



SHOW NOTES

Season 5 Episode 1

DISCOVERY with Dr. Colin Ellard

Guests include Randi Howard, Tim Howard, and Tonya Welker

TRANSCRIPT

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Randi, I remember the first time you told me about **Bombergers** and you called me up and you're like, have you ever been to **Bombergers**? I get this call from you on the back and saying, you spent an hour and a half there. That was the first day, yeah. That was the first day. So we go, we had so much help, like you didn't really have to look around for help and most of the people that work there, everyone is super nice, really knowledgeable. What we found was a lot of people that worked there were retired, like, crafts people, and they just knew everything.

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The person that helped us with the grill just knew everything about grills. They had every accessory. So we ended up buying our grill, so I said to Tim, let's just walk around. Let's see what's in this place. And it was so big. I mean, you could buy greeting cards up to having them remodel your bathroom. They had paint. They had window treatments. Um, a whole area on if you were really into like birds and bird watching. I don't know, what else, Tim? It was just, every time I go in there, I'm amazed.

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They have a little cafe, can grab coffee, little gifts for people. It's, I was just there the other night and Tim went in to get, um, something for his saw. What were you getting? A blade. A blade. For his saw. So while he's doing that, I said, you know, I'm gonna walk around and see if I can get a mirror for my bathroom for over the vanity. So I'm walking around didn't see anything. So I went up to the counter and the guy said, oh, can we help you with anything? I said, yeah, do you sell mirrors for my vanity?

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And he said, we don't sell them, but we can cut one for you and frame it. And I'm thinking, my goodness, what?

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They do a lot of that kind of stuff. They do a lot of that. They will, if they don't have it, they will find a way to get it for you. Right. Yeah. So, Tonya, you know, you told me that you walked in the other day and you said, do you have this part, like, no context? No, nothing. You just walk in and hand them a part? Yeah, so you hand, okay, it was, we were doing something at home and there was, it



needed metric washers. Trying to find a metric washer is not the good thing. so he just walked in, he said, here's this, this is the size we need, and he walks over to the whole section that's got all the little drawers of all the, of all the, that's bolts, everything you can think of over there that you can buy one of if you only need one, which is

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great, and, uh, he's like, okay, let me, let me measure it, he gets out his handy-dandy tape measure, measures it, and he walks over it, he goes to the drawer, he goes, okay, let's measure this piece, and he goes, here you go, And he found it for us. It was great. I agree with you, Randi. They are so knowledgeable. You can go in and also tell them, this is the project we're doing. What do we need to do this? Walk you around the store and get you the parts? Penny? I mean, everything. Hardware undersells it. And, uh, who says customer service is dead? These are incredible stories of customer service.

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Yeah. Yeah, that's the real difference. Well, we just got the saw blade, and I almost bought the wrong saw blade. If I had, you know, been at, uh, uh, owes their home depot, I would have come home with the wrong saw blade, gone back, but the guy who, um, was helping us, he asked me, you know, several questions, and he determined that the saw blade that I had couldn't be the right saw blade for my circular saw. He told us which one to get, I came home, it worked perfectly. So, it's that type of, uh, assistance in there. They're always available.

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You know, you don't have to wait on anyone to help you. That's what impresses me most. You know, for a hundred-year-old store, they seem to be pretty darn modern. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You don't have to stand, you don't have to stand in an aisle and just break. I've been going to that store since they weren't at the location. This is an old warehouse that they're in now and they bought that and moved everything here. Well, it appears like from the outside that, you know, when you go in, it's this war-in of things and you just keep going and going and going.

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Yeah, it's enormous. Once you get in there, like, I was walking towards the back and I looked and I was like, oh my goodness, it's extended. I mean, that's where all their flooring is. Uh, I couldn't believe that they sell like, and I was upset because I had, I ordered all these custom, um, blinds and things at some expensive place here, and when I went in the back, they had everything. Everything. And, like, they sent someone out to measure. It's just the nicest store that is so close, and everyone in there, like you, like what Tim said, you don't have to wait in line for, like, someone to come help you.

