

STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION CELEBRATES 15 YEARS OF BIG IDEAS

ROSEMONT, ILL (January 2008)—There have been 3,085 entries over the years from 63 universities and colleges. More than 100 judges have come from more than 50 companies and academia to award 96 winners for creativity imbued with real world practicality since 1994.

But for all the numbers involved, there is no better barometer of the International Housewares Association's Student Design Competition and its impact than the careers of those who entered and then toiled for months on the development of a single project. Past winners have received jobs at major consumer products companies such as Whirlpool/KitchenAid, Black and Decker, HOMZ and Hasbro, and top design firms such as IDEO, Fuseproject, Lunar Design and Continuum.

The lessons these students learned, trite as that may seem in a tough world, helped build a foundation for all that was to come.

"My experience as a winner is not one to be forgotten," says Jenna Stephens-Wells, a 2007 second place winner from Carleton University for her *Floating Humidifier*. "While it's an immense honor to have been selected as a winner, the greatest benefit came from the opportunity to network and display my work at the International Home + Housewares Show. The opportunity provided to winners is a once in a lifetime chance for a young designer to be put in a spotlight."

Her time at the Show led directly to a design job that moved her from Canada to the U.S. The opportunity was offered by Mrako Fenster, a 1999 competition winner from Arizona State University.

Henry Law, who won second place in 1999 for his *DeFogger*, went on to jobs at several major companies, including Philips Electronics North America Corporation, and has traveled the world since graduating from San Jose State University.

"The IHA provides a design competition that allows students to not only design but discover new product opportunities, address undefined user needs and create the future of how users interact with product solutions," he says. "Being a winner in the competition provided me with a real world exposure to the industry, a connection with working professionals and industry people and a design internship in New York."

Celebrating 15 Years of Student Designs/Add One

The responsibility of longtime IHA Design Programs Coordinator Vicki Matranga, the competition enters its 15th year with an abiding mission: to provide an educational experience for every entrant through an innovative entry format and evaluation process. Much like industry sponsorship has become a “routine” element of industrial design curricula, the Student Design Competition has been incorporated into many design course requirements, according to Ann-Marie Conrado and Paul Down, authors of the article, “Learning to Win,” in the Winter 2007 issue of *Innovation*, the quarterly journal of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA).

When the competition first took shape in 1993, “few realized how much impact the event would have on industrial design education,” they write. “Most competitions, especially those for college students, best serve the top contenders, who gain individual and program recognition as well as cash rewards.” Non-winning entrants, conversely, receive “little feedback” in exchange for the work they put in and virtually no reward for the process that led to a solution and an innovative product, they add.

Competition Evaluates Design Journey as Well as Product

From the beginning, IHA’s competition has evaluated the “design journey” as well as the product prototype, which brings in “demographic research, product bench-marking, alternative design considerations, form development and manufacturability,” all of which the authors say are “real-world” aspects of the design process and evidence of thorough preparation.

“Numerous thoughtful attributes of (the competition) developed under Matranga’s direction respond to the shortcomings of other contests while providing significant value to academia” the authors maintain.

Shailesh Patel, a winner in 1996 from the University of Illinois at Chicago for the *Cordinator* and who went on to head product design for Martha Stewart Living, came back to the competition as a judge. He says the contacts he cultivated through the competition remain in his Rolodex today.

“When I was asked to be a judge, I thought about how important it was to receive feedback as a student. As a judge you have the unique opportunity to see a large variety of work, current creative thinking and some really good ideas from students at many different schools,” he says. “As a judge you get to see how real-world constraints play into the design process. Manufacturers are trying to balance the needs of

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their companies, their buyers, the end users and staying ahead of their competitors.”

For Matranga, also a housewares design historian with a book and museum exhibitions to her credit, the reward of the competition lies in the relationships with the students she helps mentor through the process. The result is that students uniformly feel they gain from the competition, whether they win or not.

“The IHA competition is one of the best experiences of my young career,” says Geoff Baldwin, a 2006 winner from the University of Cincinnati for his *Smart Beverage Heater*. “It got me a job, it got me on TV and in more blogs than I can count, and I got to meet a lot of incredible people along the way. I can’t say enough about all the hard work that Vicki does. She really cares about the kids that come to the Show.”

The winners and their designs of the 2008 IHA Student Design Competition will be on display in the Housewares Design Center, Level 3 Lobby, Lakeside Center, during the 2008 International Home + Housewares Show, March 16-18 in Chicago. Photos and descriptions of the products will be available at www.housewares.org shortly before the Show.