

My Birthday

I was 60 on 18.2.2015. This is a design for my birthday party, which happened a few weeks before the big day.

I used SADIM for the design – the evaluation was from feedback from people who came, and I won't have another party like this for another 10 years, when we will all be rather older so I haven't tweaked it at all.

My over-riding principle was 'the yield is only limited by the imagination of the designer'

My main ethic is people care, but earth care came into it (car sharing), and fair shares (people contributing cake and party bag bits to the event)

I started the design in March 2014

Survey

Who, what, when, where, why, how much? I used these questions for the client interview on myself.

Why?

I love birthdays, love being able to offer something special to my friends and relations, had a big party for my 50th and wanted to improve on that with the benefit of permaculture design

What?

Wanted a weekend house-party. A whole place so everyone would be together

Where?

The Lake District – I used to work in Langdale from 1982-1986, and lived in Windermere at the time. We return every year to a timeshare there, and know and love the valley.

When?

The last weekend in January 2015. I wanted to be away for my actual birthday, with a bit of time in between.

How much?

I had a budget – I could spend a reasonable amount thanks to my Uncle Hugh who left me some money a few years ago.

Who?

See list of people I wanted to invite. Wanted to be able to invite everyone on my list, so it needed to be a large venue

How?

Have a residential weekend, with some shared food, some provided food, entertainment that would suit everyone

I used these questions/answers as my starting point for the whole design, and realised that there were many designs within the design:

- Venue
- Food
- Entertainment (Friday and Saturday)
- Daytime activities

Venue

Survey:

- I wanted somewhere large enough for everyone
- I didn't want to have to reduce the people invited because of lack of space
- Needed accommodation in the local area for those who would not want dormitory/bunk beds
- Needed to think about transport to the venue
- Wanted a whole place, not sharing with another group
- Preferably a variety of shared rooms and bedrooms
- Local friends said they wanted their children in the same room as they were (rather than a children's dormitory, which meant that the children wouldn't sleep!)
- Looked at the Yorkshire Dales (an area I know well) as well as the Howgills and the Lake District) so I didn't miss a great venue

Analysis (google!):

Looked at a few hotels – too expensive

Large houses to rent – either not large enough, or too expensive, eg Holiday Fellowship)

YHA Rent-a-Hostel had various options in the Lakes and Dales. I looked at the larger ones and weighted them on size/cost/venue. High Close came out on top as best value (cost per bed spaces)

Design:

High Close Youth Hostel fitted the bill –



- it could sleep up to 100 people so I could invite anyone and everyone without being restricted
- was situated in the Langdale Valley
- has brilliant walks in the area (long, short, medium)
- good cafes and pubs in the area
- was available to book the entire hostel for the weekend
- had a manager who could cook for us
- railway station in Windermere with taxis; bus to Ambleside and shorter taxi for those who wanted public transport
- is a wonderful building with a large sitting room and entrance hall, and with other rooms for the younger guests (pool table, table tennis) in the basement
- had a wide variety of bedroom sizes
- good recycling facilities there
- other accommodation in the area for people who didn't want dormitories
- was available for the last weekend in January
- total cost: £1865 for the weekend. £500 deposit paid in March 2014 (implementation)

This part of the design didn't take too long!

Entertainment

Survey:

Ages of my guests ranged from 7 to 80, so wanted **entertainment** that everyone would enjoy (integrate not segregate, use and value diversity)
 Large sitting room in High Close was big enough for everyone to fit in (just about!)
 Wanted something for

- Friday evening
- Saturday before dinner
- Saturday evening

Analysis:

Friday evening:

- people would be arriving from 4pm to 10.30
- some people would be happy to sit and chat
- some people didn't know each other, so good to have games in hand

Saturday afternoon:

- Dark by about 4pm
- Wanted entertainment for everyone

Saturday evening:

- some people would be happy to sit and chat

- some people didn't know each other, so good to have games in hand

Design: Realised that **Saturday afternoon** was the most important bit to get right!, so back to the analysis)

Analysis:

Discussed with friends – the two best options were magician or story-teller

Asked friends in the area if they knew of anyone, and googled around. I was recommended to Chris Cook (magician) in Kendal, or Taffy Thomas (story-teller) in Grasmere. (Chris was recommended by Taffy Thomas!)

Design: in the end, I just felt that Chris Cook would be a great fit:

- He wasn't too expensive
- He lived locally
- He wasn't going to charge for travel
- He was free for the Saturday tea-time
- His website and you-tube looked great!
- He was happy with the age range of the audience

Booked from 4.30 – 5.30pm, Saturday 31 January. Cost £200 (implementation)



Reflection: he was brilliant. Afterwards, he stood in the main hall and taught a few tricks to the children!