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They have enough people in there at all times. And, like, again, they're just so nice. Like, I-I would go there any day over, like, some of the other stores. What's that section we went to, and, um, it was,



like, a Frisbee? Oh, yeah, Tonya- The frisbee golf place in there. Yeah, they even have that there. Yeah.

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Yeah, it's, it's literally a whole designated section. Yeah. Just for frisbee golf things. Crazy. In a half hour in there with the guy, I mean, the, I don't know if he, I don't know if he, we wanted to get it for our grandson. Yeah. Yeah, like he, I've never heard of him. He, he took all this time he's telling us how you do it, places you can go to do this. And it was just, it was so cool. When I leave there, I'm always happy. I've quite honestly never had this kind of an experience at a Lowe's or a Home Depot.

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No, no, definitely not. Cristene, I don't know the last conversation we've had. We're talking hardware here, but any retail, we haven't had a conversation about how the level of energy about a retail store overall is unbelievable. And Jeff, I do not get excited going into the Lowe's and Home Depot. Actually, I hate going in there because nothing excites me in there. But boy, when my husband's getting what he has to get, actually, I just start wandering. You can leave with a candle.

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I mean, I can leave with things I love. You can leave with candy, you can leave with... I can even get a pulled pork sandwich if I want to. Yes, you can. That's as long as the cafe is open when you go. Oh gosh. Well, you know, I think that we are starting off this season of Retail Done Right, talking about love. You know, this, it's all about emotion and how connected we can be to retail places. So, for me, this was, so much fun to hear and to have this be a local piece to our Lancaster heritage, to have a store that is, you know, a centennial store that people still love is just,

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I can think of no better way for us to kick off the season. And Cristene, I have to say it, I think you hit the nail on the head with this one as a launch. Yeah, this just feels like, um, unintended. I didn't even hear! Oh, God! We are gonna be off to a great start. This is retail done right. Thank you so much, Tonya, Randi, and Tim. This is incredible.

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So we just spent 10 minutes raving about a hardware store. The good news is, is we have someone here who can tell us why that store does what it does to us. Dr. Colin Ellard is a cognitive neuroscientist at the University of Waterloo where he directs the Urban Realities Laboratory. He studies how the design of buildings, streets, and stores shapes how we feel, what we pay attention to, and what we do next. his work pairs immersive reality and biometric measurement, things like fancy words, skin conductance, heart rate, gaze tracking, to test how real people respond to real spaces, um, on the streets and in a lab.

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He's the author of *Places of the Heart*, *the Psychogeography of Everyday Life*. and you are here, why we can find our way to the moon but get lost in the mall, um, which I do all the time. On purpose. His research has been featured in *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *Science Friday*, *NPR*, the *BMW Guggenheim Lab*, *Aeon Slate*, and *Psychology Today*, and in *Psychology Today*, he writes a column called *Mind Wandering*. He has this landmark Lower East Side walking study where participants wore biosensors, passed a blank facade of a Whole Foods, and then a livelier strip of small shops.

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And it is the most cited piece of evidence on how store design affects the human nervous system. Colin Ellard, welcome to *Retail Done Right*. Oh, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. So first, your work is fascinating, and I'm really glad to be talking to you. So, as you've heard in the opening, we're kicking off this season with a hundred-plus-year-old hardware store called Bombergers outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As a psychogeographer, what do you hear in that story?

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In my field, sometimes we talk about, um, awe experiences. So psychologists have become really interested in the experience of awe because of the kinds of things that it does to your psyche and the kinds of changes it affects in, for example, the way that we feel about the world and we treat one another. And usually when we think of our experiences, we think of things like grand environments, you know, walking into a massive cathedral or any kind of cavernous space or a beautiful gallery or something like that.

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But one of the things that we sometimes forget is that, is that awe can also be generated by let me call them smaller things by more subtle things by having exchanges with people with great expertise. So the famous examples are things like we might be in awe of the intellect of a famous physicist like Stephen Hawking. And what we're in awe of there is not anything to do with the, with his physicality, but to do with all of the things that he knows. So I wonder whether part of what's special about this store, and other stores like it, is that we have contact with that kind of expertise that allows us to, in a way, surrender ourselves to the person and the environment in a

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pleasant way, to surrender ourselves to the person and the environment in which we're shopping. The other thing that I picked up on, especially Cristene from that story of the person who suddenly found that they'd spent an hour and a half in a hardware store is, I don't know, but I'm thinking that when that kind of thing happens, when you lose track of time in a pleasant way, often the reason for that is because you are becoming, um, fascinated with the setting.

