

PechaKucha Night

If You Can Say It,
You Can Do It

by Julie Vitto | jvitto@flymagazine.net

out & about

Who would've thought the Japanese word for "chit chat" would take the world by storm? Dubbing a night of slide show presentations about design and architecture "PechaKucha," the first PechaKucha Night (or PKN for short) was organized in 2003 by Tokyo-based architects Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham. Twelve years on, the event still takes place in their space for "drinking and thinking," SuperDeluxe.

Originally intended to be a one-off event for people in the design community to share their projects and ideas, PechaKucha Nights are now taking place in more than 860 cities around the world. And there are no limits to what you can talk about. Entertaining and informative presentations are encouraged and anyone is welcome to participate.

Lancaster, Harrisburg and York have all been host cities to this event in the past year. PKNs in Central PA have been held at LSC Design in York, Midtown Cinema and HMAC's Stage on Herr in Harrisburg and Tellus360 in Lancaster. The requirements to be an official host city involve organizing at least four PKNs per year. Tellus360 leads the pack in Central PA PechaKucha Nights with eight events under its belt since last year. And volumes nine and ten are already on the calendar. It's free and open to the public in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere where you can loosen up with a pre-and post-presentation drink.

Tellus360 shares a vision with Klein and Dytham's brainchild, SuperDeluxe – a versatile space that functions as a bar, gallery, kitchen, music club, theater, library and school, among other things. Both spaces offer something different every night, making them the kind of venue perfect for hosting a PechaKucha Night.

The format is simple. Twenty slides advance automatically every 20 seconds while the presenter talks. After 6 minutes and 40 seconds, it's time for the next presentation. The short, show-and-tell format was developed to prevent long-winded presenters from getting off track and losing an audience's attention. According to Klein and Dytham, designers and architects needed help delivering concise and informative presentations – thus, the idea of PechaKucha was born.

Unlike a TEDTalk, anyone can give a PechaKucha presentation. Presentations usually take place in a bar or community space and can range from highly personal and entertaining stories to informative or irreverent slide shows. The key to



PHOTOS BY JULIE VITTO FROM HER PECHAKUCHA SLIDE SHOW



a good presentation is to talk about something you love. Most people use the format to present their latest creative projects.

Good PechaKucha presentations tend to uncover the unexpected, whether it's a talent or an idea. Some PechaKuchas are a way to tell great stories about a project or a trip. Some are funny, while others are inspiring. They're all different, and this makes each PechaKucha Night kind of like sampling a flight of beers or a box of chocolates.

One of the goals of PechaKucha is to develop a real (read: face-to-face) social network through the sharing of experiences. On the official PechaKucha website, where you can search for host cities and view presentations, founders Klein and Dytham state their belief that there is nothing social about online social networks.

I threw my hat in the ring for the sake of a good story and participated in my first PechaKucha Night in October. It's recommended that you go see a PKN or watch some online first before you decide to participate in one. Of course, I went and got myself on the event list before I knew what I was in for. I'm glad I did it, though. And I'm glad it took place



at Tellus360 – a place where moral support is always on tap.

Event coordinator Bill Speakman – the organizer of PechaKucha Nights at Tellus360 – encourages people of all walks of life to reach out if they'd like to present. PechaKucha Nights are an ideal way to get to know the names and faces making our corner of the world worth talking about.

There were six presenters that night. Some were first-timers and others were repeat performers back again for the fun of it. Subjects ranged from how diet affects the brain to Lancaster,

Nebraska, to "not safe for work" Bible stories to the word PechaKucha itself. My presentation was on building a better bucket list.

The story was autobiographical with a backdrop of odd and entertaining images of my attempts, failures and unexpected triumphs. I won't lie – I was nervous. And yet, I managed to find the comfort of friends, acquaintances and strangers offering their support. After downing a beer and a glass of wine, I took the stage. I remembered my name – a good start – and let the room go blurry as I focused on my script. I made a conscious decision not to sound like a robot – thanks to my pre-presentation drinks – and began my PechaKucha debut.

It all started with a Monkees concert at the Mann Music Center in Philadelphia in 1997. From there, I started (and never finished) a Monkees autograph collection. Three out of four ain't bad, right? After that, I went on a roller coaster ride of learning to trust my own abilities in the face of failed attempts and unexpected experiences like traveling to far off places, learning new skills and figuring out what motivates me to keep moving forward – mostly the pursuit of music, food and good libations.

By the end of my spiel, the audience witnessed me crossing something else off my bucket list – confronting my fear of public speaking. With only a few days to prepare, I was just happy I'd managed to get my script to flow in time to the slides behind me. It was an invigorating experience that I recommend everyone have. If you're scared of death of confronting a fear, there's no better way to make peace with it than by pouring your heart and soul (time permitting) into a presentation that makes people feel connected to you in some way. Even if you generally feel disconnected from most people. You'd be surprised how willing folks are to receive you – especially when there's beer around.

After having experienced a PechaKucha Night firsthand, I'm encouraging everyone to get out from behind the computer screen and get to a live event with real people, real communication, real beer and real creative fun. By the end of the night, you're pretty much guaranteed to have learned something – while possibly making friends in the process. Not a bad way to spend a weeknight.

If you're itching to share something cool and have 6 minutes and 40 seconds to spare, look up the nearest PechaKucha host city and get yourself on the list. Central PA needs bright ideas. And everyone loves a good story. If you've got one, we're all ears.

Listen to Julie's PechaKucha presentation at flymagazine.net



Tellus 360 in Lancaster hosts PechaKucha Night Vol. 9 on November 17 at 7 p.m. Email BillS@tellus360.com if you'd like to be a participant. Visit pechakucha.org to find out where the next PechaKucha events are happening in Central PA.