

# And the winner is...

Will it be a brush that shines in the dark? Knitted electric cable window blinds? Or an acrylic chaise longue? Dominic Lutyens sizes up the competition for this year's £30,000 Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards

Two years ago, the Oxo/Peugeot Design Award went to design company One Foot Taller for its frosted-white plastic Chasm chair. Last year, Hector Serrano's Superpatata lamp (a light bulb inside a malleable salt-filled latex balloon) came out on top. The prize allowed us to move to our current 1,000 sq ft studio, recalls One Foot Taller's Katy Barac.

The financial benefits were equalled by the prestige of the prize. A major problem for design companies is gaining clients' trust. The endorsement of the Peugeot Prize made a massive difference. 'It helped me set up my studio after college, get a computer and tools,' says Serrano, an RCA postgrad. 'I've been able to live for several months with this money while I design a lamp and plan for an exhibition I'm having in London, in September. This is a prize that can make a young designer's career.'

Any UK-based designer can enter the Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards, the prestigious design prize for cutting-edge work in furniture, domestic metalware, ceramics, textiles, glass and lighting. Established names rub shoulders with young unknowns, who gain nationwide recognition if they hit the jackpot.

The total prize money is £29,500. There's a winner in each category. Runners-up in all categories each win £500 – the shortlisted designers, revealed for the first time today, know they've won at least this sum so far, but won't know who's scooped the lion's share until 13 June, when the winner, who walks off with £15,000, is

announced. The products will be on show from 2 June to 1 July at the gallery@oxo, Oxo Tower Wharf, Bargehouse Street, London SE1 (020 7401 2255).

Shortlisted this year are 14 finalists: Mathias Bengtsson's Slice chaise longue; Inflate's Snoozy bed; Paul Godden's Tri bollard with a sloping top that doubles – or triples – as a place to park a bike and your bum; Charles O Job's mirror-cum-clothes hanger; Matthew Tomalin's cast-iron bowl; Eli Zagury's Duct Bin; Sharon Elphick's Graffiti transfer print on canvas; Annie Sherburne's Soft Cobbles textile in organic wool; Ruth Spaak's Chain Link window treatment; Anson Kaynama's Hatch porcelain birdhouse; Eddy Mundy's Light Sweep broom with in-built light; Tord Boontje's Wednesday Light; Michael Russell's tiles that light up, and Sam Maidment's Write-on storage jars.

'A few items sparked a debate,' says Louise Taylor, director of exhibitions and collections at the Crafts Council, and one of the judges this year. The birdhouse had us speculating as to whether a bird would nest in porcelain. I personally loved Bengtsson's chaise longue – you can imagine it becoming a design classic. 'Wayne Hemingway, also on the judging panel, agrees: 'He's going to be a massive star. And the Light Sweep – it's very witty and it works. We had fun trying it out in a dark corner.' Taylor adds: 'These designs are all characterised by flexibility, wit and narrative.'

Here, are just six of the 14 shortlisted designs. ■

**LIGHT SWEEP BY EDDY MUNDY**

This year's judges were swept off their feet, so to speak, by Mundy's Light Sweep, and rightly so. 'Getting into all those dark corners was my inspiration,' he explains. To this very conscientious end, the broomhandle is fitted with rechargeable batteries which power a fibre-optic light in the head of the broom that illuminates the bristles. 'I also wanted to elevate the humble broom by lighting it up.' Asked what's more important, humor or functionality, he replies, 'Both. Entertainment is an important aspect of product design, but so too is practicality.' Mundy graduated from the RCA with an MA in product design in 2000



**CHAIN LINK BY RUTH SPAAK**

Spaak refers to her design, rather quaintly, as a window treatment. But there's nothing net-twitchingly suburban about her experimental alternative to conventional blinds. Chain Link combines kiln-formed horticultural glass (used in greenhouses) with scraps of neon-bright cable in Liquorice Allsorts pinks, blues and yellows. It's portable, unlike blinds. Spaak, a constructed textiles graduate from Birmingham Polytechnic, is inspired by grids, and incorporates each element row by row – like knitting. A systematic method, perhaps, but her juxtaposition of electrical odds and sods with traditional glass is fascinatingly eccentric



**ONE YEAR ON...**

Hector Serrano won last year's Oxo/Peugeot Design Award with his Superpatata lamp, pictured here, with the designer. People love the tactile quality of the lamp. Winning the prize has allowed Serrano to develop other designs, while the Superpatata itself has been picked up by the Dutch avant-garde design group Droog. They are developing the project with a view to putting it into production and will be showcasing it at the Milan Furniture Fair this week. For information about Serrano's work, call 020 7329 5064



**SLICE CHAISE LONGUE BY MATHIAS BENGTSSON**

An ultra-futuristic take on that most decadent and traditional piece of furniture, the chaise longue, Slice is made of vertical sheets of flame-orange acrylic held together by three nylon rods. 'I wanted to use a 2-D material to create a complex, 3-D form,' says Bengtsson, who studied furniture and industrial design at the RCA. 'But I used a transparent material to expose its structure. I wanted the process behind it to be simple and apparent.' Slice is redolent of 60s space-age furniture, though Bengtsson says he's not influenced by it. 'But I am inspired by the vision of the 60s, its search for a new aesthetic. Each era must find its own'