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and fascination also is a word that we use a lot in my field and it has to do with the properties of environments that allow us to effortlessly switch attention from one item to another as we explore a space. There's a related idea, there's something that we call mystery, which



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is very much in the core with a common sense understanding of that word. An environment has mystery in a good way when it pulls us in, when we are encouraged to keep exploring more and more deeply because we're curious of what we'll find next. So the classic example is when you go for a walk through the woods. and you walk much further than you're expected to because you just are filled with curiosity about what will be around the next corner and the next corner and the next one after that. So I'm, I'm wondering whether, you know, on those kinds of experiences of fascination and mystery, are most often in my field associated with natural environments, natural settings, like I said, the woods, like a park space, like a, a deep forest.

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But they don't have to be, I think, more and more we're appreciating that you can generate those things, fascination and mystery from other kinds of settings, built settings, streetscapes. I think people who travel and explore cities are well familiar with those kinds of feelings of fascination and mystery that pull us into an environment. And I don't think there's any reason to think that it would be otherwise with something like a well-designed retail environment. So I think maybe that's the other part of what's happening. So part of it is the engagement with the people, um, which comes through an obvious way from the snippets that, that I heard.

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Another part of it I suspect is the, uh, the design of the setting, its physicality, its real properties. You know, that's really interesting in the sense of

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we don't use those words in retail, fascination and mystery. And I think that

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as a matter of fact, the goal would be to remove mystery altogether so that you know where everything is and you lose the sense of discovery and that is what makes it fun or blessed in the sense that traveled globally when you go shopping somewhere else and you go into a store and you can't read any of the language and you see how much you recognize it's such a sense of this shared experience, but it's also a unique experience.

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How do we have enough of both? Yeah, that's super interesting. So I can, I can see your point that you could almost think of it as a, as a grammar of the retail environment, where if we are completely unfamiliar with the space, I'm thinking of personal examples and I think of grocery stores, which generally always have the same kind of modal layout. And you, you know, to some extent you want that, if you're in a hurry, you want to know where the milk is, and it's usually easy to find. But you're right. To have a pleasurable retail experience, you, you want to have some surprises.

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You want to have serendipity. You want to discover the product that you never even thought, uh, but it might be interesting that you didn't know about. And so, finding that balance where people are able to successfully accomplish what it is that they've come into that story to accomplish, but also leave with the feeling of having had an experience that's a delicate balance. That's a little bit of alchemy, which I guess a scientist should not use a word like alchemy, but there you have it.

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I guess a scientist should absolutely use a word like alchemy. absolutely you should I want to lean into the comments you just made about streetscapes in particular in terms of streetscapes can be too blank or for that matter too chaotic can be bad for the nervous system if I understood correctly and I'm very much of a fan of negative space myself with balance because I think negative space can help reduce just overall visual clutter.

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I think you call it a little bit more chaos. And I think that it helps to allow retailers to hopefully bring a point of view to the conversation, but especially from a streetscape perspective,

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Maybe retailers aren't paying enough attention to their storefronts themselves. And I think your study with the whole foods and the Lower East Side opposing sides of the street or literally one block away from each other and in the huge difference, where do retailers or retail stores sit on that scale? And what is the version of it? Maybe that gets it right. Knowing clear well what doesn't get it right. Where is that balance? you're pointing out something that I think is very, very important that there does need to be this balance and the added wrinkle, which you didn't mention,

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is that we're all different. So, you know, okay, and this is something that I've grown to increasingly appreciate over the years that I've done this stuff is, is that treating people as if we're all the same just doesn't work. So we've got different thresholds for our tolerance for, let's call it chaos. I love me a little chaos. Yeah, a little chaos, right? And some of us, like Jeffrey, gravitate to what you described as negative space. So something that's lowering complexity and, and more scarf, but probably not all the time.

