasting the native and foreign versions of like design models, attractions and environments has allowed me to draw certain conclusions about theming on a global scale.

Listed here are the major thematic sites I visited throughout the course of my project research from summer 2007 to summer 2008. Domestic destinations are noted in red, international destinations in blue.

**DISNEYLAND** Anaheim, California :: August 27–31 2007

**KNOTT'S BERRY FARM** Buena Park, California :: August 27–31 2007

**WALT DISNEY WORLD RESORT** Orlando, Florida :: October 17–24, 2007

**LAS VEGAS STRIP** Las Vegas, Nevada :: December 27–30, 2007

**DISNEYLAND** Anaheim, California :: January 3, 2007

**DISNEYLAND PARIS RESORT** Marne-la-Vallée, France :: March 16–22, 2008

**DUBAI** United Arab Emirates :: April 17–24, 2008

**TIMES SQUARE** New York, New York :: May 25–29, 2008

**ATLANTIC CITY CASINOS** Atlantic City, New Jersey :: May 27, 2008

**TOKYO DISNEYLAND RESORT** Tokyo, Japan :: June 3–8, 2008

**HONG KONG DISNEYLAND RESORT** Hong Kong, China :: June 8–12, 2008

**VENETIAN MACAU** Macau, China :: June 10, 2008

**MACAU FISHERMAN'S WHARF** Macau, China :: June 10, 2008

**LAS VEGAS STRIP** Las Vegas, Nevada :: July 7–12, 2008

**DISNEYLAND** Anaheim, California :: July 15–20, 2008

**UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD** Universal City, California :: July 15–20, 2008

**UNIVERSAL CITYWALK** Universal City, California :: July 15–20, 2008

**THE GROVE** Los Angeles, California :: July 15–20, 2008

**THE AMERICANA AT BRAND** Los Angeles, California :: July 15–20, 2008

**DISNEYLAND** Anaheim, California :: August 1, 2008

### MFA THESIS FROM PROJECT TO PUBLISHED BOOK

In order to complete my MFA degree at the Academy of Art University—and graduate in May, 2009—I will be producing two major deliverables:

- A hardcover book, approximately 275–300 pages, measuring about 11.25" x 10.25"
- An annotated process book, approximately 150 pages, measuring the above size

The content of this thesis book will be two-fold; a visual history of thematic design, and a record of my travels and observations. I intend on interweaving these narratives into one compelling artifact, blending clerical, academic research (reading and thinking) with personal observation (seeing and documenting).

The process book will consist of photographs and scans from my handwritten journals, with extensive explanatory text accompanying the many sketches, maps, and collaged ephemera. This piece will be designed to accompany the primary book, perhaps in a shared slipcase or other unified packaging solution, but will not be ported over to a commercial product.

Because this project is academic in nature, I will be at liberty to include copious amounts of concept art and photography I would otherwise have to seek proper permissions to reproduce commercially. Creating such a work for my MFA thesis puts me at an advantage; I am in a position to design the book however I see fit, and exercise complete editorial control over the final product.

For commercial publication, however, I will need to tailor *Themerica* to both the needs of rights holders and the publisher that will bring the book to market. Editorially, I expect *Themerica* to undergo some revision in both content and design to satisfy these requirements.

It's important to note that the sample chapter provided in this proposal reflects the artifact as produced for my MFA thesis, and is of course open to revision and re-design as a commercially published book.

## THEMERICA WHAT IS THE BOOK ALL ABOUT?

*Themerica* began with the age-old author's adage: write the book that you yourself would want to read. As a graphic designer, an architecture aficionado, and a theme park enthusiast, I was frustrated with the glaring gap on my studio bookshelf. It seemed that no one had yet written *the* comprehensive volume, *the* definitive study, *the* end-all-be-all book of thematic design.

Certainly, theming has been discussed widely in other fields. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, architects, urban planners, cultural critics, and theorists have all published works on this far-reaching phenomenon. Yet the story has not been told either for a mass audience, or in a visually compelling manner. Some books have a high level text, with little or no supporting illustration and design; others still have attractive photography, but without a serious narrative. In addition, the more interesting existing architectural titles focus only on Disney, and don't address theming as a design movement that transcends theme parks to affect retail environments, casinos, restaurants, and residential districts.

*Themerica* traces the history of thematic design from the late nineteenth century to the present day, covering Disneyland and its sister parks, gambling centers Las Vegas and Macau, burgeoning Dubai, and numerous smaller examples worldwide. The title—a portmanteau of *Theme* and *America*—refers to a design language that was born in the United States and has since become global in scope. In this sense, *Themerica* is not a place, but a state of mind.

