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Inside the business of innovation and design

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Cirque du Soleil and David Rockwell's Birthday Party.

[David Rockwell, architect and founder of the Rockwell Group, is a master of designing experiences.](#) Whether its theatre sets (Hairspray), [restaurants](#) (Nobu), hotels (W), gambling joints (Mohegan Sun), a kids hospital, spas (Canyon Ranch) or Cirque du Soleil, he is all about creating amazing experiences for groups of people.

[So it should not be a surprise that for his 50th birthday, Rockwell designed a party for his 400 friends and their kids in NYC](#)--and succeeded in giving them all a memorable time. I don't know who all was there. I saw Richard Meier, the architect now putting up glass urban edifices everywhere for the rich and famous. Karen Stein who runs Phaidon, the art/architecture publishing house. Paola Antonelli, curator at the MOMA, Chee Pearlman, 5-time winner of the National Magazine Awards, [Stephan Sagmeister, probably the hottest graphic designer around \(we commiserated over our fates at the hands of the mob at Design Observer\)](#), RitaSue Siegel, the woman to go to if you need a senior design manager for a global corporation and Rockwell, of course, who hugged everyone.

Players from Cirque du Soleil entertained. Clowns moved through the crowd, clowning. Kids were featured. And there was food from 20 (I think) of the top chefs/restaurants in NYC. I hear that's the way to have a top-rated party in the city these days. The food from Country, I can attest, was incredible. I'm guessing that Rockwell designed most of the restaurants represented at the party.

I've seen parties where people networked but never anything like this. Meier was like a butterfly, moving, touching, moving--amazing.

I've done several stories on Rockwell and he's impressive in the way he thinks. It's a combination of empathy for the audience and celebration of the theatre of experience. He uses wonderful materials in innovative ways. Rockwell is also, well, nice. Can't really say that about most famous architects, can you? In lieu of presents, he asked people to donate to DIFFA (Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS). He's chairman.

Rockwell has a book coming out in the fall with Bruce Mau from Phaidon called Spectacle--the great events we love to attend in huge numbers and enjoy as a group (from Nascar to Burning Man). I've seen the proofs. Amazing.

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