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And so I think this is the key point. And this is, I confess, I haven't really thought very much about this in the context of retail spaces, so I'm beginning to feel what maybe I should have. But in other kinds of spaces as well, What tends to run through everything, everything that I've done and everything that I've discovered is the idea that what we want most of all in an environment as agency, we want to be able to decide for ourselves to choose where to go. And if I'm feeling, you know, like I want to be standing in front of a stark, sometimes beautiful, brutalist building for a couple of minutes, then And if I can't do that, that's a miss.

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That's a failure of the setting. And if I'm forced into that higher than comfortable level of complexity for me, that's also a fail. So it has to do with the ability to be able to go from one kind of setting to another. So for a designer, I think that means and not to suggest that this is easy and not to suggest that I am a designer, I'm not, but I think the art is to build settings where there are affordances for a number of different ways of engaging with the setting. I'm thinking about retail settings and there are times when I don't particularly want company when I go into a setting.

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I don't want a curator. I know what I want. I want to just go and reflect and look at stuff myself. And there are other times when I need help and I really appreciate it. So again, it has to do with being able to make that choice myself as to what happens next. And I've been asked this question a lot by architects and planners over the years is, you know, what is the sweet spot? How do we do this right? And I think the problem is that there isn't one because we all have our own sweet spot. There are probably greater similarities than differences, which is, you know, what psychologists always say we're more alike than we are different.

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But nevertheless, I think to get things right, you have to appreciate both that we're all at least a little bit different. And secondly, that we really cherish our agency, our power to choose for ourselves what we do next and where we go. That's powerful. That is powerful. as a data maven, this study of yours, the Lower East Sidewalking Study, you put biosensors on people and you put them in front of a blank facade of a Whole Foods and then a few steps away a strip of small storefronts and the numbers told the story that their words could not.

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What did you find and how should we interpret that? Well, we used the biometrics for better or for worse. I've always had the feeling that the body doesn't lie. So if we can get a readout of what somebody's body is doing, that tells me one part of the story. In the case of the study that you're referring to, Cristene, We did actually use verbal questioning as well. So, and that was, for me, the most interesting part was that when people were standing in front of those very low complexity settings, like the Whole Foods store, their nervous system went quiet.

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And all I mean by that is that the main sensory we're using was measuring something called skin conductance, which is really not much more than just a readout of your sweat glands and how they're performing. And we all know from everyday life that's an index of arousal. We know that when we are physiologically aroused, we're anxious, whatever, for a number of different reasons, then our sweat glands are more active. So when people were standing in front of those low complexity settings, like Whole Foods,

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The physiological arousal levels are already low. The trick is, that can also be true in a very different kind of setting. If I take someone, as I did in that same walk, into a nice lush, quiet green space, which in this case was a community garden, then you'll also see low physiological arousal. The difference is that if you ask people how they feel in each of those two places, while they're feeling unaroused, whether skin conductance is low in the park setting, they're also reporting very positive emotional states.

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Standing in front of the Whole Foods store was a different story. People were reporting not being very happy at all to be there. And so that combination of low physiological arousal and low affect or emotion I discovered, I didn't know this at the time we did the experiment, but I had a colleague down the hall from me who was studying boredom and he said, that's the absolute signature for boredom. And the reason that we care about boredom is because it's stressful. So if you put somebody in a situation like standing in that spot on the street and measure salivary cortisol, the so-called stress hormone, you will find an increase in secretion.

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And we know that chronic the elevated cortisol has all kinds of negative health effects. So that's why I began to think that, you know, doing these kinds of things in a better way could actually be a question of public health. We're not going to fall over and drop dead of a heart attack or a stroke if we stand in front of a boring building. But if you think about that experience accruing over the days and weeks and months and years of your life, badly designed settings from the standpoint of psychological sustainability, then absolutely I believe that it will be measurable in terms of susceptibility to diseases of a number of different kinds.

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That's fascinating. Yeah, the words that you called out in your report were bland, monotonous, passionless. I mean, these are horrible words for a retailer to be associated with in terms of trying to compel or, or entice people to come in. You just said it clearly. The essay really talked about is this bad for public health? Is a poorly designed streetscape bad for public health, which was just a fascinating insight. I think for me, I immediately went to, wow, storefronts, facades.