Along with providing a visual history, *Themerica* places theming in a interdisciplinary context—the intersection between interior design, architecture, and graphic design. This context is fleshed out in a series of common characteristics that can be used to evaluate spaces and establish the dividing lines between theme and brand, style and motif, original and copy—and identify where these criteria overlap.

Above all, *Themerica* is a visual and visceral study; a lavishly illustrated compendium of one of the most influential—yet often overlooked—movements of the twentieth century. Sociologists, historians and anthropologists have all had their say; it's time to add a multi-faceted design history perspective to this fascinating subject.

## THEMERICA WHO IS LIKELY TO READ IT?

*Themerica* is targeted at a far wider audience than similar existing titles. There is currently a rift between two extremes—serious, high-level academic texts on the subject (with little or no visual interest); and photographic puff-pieces issued by Disney (and others) that don't take the material seriously enough. The higher-level texts tend to be very insular and obtuse, and are not intended to be read outside academia; their readership is severely limited. On the other hand, it is difficult for professionals and enthusiasts to take the lighter books seriously.

*Themerica* is about bridging this audience gap—bringing the creative professional, instructor, student, art + design reader, and dedicated enthusiast to one single title that both excites visually and provides a high-level text—yet does not alienate the lay reader like so many existing titles.

*Themerica* also has a special market in education, for numerous existing titles on theming are already in use at the university level (in architecture, urban planning, design, sociology and anthropology). Because *Themerica* combines a social science topic with a design study, it fits multiple needs across multiple disciplines—and provides a visually-rich alternative to unadorned textbooks.

Here are seven basic archetypes who may own one or more of the titles that follow in this market analysis, and who would probably purchase *Themerica*:

**CREATIVE DIRECTOR.** Owns numerous titles on design, architecture, history, pop-culture, and fine art. Considers *Themerica* to be an ideal title to add to his studio reference library, and/or his home library. Bought the book both to read completely and to glance through.

**UNIVERSITY ARCHITECTURE/DESIGN PROFESSOR.** Considers *Themerica* to be an authoritative book on the subject of experiential design, an ideal title to add to her home studio library, and a perfect choice to assign her students for class.

**READER WHO LOVES BEAUTIFUL ART + DESIGN BOOKS.** Book buyer who owns numerous titles from Chronicle, Taschen, et al. Attracted to the professional production, quality of photography, and the overall subject matter. She bought the book primarily for the visuals, as a coffee-table piece.

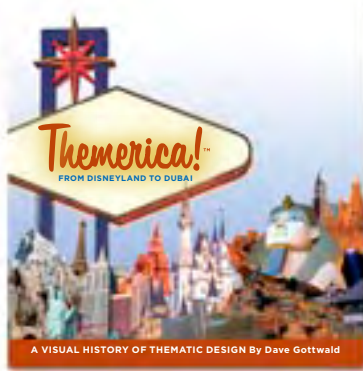
**ARCHITECTURE AFICIONADO.** Upmarket book buyer who frequently shops Chronicle, Taschen, Princeton Architectural, et al. He bought the book primarily to read, but also to display as a coffee-table piece.

**DISNEY THEME PARK ENTHUSIAST.** Owns every book ever written about Disney, theme park design, and related subjects. He bought the book primarily for the visuals, as a coffee-table piece, but also is interested in reading the text.

**UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.** Considers *Themerica* to be an authoritative book on the subject of theming, an ideal title to add to his home studio library, and a perfect choice to assign his students for class.

**ARCHITECTURE/DESIGN STUDENT.** Either she was required to purchase the book for a class, or (as many students are apt to do) bought the title because of general interest in the material, to add to her burgeoning home studio library.

*Themerica* is an excellent fit for the markets that Chronicle's existing art + design titles typically sell well in, while adding a significant educational market.

**DESIGN STUDIES**

## **THEMERCIA: FROM DISNEYLAND TO DUBAI A VISUAL HISTORY OF THEMATIC DESIGN**

**AUTHOR** Dave Gottwald (graphic designer)

**MEASUREMENTS** 11.25" x 10.25"

**PAGE COUNT** 275–300

**TEXT** Gottwald traces the history of thematic design, from its earliest roots at the late nineteenth century World's Fairs, through Luna Park at Coney Island, to the the opening of Disneyland in 1955. Theming as a visual vocabulary is defined, and criteria are established to distinguish thematic environments from branded spaces. Thematic design is outlined as running a gamut—or gradient—between pure simulation (i.e. Main Street U.S.A.) and pure brand (i.e. Niketown). Upon perfecting the language of theming at the first Disney theme park, thematic design spreads across the globe via parks in Florida, Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. Extensive attention is given to Las Vegas, which has reinvented itself numerous times as thematic mecca, often in direct response to the innovations of the Disney organization. 'Brandscapes' are also covered, including the work of the world-renowned Jon Jerde partnership (Universal Citywalk, Horton Plaza, The Fremont Street Experience, among others), the Rockwell Group (restaurant and casino design), and Gensler Entertainment Division (Vegas resorts and retail districts, among others). The future trajectories of theming are also discussed, using Dubai, Macau and Las Vegas as a case studies.