Analysis:

Fair shares and people care were the predominant ethics in this design. I wanted to offer something to entertain my guests (a magician), and also wanted to put something back into the local community.

In 1983, I had seen at close hand the Langdale and Ambleside Mountain Rescue Team (LAMRT) rescue a canoeist who was capsized and stuck in his boat opposite the Langdale Estate (where I worked). Ever since, I had been a supporter of the Team when possible.

Design:

Asked someone from LAMRT to come and give a short talk and bring a collection box along.

Mark Bains, the Chair of LAMRT (who lived in the valley) was booked for 5.45 to give a 15 minutes talk (with a few slides)

Made it clear to my guests that I didn't want any present. They could contribute to LAMRT instead

Reflection:

Fascinating talk.

LAMRT raised £405.28



Other evening entertainment:

Analysis:

Wanted games everyone could join in with
Probably no-one knew everything about me!

Design:

Beetle drive (see attached) sheets available, and dice

Asked a neighbour about other games to play – she came up with a great list but we didn't need any of them!

Getting to know me – design a quiz for everyone (thanks to Lou who had a quiz at her 50th!) Get a display of photos of me at various times in my past

Music – a couple of the people coming were great musicians. Asked people to bring instruments, and/or be prepared to sing



Implementation

Booked High Close
Booked Chris Cook
Booked LAMRT
Sent out 'save the date' emails in December 2014
Sent out invitations (5 January 2015)
Asked Julie to make soup for approx. 20 people
Wrote lists
Wrote more lists
Made up quiz about myself
Sorted out photos and boards
Checked everyone had a lift who needed one

Reflections on the design

What a complicated one! I did a design on lots of large and small elements of the party, but have only written up the venue and entertainment in detail.

Lots of time in **analysis and research** – the venue, entertainment, food options (Friday and Saturday)

Kept going back to the principles:

Observe and interact – happened on the Saturday when some people didn't have the right clothes, didn't know the area, didn't know what to do.

Catch and store energy – make sure everyone had a great time (and I think they all did!)

Obtain a yield – have a great time

Use and value resources and services – share things, appreciate High Close, introduce some people to the Lake District

Produce no waste – great recycling on site. All left-over food taken away.

Patterns to details – the whole design started as my dream of a weekend, and gradually got more and more detailed

Integrate not segregate – informed the entertainment, food, sleeping arrangements, walks

Small and slow solutions – took a year to plan!

Use and value diversity – invited lots of folk of different ages, backgrounds, parts of the country. Did a web of connections to see who wouldn't know many others

Use edges and value the marginal – three children (who hadn't known each other before the weekend, Rosie, Lily, Lauren) wrote and performed a song and handed out autographs; teenagers could use the pool table in the basement, or run around outside

Respond to change – my role for the weekend!

Implementation and Evaluation

Great weekend! Wonderful feedback from friends. Incredible cakes!

Maintenance

Not applicable

Tweak

What could be even better in 2025? Not sure .. maybe need a Stannah stairlift!

Reflections

Obtain a yield: I had a great time!! Someone said it was the best birthday party they'd ever been to!

Lots of loops – I spent time on the venue doing a survey, analysis of options, coming up with the finished venue, implementation (booking)

Got a bit confused as there was a design process for the venue (lots of youth hostels looked at and scored), the entertainment (story-teller or magician were the two areas I looked into), the food. Hard to separate out the different parts of the design.

Great outcome was that Mountain Rescue raised over £400!

In the end, I didn't get a photo of everyone, despite giving Caroline and Phil a list and asking them to tick everyone off ... Sungyul came along and she took some wonderful photos.

Despite all instructions, was surprised that some people didn't bring the right clothes! Luckily I could lend them hats, boots, waterproofs as I didn't go for a long walk myself (observe and interact). One friend had never been for a walk (she did the fell walk to the Dungeon Gill in the snow) and absolutely loved it! The middle length walks turned out to be the longest, as I think they got lost somewhere.

Lots of notes about what I did in the folder – apart from this and the invitation (which was the important part of the design), I have left them as working notes.

Was the inspiration for a friend's wedding in 2017 – they decided to hire a whole youth hostel for a weekend

A bonus was that the Manager of the Youth Hostel was a great cook. Also really interested in the Hostel building, and had developed a quiz for the younger visitors which kept them all quiet on the Sunday morning while they spotted architectural features. Although the YHA information said 'No Dogs', as she had a dog herself, she was fine about Kiita (Naomi's dog) coming in for the evening.

My sister sold Aloe Vera products and asked if she could bring along a stand with information, and some free gifts for the party bags (creatively use and respond to change)