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Where is that? Where is that balance? Where's that sweet spot, right? Jeff, I'm gonna double down for a second on stuff I know that you've done. And it is this notion of the move from the window to the entry zone of a store. You designed that intentionally, and I think that it's very different than the way we think about entry to most places.

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And hearing, uh, what Colin was saying, even if you have excitement on the sidewalk and you come in and you lose that excitement, I, you know, I just wonder how that translates. And I know we probably haven't done that study yet, but there's something interesting there. Actually, this would be



really, really fascinating because in retail, there's this whole idea that you get them across the threshold. There's what we call a decompression zone where you're entering a new space and you're not necessarily familiar with it unless you're a repeat customer.

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For me, it's more about the words you used earlier. It's discovery. It's fascination. But there's this element there. There's this moment where you need to orient yourself into the environment. and you can't just hit them right away. You need to allow them to become a little bit more comfortable in the space, get a sense of their belongings, and then start their journey, that crossing of the threshold. I would love your kind of just stream of consciousness ideas on that.

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I haven't really thought much about this at all, but what you're saying makes a good deal of sense to me. I think on the one hand,

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I feel as though

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if the storefront produces a particular state

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it's almost like there's a promise or maybe less a promise and more of an offer that when you enter this door, something is going to be fulfilled. So I think, you know, you might be looking for that, but I think you're right. I mean, one of, from the psychological perspective, I know people who, um, have been interested in what happens when we pass through doorways. And it's quite interesting that there's a whole science of I guess part of it is what we call event perception that has to do with how

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we know when one event has ended or one episode, let's say, one episode has ended and another one begins and explicitly we know some things about just passing through a doorway that we know makes that happen. There are some fascinating studies, they're, they're a bit old now, but I think nobody has ever falsified these as far as I know that when you walk through a doorway, and this was done in both real world and in VR, there are some really interesting effects on people's memories for what was before the doorway as opposed to what gets built up after the doorway.

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So it's as if that doorway, that threshold explicitly makes for an event boundary that resets things. And I would think, I mean, I don't have the science to substantiate this, this is all just basically intuition, but I would think that under those circumstances where a new episode is beginning as you pass through that entryway, you would benefit from having some kind of a pause, some kind of location of say lower complexity um, maybe even at the beginning, lower levels of the kinds of



things that I was talking about as fascination and mystery, like just long enough, a couple of beats just to get your bearings to remind you that you're somewhere else.

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Humans are, we're incredibly smart, so too smart for our own good lots of the time, but if we just have like a second, that can be long enough for us to just reorient and design what we want to do next and decide what we're faced with. So I could see the psychological benefit of a threshold space like that. Just don't ask me to design it. The introduction of this event perception is really a fascinating idea that really, really plays right into that. I've not thought of it in that context.

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This is another event, uh, in many respects. I think it plays very much into some of the things that we've talked about where the store our guests describe is the opposite of what I think you would consider an optimized retail experience. most chains are, and I think Cristene mentioned this even earlier that everything has been designed for efficiency. Um, it's almost like we're losing that sense of fascination, mystery, discovery. There's still the idea that, you know, where the prescription counter is in the convenience store or the milks in the back of the grocery store because they know you're, you're coming in for that or oat milk or almond milk.

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So much is about efficiency now. What gets lost when retail is engineered for efficiency and is there a measurable cost in, in your data for boring environments? Those are two somewhat different kinds of questions. I would say what gets lost in

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a hyper efficient environment like that. It kind of reminds me of what people have tried to do in

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cities, sometimes smaller scale settings, but there has been an ambition to do this kind of thing in a city, the so-called smart city idea, the response of environment and knows what you want and makes it happen for you. And it sounds deliriously happy, doesn't it, that I can walk into this space and be cocooned in a caring environment that just conveys me to what I want and helps me find it and then gets me out. And I think, you know, for the most part, the human experience of those kinds of environments has been that they're dreadful, that we don't like them.

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And it harkens back to something that I was talking about before that has to do with agency. One of the words that I like to use, and I know that not all of my colleagues agree with me about this, but that's what makes life interesting. I use the word friction. I think that we need to have some level of friction in any kind of environment in order to feel the ground beneath our feet, to feel, again, that we are in control of our, our own decisions in, in the setting.