**DESIGN** Lavishly illustrated, large format hardcover. Professional design and typesetting. Estimated 50% original photography and illustration, 50% sourced photography, ephemera and illustration. Permissions to be sought via Disney Enterprises and others.

**AUDIENCE** Themercia unifies both the lay reader and the enthusiast, at the intersection between design professionals and students, architecture aficionados, and theme park fans (especially Disney's particularly rabid following). Existing texts only approach theming from either an overly scholarly-level text, a non-visual approach, or both.

## **PART I: ESSAYS [25% of total content]**

### **1.) INTRODUCTION**

Inspiration for the topic; a discussion of San Francisco's Chinatown  
Childhood influence of Southern California & Disneyland  
Why this is a design-centric topic  
The relationship between design (art direction) and architecture has been transformed

### **2.) WHAT IS THEMING (verb, i.e. "to theme")?**

Modernism and the destruction of symbolic architecture  
Theming as the 'vengeful return' of symbolism  
Distinction between sociological definitions of theming and *design definitions*.

### **3.) VOCABULARY OF THEMING: ESSENTIAL DESIGN ELEMENTS**

- Vernacular architecture
- Choreography of space
- Manipulation of scale
- Prop vignettes
- Color and mood
- The holistic environment (sight + sounds + smell + personality)

## **PART II: A VISUAL HISTORY [50% of total content]**

### **4.) THEMES BEFORE THEMING**

The meaning of space in classical civilizations  
The Garden Tradition: Manipulation of landscape and scale  
Early postmodern thematic forms (late 19th—early 20th century):

- Tivoli Gardens
- Fred Thompson and Coney Island's Luna Park: "Entertainment Architecture"
- World Fairs & Exhibitions
- The Paris Arcades: the dramatization of retail: prop vignettes
- Hollywood and early entertainment vernacular
- Tiki Bars

### **5.) THE SEVEN BASIC ARCHETYPES OF THE 20th CENTURY**

- Tropical Paradise
- The Wild West
- Classical Civilization
- Medieval & Arabian Fantasy
- American Nostalgia
- Modernism & Progress
- Cityscapes (Urbanism)

**6.) DISNEYLAND: A NEW DESIGN LANGUAGE IS BORN**

Walt Disney's approach, goals, and influences  
The design and development of the first postmodern thematic environment  
Primacy of the art director over the architect  
The introduction of cinematic language  
Story-driven architecture and the choreography of space  
  
Walt Disney World Disney World: theming + urban planning  
Disney goes global: Tokyo, Paris, & Hong Kong  
Disney**ization** versus Disney**fication**

**6.) (STILL) LEARNING FROM LAS VEGAS**

Wayne McAllister & Agua Caliente: Entertainment Architecture  
Las Vegas v1 (1940s-50s) El Ranco et al.  
Las Vegas v2 (1960s) - Venturi's classic study  
Las Vegas V3 (1990s) - the Disneyization (family orientation)

**PART III: THE FUTURE OF THEMING [25% of total content]**

**7.) THE PLACEMAKING REVOLUTION: WHERE THEMING AND BRANDING INTERSECT**

Self-reflexive theming: Logolands  
Brandscapes  
The vector between pure simulation and pure brand  
The New Architecture  
Jon Jerde  
Gensler Entertainment Division  
Rockwell Group  
B.I.G.

**8.) THEMING & URBAN UNREALITY: DUBAI AND BEYOND**

Theming as Lifestyle: Dubai  
Theming as Lifestyle: Las Vegas v4 (2000s)  
Celebration, Florida and the residential trends in theming  
The Grove and The Americana at Brand: New trends in retail

**9.) CODA**

## MEET THE AUTHOR



Dave was born and raised near San Juan Capistrano in Southern California. Always passionate and inquisitive about both visual communications and the social sciences, he chose the latter for his formal education. Although Dave received his BA in history from California State University San Marcos in 2001, his work experience for over nine years has been in the field of graphic design.

