

A Singapore Sling lifts the haze

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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I was not designed for the clinical beauty of Singapore. It has the humidity of a Bikram yoga studio inside a Turkish bath house. I have hair that is the opposite of short. Subsequently, whenever I go there I feel like I have a dead octopus on my head.

I am perfectly designed for the temperature you feel at the base of a lone pine tree on the tundra in the Arctic Circle. So, the relentless moisture of Singapore creates or adds to the fog in my head.

As it turned out, it would be the place that cleared it, too.

In advertising, there is a lot of noise. It is easy to start looking at the wrong things.

The great fashion photographer Norman Parkinson once said the purpose of fashion is to change. In many ways, advertising is not that different. We are always looking at what is changing or what is new. Anybody remember Vine or Foursquare? Vine was launched in 2012. Four years ago, it was the biggest thing ever. I was in many meetings about vaguely doing something with it. Remember how it was going to change the advertising world? Anybody remember having conversations a couple of years ago about how all ads in the future would be 10- or 15-seconds long because that would work better on social media platforms? Anybody notice how the latest Kenzo ad Spike Jonze just shot is 3-minutes long? Boy, we talk a lot of sh!t in this business.

I guess the trick is to remember to look at what doesn't change.

This fog had been building for a while.

I had been having stupid conversations about ad blocking or what the absolute definition of content actually is. As far as I can tell, content is just another word for stuff, right?

Then there was the story about Matthew McConaughey becoming a creative director for a big whiskey brand. I didn't realise it was that easy to become a creative director. I feel a bit stupid now, spending the last 20 years trying to get there. Oh well. In between copy-checking shelf wobblers and trying to motivate his creatives with his speech from the *Wolf of Wall Street*, Matthew used his time to make a violently average ad. The ad had no idea. But it didn't need one, did it? Because the real idea was using Matthew McConaughey as the creative director. This is happening more and more. The idea is simply to use a celebrity with a big social media following. Is that an actual idea?

Stuff like that. I was thinking about the wrong things.

While this was going on in my head, I was in the middle of the task of judging about 500 television commercials as well as online content (there's that word again) for Spikes Asia.

It's an interesting experience looking at that much work at one time. In the beginning, you might be very analytical about the work, but I think when you judge this much work you become a consumer. You notice it or you don't. You feel it or you don't.

When you get to that point, all the verbal shrapnel and bullshit confetti we deal with every day disappears and it all becomes so very simple. The fog lifts.

It has to have a great idea. It has to be well made.

Seems obvious and easy, right? Well, if that were true there would be far more of that kind of work.

I think many of our businesses at the moment think there are shortcuts. Concept and quality wise. Do yourself a favour. Go and judge 500 pieces of work. You will see many pieces just like the next piece. Many with no ideas at their heart. Many that are made without the care and quality a good idea needs. They are invisible. Whatever box they ticked, they were a waste of money.

And then, you will see a handful of pieces that are brilliant. They go straight into your heart and head. No explanation or post rationalisation is necessary. They make you laugh and cry. They make you feel. More importantly, they stay in your head. You remember them.

This is what quality and care does. It makes you notice. It makes you give away your most valuable asset: Your time.



On my last night in Singapore, our jury president Tony Granger very kindly took us to have a Singapore Sling at the famous Raffles Hotel, the place where it was first made in 1915. We could have gone anywhere to have a Singapore Sling but it wouldn't have been as special. And it's special because The Raffles Hotel has invested in an idea. This has created an experience you remember. The tiny fans on the roof. The ingredients they use. The beautiful green lights against the wood panelling. The peanut shells all over the floor. The fact that Ernest Hemingway used to drink there. Details matter. There are no shortcuts. Advertising is no different.

It's funny we want consumers to believe and invest in our brand or product, but I think part of their belief comes from them seeing that we believe and are investing in the brand or product, too. In a sense, they are saying 'you first'. And we show them we are doing these things by investing in how we communicate with them. (Rory Sutherland wrote a great piece in the

Spectator about this idea and the value of experts).

Look at a great piece of work. A piece of work somebody really cared about. It says to the consumer, 'I care about what I am selling you. I care about your time. I will try not waste it.'

A lot of things may be changing but these things will never change.

Thanks to Singapore for reminding me there are no shortcuts.

"You could certainly save money by inviting people to your wedding in an email, but not many people would show up." - Rory Sutherland

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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