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So specifically I'm talking about in the urban environment the classic example is something called the desire line. So planners set up cities in such a way that they expect us to do certain things to walk in certain areas and not others. And if you look at where, you know, grass patterns are worn probably in your part of the world and where snow gets worn down in my part of the world, we don't follow the rules. We don't like to follow the rules. We like to decide where to go ourselves and you can see the physical

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evidence of that on our streets. So I think that when we are given an opportunity to set the rules for ourselves, rather than to be led gently by some kind of nurturing, benevolent force from above that thinks that it knows what we want, I think we're happier where we end up having a happier, more interesting and fulfilling experience and also having an opportunity to experience some of that mystery and fascination that I describe to you.

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So it, you know, it depends what you want. It's so interesting and complicated. There are different kinds of experiences, aren't there? I mean, there, there are certainly times when I go to a store, and again, I'm thinking of grocery stores because those are the retail environments that I find myself in most of the time. I might need to just pick up what I need and get home in 10 minutes to make dinner. But there are other occasions when that's not the case, other kinds of experiences where I don't want that. so to me the thing here is when you talk about this sense of mystery and fascination it is Costco on a Saturday and we're fans of Costco I will just flat out admit that love me some Costco but you walk around at Costco and they'll be sampling a stewed

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beef lasagna and I'm like I wouldn't buy a stewed beef lasagna I hadn't sampled I would never even think of it but I'm gonna stop and I'm gonna try it because it's this sense of discovery and you never know what's gonna be what they're gonna sample you actually Don't even know if the item you bought last week is still going to be there It's this, you do get a different sense of discovery and I think that is interesting and the other piece I'm going to go back to on the friction side The one piece about retail that just absolutely sticks me every darn time is why they have to create friction at the cash wrap so that you have to go buy 862 other items while you wind through the life-deadening

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line and look at candles and 16 other things I think you're right. You want friction in the right place. We are made up of multiple people based on our mood and point of view and what else is going on. So sometimes you do need that efficiency, but other times you do want to be inspired and you may not exactly have your dinner in place and you need to go into the store to actually find something that is going to inspire you to add those ingredients and walk out the door. But Friction and I think it's a fascinating conversation to talk about the reactionary Friction is a benefit and then Cristene to your point in the right place Yeah, you know AI is rewriting how Stores get staffed how



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customers get serviced and Augmented and virtual reality are beginning to show up in store design Looking ahead what parts of the science will work with the way places make us feel and how they connect us to our communities. Where is the science heading that we can start to design better experiences? That's the hardest question you've asked me so far. I hope they don't get any harder than this one. I think what you're asking, what are the principles that have emerged so far that we might use in, in design of retail environments, and especially the risk that using AI to design environments, it's going to do a couple of things.

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First of all, it's going to flatten our experiences because AI models typically treat us as all being more the same than different, which to some extent is true, but not completely true.

00:33:18 – 00:33:50

my gut sense is that, that AI in design, just like AI everywhere else that is being used kind of homogenizes experiences that if you look at AI writing, it's got kind of a level of Again, homogeneity, unexceptionalness to it, but I'm, I'm trying to imagine what would happen if you asked an AI engine to design an environment that makes for fascination and makes for mystery. It's almost like a contradiction to ask something like an AI engine to accomplish something like that.

00:33:51 – 00:34:20

What you're gonna get is more better sameness. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, AI is all based on what's been done, right? It's that that's where it comes from. Large language models based on everything that we've already done. So it's, I think maybe I'm being naive about this, but I think it's unreasonable to expect there to be genuine, exciting, inspiring novelty from the application of these kinds of methods to a retail environment. It could just be that I'm more fashioned, but that's how I feel today.

00:34:21 – 00:34:56

Completely understand. I think we're more aligned with you than not for sure. So, where's your favorite place to shop? Oh my goodness. I mentioned it just before we began to record, I think. I have a toddler. I've a two-year-old daughter. That changes your shopping experience when you've got somebody under your arm who's sharing the experience with you. In some ways, it makes it more delightful. In other ways, it makes it a lot more difficult. But the one place, and I think this is true for her, it's always been true for me, that the farmers market, and there's one in every city, Whenever I travel, it's one of the first places I look for.