Until beginning graduate studies, Dave was a self-taught designer who had worked his way from in-house art departments to principal of his own multimedia firm, Optional Design Group. ODG created a variety of solutions for both online and fixed digital media, however after five years of solid work and industry praise, Dave really yearned to get ink on his fingers again. Graduate studies at the Academy of Art University have afforded him the opportunity to build a more robust print portfolio, expand and sharpen his skills, and delve into research, design theory and education.

Dave has received recognition and support from several leading scholars in multiple fields. Most notably, he is honored to be speaking at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting in November 2008. Discussing the language of thematic design, he will present on a panel alongside authors Anna Klingmann (*Brandscapes*) and Miodrag Mitrasinovic (*Total Landscape, Theme Parks, Public Space*).

Dave currently engages in contract work when time allows and has been a faculty member at the Academy since July 2006. He has taught the Pre-College Art Experience in graphic design for three consecutive semesters, and leads critique workshops as a student mentor for the Academy Resource Center. Dave also serves on the board of AIGA San Francisco as a liaison to the student graphic design community.



## DAVE GOTTWALD

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thesis >>> themerica.org

## THE NEXT BIG THING

Get ink on my fingers again. Create artifacts that are less ephemeral than the latest flash microsite. Continue to look good in print.

## MY EXPERIENCES

Over nine years spent envisioning, concepting, pitching, roughing, comping, presenting, revising, producing, delivering. Wash, rinse, repeat.

## USEFUL STUFF

Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Acrobat, Quark, Flash, Dreamweaver, MS Office. Fluent on both Mac and PC platforms. Mastery of multimedia authoring in Flash for both online and fixed media. Experience with production (mechanicals, prepress, etc.) in both traditional offset and digital color workflows. Experience with video content integration and sound editing for both online and fixed media.

Good at spotting fonts and the like.

## WHERE I PARTICIPATE

**04.2006—PRESENT**  
**AIGA SF BOARD MEMBER :: STUDENT LIAISON**  
Responsible for coordinating Portfolio Day and other student-centric events, monitoring online forum for student members, mentoring, singing the praises of AIGA, and being a general resource for board members. This sometimes means getting coffee and making copies.

References available upon request.

## WHERE I'VE PLAYED RECENTLY

**00.2005—PRESENT**

**CONTRACT DESIGNER**  
**SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

Provided traditional print and multimedia services to a variety of clients, including LAD Design, Satellite Design, eudesCo and AIGA.

**07.2006—PRESENT**

**INSTRUCTOR :: ACADEMY OF ART UNIVERSITY**  
**SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

Currently teaching the Pre-College Art Experience. Plans to expand the program to encompass a more advanced course. Leads graduate workshop sessions for the Academy Resource Center as a Student Mentor.

**05.2006—09.2006**

**SENIOR DESIGNER :: EUDESCO**  
**SAN FRANCISCO, CA**

Designed and developed both print and multimedia solutions for a variety of clients including Gap Inc., Urban Bay Properties and Pelikan Technologies.

**03.2000—08.2005**

**PRINCIPAL, CREATIVE DIRECTOR :: ODG**  
**ESCONDIDO, CA**

Designed and developed over 100 websites, and authored numerous flash multimedia pieces for online and fixed media. Also produced numerous brand identities and print collateral packages. Art directed contract employees and interns. Performed every other task that comes with owning a small design business, including the paperwork.

**08.1999—07.2000**

**SENIOR DESIGNER :: DYSON & DYSON REALTY**  
**CARMEL VALLEY, CA**

Designed and developed all in-house print marketing for large luxury real estate company. Spearheaded the company's first online and multimedia division, then conducted website management and continued to lead the design team and manage overall print production.

## WHERE I'VE STUDIED

**(Anticipated Graduation 2009), MFA Graphic Design**  
**Academy of Art University, San Francisco, CA**

Thesis Project :: Themerica—From Disneyland to Dubai, A Visual History of Thematic Design. Read more at themerica.org.

**2001, BA History (California Regional Topics Emphasis)**  
**California State University, San Marcos, CA**

## RECENT HANDSHAKES & HIGH FIVES

Academy of Art Spring Show 2008  
Academy of Art Book Arts Juried Show 2007  
Academy of Art Spring Show 2007  
Academy of Art Spring Show 2006

## PRO BONO

**2007 DESIGN MATTERS LIVE ADOBE LECTURE SERIES**  
Animated typographic compositions by Marian Bantjes to produce branding interstitial sequences.

**COMPOSTMODERN 06**

Designed and developed presentation materials and branding interstitial sequences.