



FROM BRAND INTENT TO LIVED MEMORY

EXPERIENCE DESIGN

Maurizio Serena

A methodology for designing experiences that are lived, remembered,
and repeated.

Experience Design: From Brand Intent to Lived Memory

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Introduction

You rarely notice when an experience begins.

There is no clear threshold, no announcement, no signal that says this is it. Something changes instead. Your attention adjusts. Expectations realign. You start to behave differently – often without realizing why.

This is how experiences work.

They do not start when something happens. They start when meaning becomes possible.

Most of the time, this process remains invisible. We move through spaces, services, brands, interfaces, rituals, believing we are making choices freely, while environments quietly shape what feels natural, desirable, or inevitable. Design is already at work long before it is recognized as such.

This book begins from that premise.

Not from the belief that experiences can be controlled or guaranteed, but from the conviction that they can be intentionally scripted at the level of meaning, structure, and narrative – while remaining open to interpretation when lived.

What follows is not a catalogue of techniques. It is a way of learning to see. To notice where intention is present and where it has been abandoned. To understand how meaning emerges from structure, rhythm, space, narrative, and human presence.

This book grew out of years of work across projects, classrooms, and conversations with colleagues, clients, and students who helped sharpen the thinking presented here.

For Whom This Book Exists

This book exists for those who shape environments in which meaning is lived rather than merely communicated. It is written for people who work in contexts where experience is not an accessory, but the substance itself — where what endures is not the message delivered, but the feeling carried forward.

You may work in luxury, hospitality, retail, culture, or services. You may design spaces, orchestrate journeys, script interactions, or define brand direction. Titles matter less than sensibility. What unites you is the nature of the challenges you face: attention is scarce, expectations are high, and repetition depends on emotional coherence rather than novelty alone.

You operate in environments where spectacle is easy but meaning is fragile. Where every gesture is noticed. Where inconsistency is immediately felt. Where people return not because something was impressive, but because something resonated — quietly, precisely, and over time.

Most writing on experience design focuses either on technique or on display. It catalogues tools, maps touchpoints, or celebrates moments of impact. This book takes a different position. It is grounded in disciplines that cannot afford incoherence: luxury retail, cultural exhibitions, hospitality, and branded environments where experience must hold together across time, space, and repetition.

What follows is not a collection of tactics, nor a set of formulas to be applied. It offers principles tested under heightened expectation, frameworks refined through real

projects, and tools designed to translate insight into structure, and structure into lived situations.

How to Use This Book

This book is both a method and a working tool, but it begins by asking something simpler: attention.

It can be used linearly, from beginning to end, or approached selectively during active projects. Some readers will move through it as a narrative, allowing ideas to accumulate and connect over time. Others will return to specific sections when framing a brief, designing a journey, or testing the coherence of an experience already in motion. Both approaches are valid.

The book unfolds in four broad movements, each addressing a different dimension of experience design.

It begins by establishing why experiences matter today and by clarifying what an experience is, grounding the discussion in cultural shifts, human perception, and contemporary research. This foundation sets the conditions under which experience design becomes relevant and necessary.

It then examines the nature of experiences as lived phenomena — how they are perceived, felt, remembered, and shaped over time. This section focuses on the characteristics that distinguish experiences from products, services, or interactions.

From there, the book introduces a four-phase experience design framework—Understand, Script, Design, and Stage—and explores

each phase in depth. Together, these phases describe how experiences can be intentionally conceived, structured, and brought into lived reality, from the first framing of intent to enactment and evaluation.

While the framework is presented sequentially, experience design rarely unfolds in a straight line. In practice, phases overlap, loop back, and inform one another. The structure offered here is not meant to impose rigidity, but to provide clarity – a shared logic that helps complex experiences remain coherent as they evolve.

Throughout the book, you will encounter conceptual foundations, visual models, practical tools, and concrete examples. These elements are not intended to be applied mechanically or in isolation. They are meant to be used together, tested against context, and adapted with judgment. Experience design is not about following steps, but about making deliberate choices and understanding their consequences.

A Note on Examples

The examples used throughout this book are intentionally diverse. They range from retail and hospitality to exhibitions, pop-ups, cultural institutions, and branded environments. Some are widely known; others are more niche or experimental. Their purpose is not to be replicated, but to make underlying principles visible.

A significant number of examples come from fashion, luxury, and cultural contexts. This is not because the methodology is limited to these sectors, but because they operate under heightened

expectation. In these environments, meaning must be deliberate, emotional pacing must be controlled, and coherence must endure over time. As such, they make the mechanics and responsibilities of experience design particularly visible.

A Final Word Before We Begin

Experience design is not about adding spectacle for its own sake.

It is about designing situations in which people can feel, engage, and make sense of the world in meaningful ways. It requires empathy, rigor, and an understanding of both human behavior and cultural context.

With that in mind, we begin where every experience design project should begin: by understanding why experiences matter today.

About this Book

This manuscript presents a comprehensive exploration of experience design methodology – from foundational theory to practical implementation. The framework – Understand, Script, Design, Stage – has been developed and tested across retail, hospitality, cultural, and luxury brand contexts, with the aim of producing coherent, memorable experiences grounded in both strategic intent and human perception.

For inquiries about workshops, consulting applications, or licensing of this methodology, please contact the author.

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Experiences do not begin when something happens.
They begin when meaning becomes possible.

As products and services become interchangeable, experience has become the primary terrain where value is felt, interpreted, and remembered. Yet much of what is labeled “experience design” today prioritizes surface effects—spectacle, activation, or isolated moments—often at the expense of coherence and lasting impact.

This book takes a different position.

Written for those who design environments where meaning is lived rather than communicated, Experience Design approaches the discipline as the authorship of situations rather than the assembly of touchpoints. Drawing from luxury, hospitality, cultural institutions, and service environments, it introduces a clear methodology for shaping experiences that unfold as stories lived in the first person.

This is not a guide to producing spectacle.

It is a framework for those willing to take responsibility for meaning.

About the Author

Maurizio Serena is a brand strategist, experience designer, and educator working at the intersection of strategy, narrative, and lived environments. His practice spans luxury, hospitality, retail, culture, and services, helping organizations translate intent into coherent and meaningful experiences.

Born in Italy and educated in the UK, Maurizio has lived and worked across Europe, Asia, North America, the Middle East, and South America. He has held senior roles in international consultancies and is the founder of Naked River, a Singapore-based practice focused on experience-led brand transformation. His work encompasses brand strategy, future scenario planning, and spatial and service experience design.

Alongside his consulting practice, Maurizio teaches branding, experience design, and innovation internationally. This book reflects his belief that experiences are not designed to impress, but to hold — shaping meaning, memory, and responsibility over time.