

DESIGN AWARDS

Apples vs pears



Hector Serrano has walked off with the overall Oxo/Peugeot Award 2000 for his salt-filled latex light. The Royal College of Art graduate won £16,000 for a product that design critic and *Blueprint*

contributor Hugh Pearman described as "tactile, sculptural, original". Other winners (who each picked up cheques for £1,000) included Gusto Design Studio for its Sticklebook Shelves and El

Ultimo Grito for its witty "What Goes Down Must Come Up" laundry basket.

While there is little doubt that the prize has become a worthy event on the British design calendar, questions remain about its judging criteria and who it is really aimed at. Is Serrano's light really a better product than Matthew Hilton's "Wait" Chair, for example? According to this panel, it is. But perhaps it is the function of prizes like these (and our own *Blueprint*/100% Design Awards, p38) to make us question just how we define good design. And if they bring the industry more priceless column inches in the national newspapers, maybe we shouldn't be churlish.

Oxo Tower Wharf's Alison Pinner, for one, believes events like these help foster creativity: "The Awards have spurred designers to greater originality, bringing an incisive approach to form and function while pioneering new techniques and using interesting materials. The results are beautiful, simple designs for stylish living."

The public will soon be able to judge for itself, as an exhibition of the 11 finalists, along with images of the 54 shortlisted entries, will tour the country, taking in the Platform Gallery in Clitheroe, Lancashire from 28 September-25 October and finishing on 3 June 2001 at the Laing Gallery in Newcastle.

The Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards 2001 will be launched this autumn. For information call 020 7401 3610.

DEGREE COURSES

Be a biodegraduate

It seems there's a shortage of product design graduates with a handle on the latest environmental legislation and the principles of sustainable design. It was calls from industry for more environmentally savvy graduates, says the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, that prompted it to set up a new degree course, called Product Design Sustainable Futures.

Dean of the institute's Faculty of Design, Ian Dumelow, believes Britain is lagging behind the rest of Europe in tackling sustainability. As well as providing students with all the normal product design skills, the Surrey course will give them a thorough understanding of how to work with new legislation, such as the new Waste from Electronic & Electrical Equipment (WEEE) bill.

"Students coming out in three years will have to think in an entirely different way," says Dumelow. "The WEEE legislation covers everything from electronic toothbrushes to refrigerators." He adds that companies now need designers to address the whole lifecycle of a product, including the energy used over its life, how it can be recycled and the impact of the waste it produces. The old "take-make-waste" system is a "conceptual dead end street", adds course leader Ann Thorpe.

"It's industry, not education that's leading the way, probably because they're more aware of the legislative changes," says Dumelow. "We've had a lot of interest from companies like Sony."

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Flatpack cathedrals

"Corrugated" is an exhibition which took shape when photographer Kevin Thomas got curious about the corrugated iron churches and houses around his Birmingham neighbourhood.

The exhibition includes e-mails sent to Thomas during his investigation, along with plans and historic photos. The construction method, which originated in about 1880 and reached a peak around 1900, was a favourite with non-denominational churches, Scout groups and village halls.

"There were steelyards around the country where they produced them almost flatpack," says Thomas. "You got a catalogue and picked from various different sizes and window shapes. You could pick and mix, as everything was interchangeable, and they sent it to you by railway and horse and cart. Then carpenters and craftsmen put them up."

By displaying 16 x 20in Lambda prints, which evoke the ironic beauty of these buildings, Thomas hopes to convey his own fascination with them.

"I'm interested in the materials and the repetition," he says. "The colours people have chosen have been classical, but as the light plays across the corrugated surface on a sunny day in a drab street, they really stand out. Something about them makes them look at home anywhere. In the countryside they seem to have grown there. In urban areas they're like little jewels."

"At the time they were cutting-edge technology. Now people think they look like something from the colonies. But actually they were English: made in Manchester, Liverpool and London and transported all over the world."

Thomas points out that while many of these buildings are being pulled down for redevelopment, contemporary architects like Stephen Atkinson – who recently won the AR+D Emerging Architecture Award – are rediscovering galvanised corrugated steel.

Corrugated is at the Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings from September to October 2000. www.ktphoto.co.uk