00:34:56 – 00:35:30

It has a lot of other things that we've been talking about. So, Cristene, when you talked about the Costco experience, the first thing that made me think of was, well, but the market's like that. There are people cooking things. It's a little bit different every time. there are new people every time, but they're also the people that you get to know, the guy who sells eggs, who will, if you need it, just extend you credit and say, I'll pay me next week. It's fine. And that social experience along with the



variety of goods, and of course it's food, which is, you know, my very favorite thing to shop for of anything.

00:35:31 – 00:36:08

That's a peak experience for me. Even little markets. I live in a fairly small city and our local market is I couldn't give you unbounded dimensions, but it's, you can walk through it in ten minutes. And it's such a refreshing and liveening experience for me. We really appreciate you sharing your knowledge and your research with us. Thank you so much, Dr. Ellard. My pleasure. Thank you very much. I'm taking away a real appreciation for agency, the importance of agency, but also the power of fascination, of mystery, of serendipity, a very, very insightful conversation.

00:36:08 – 00:36:11

Thank you so much for your time. You're very welcome. My pleasure.

00:36:14 – 00:36:44

So, Cristene, the question is, with lean budgets and even less attention, can someone duplicate the Bombergers' experience? Or should they even try? Bombergers, if you ask me, works in a category where big box dominates and it works because it's authentic. That was another word similar to some of the words that came up, but that's another word that I think we need to keep in this moment. Um, can other retailers duplicate that? Sure. It's not complicated.

00:36:44 – 00:37:14

What it is is hard. You have to want to do that. You have to be willing to prioritize it over speed of checkout. you have to be willing to put it on top of better skew management or reducing the number of staff on the floor to meet a metric. Belonging is a uniquely human emotion and if a retailer wants it, you have to return to the first principles of service.

00:37:15 – 00:37:51

The final question for me is why do we care? And I'm gonna try and answer it maybe for myself, but I think it's more than that. And that's because retail is one of the last places that strangers still meet on purpose. Retail is, I'm gonna use a phrase here, the last accidental civic infrastructure that most people interact with, weekly, off and daily, without choosing to. And when you let big box flatten that out, when every store becomes the same store, and every transaction becomes a screen tap, you don't just lose the store.

00:37:52 – 00:38:30

so you get greeted by name or you get a chance to ask a question of a person who knows the answer over here a conversation that isn't algorithmically curated for them you get to feel like you live somewhere instead of just near other people and that's why Bombergers matters not because hardware stores are sacred because the woman who walks in, my friend Tonya, who walks in with a metric washer and stays for 45 minutes talking about completing her project, in that moment the human beings have done what people in markets and market squares have done for 10,000 years.



00:38:31 – 00:39:02

You're being a citizen of a place and not a consumer of it. And I think that friction is where trust gets built. Friction is where strangers become familiar. Friction is where you move from transaction to relationship. You know, if you take the friction out of the store, you don't get a better store. You get a warehouse with self-checkout and a country full of people who don't know their neighbors. Well, and I, and I agree with you. And I think the answer to my own question is in unequivocally, yes. You know, we've talked about the customer channel a lot.

00:39:02 – 00:39:33

And, uh, I agree with you that, yes, it's hard, but it's absolutely achievable and possible. you know, delivering for your customer can make people who have no interest in shopping or little interest in the field of retail talk as if they're a shaholic. You know, they're, they're brand evangelists without even knowing what a brand evangelist is. It's fantastic. I mean, the emotion and the love from their descriptions of Bambergers is really the goal, I think.

00:39:33 – 00:40:04

And, um, Dr. Ellard gave us some really interesting insights and probably a deeper appreciation to your point for friction, for the power of agency, for the importance of mystery and discovery. And these things kind of go against some of the efficiency conversations. Cristene, this is Retail Done Right. Thank you for a great conversation today. Yeah, we've had a great conversation today, and Jeff, I think it's time we go shopping.

00:40:04 – 00:40:08

We absolutely do. Thank you.

00:40:09 – 00:40:27

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