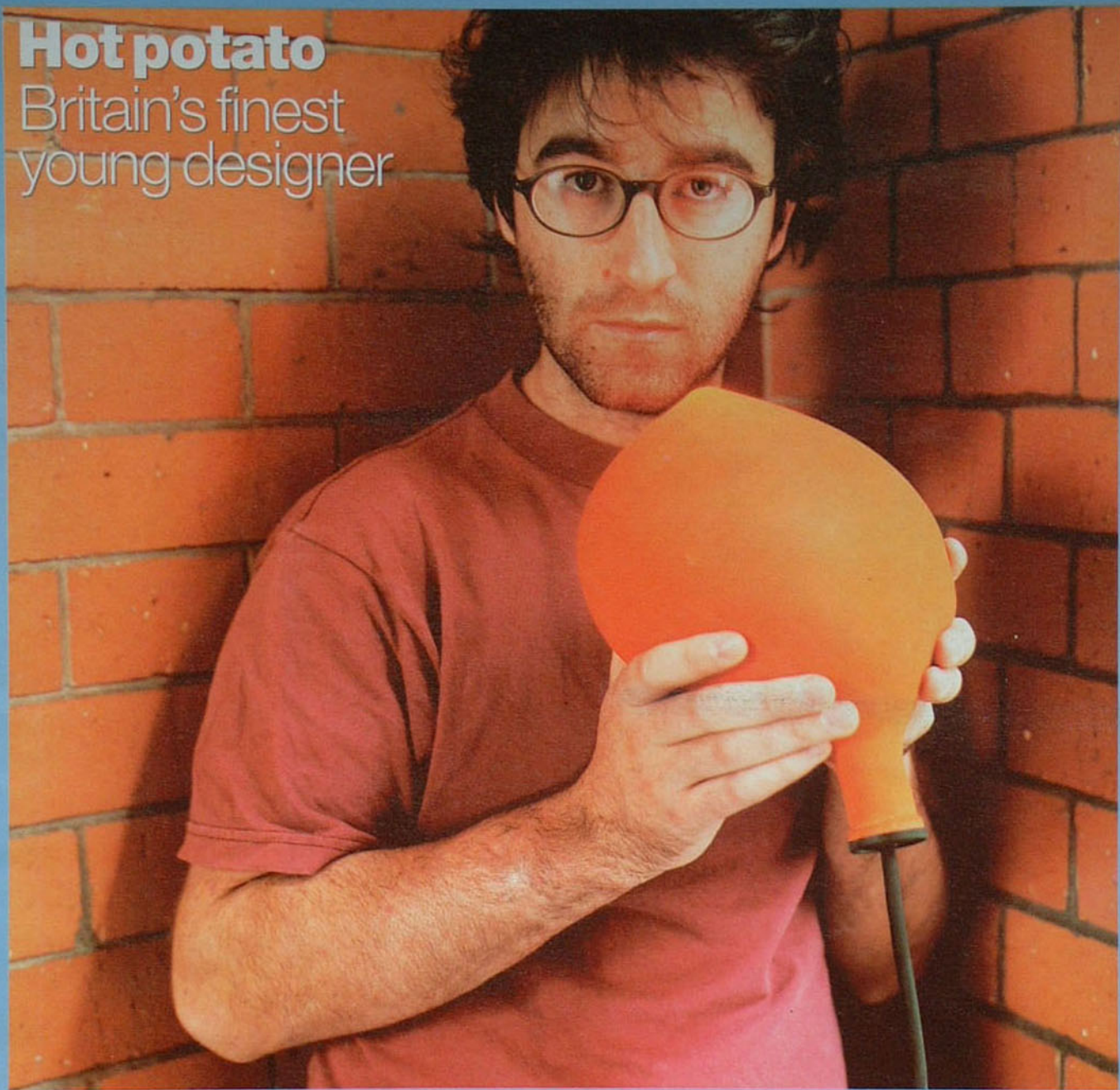


**Hot potato**  
Britain's finest  
young designer



**The Guardian** **space**

interiors/property/design July 13 2000

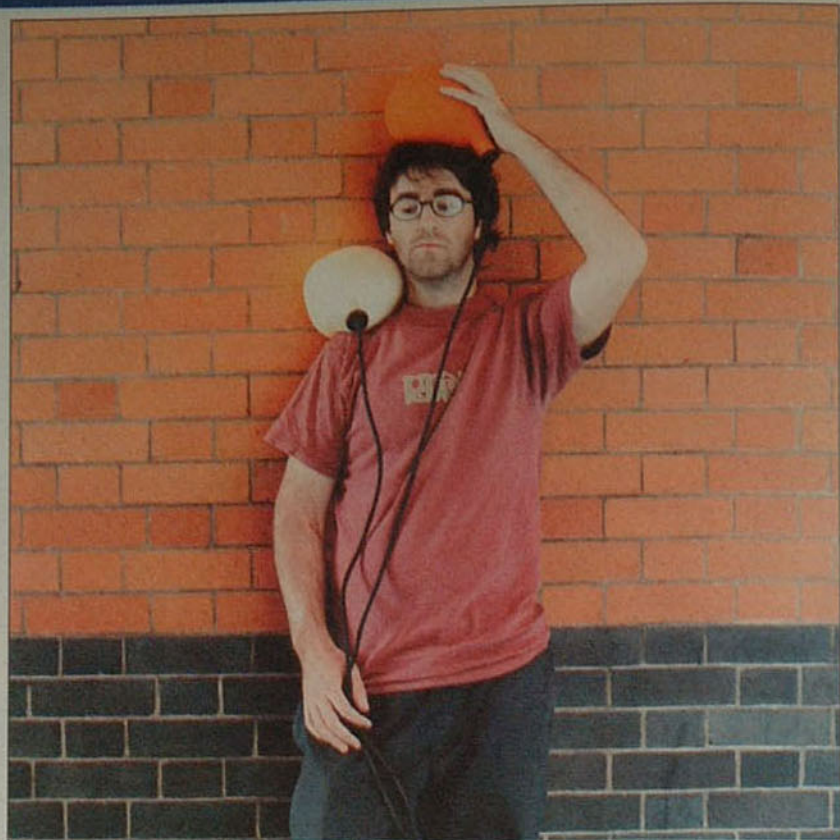


## Inner space

The finalists for this year's Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards form an intriguing snapshot of the changing nature of British design. The very word design once smacked of elitism — but accessibility and affordability seem to be today's buzzwords. The “designer objects” in the awards this year are as likely to be a low-cost bookshelf as a perfectly honed luxury chair.

The cast of players is changing too. Less than five years ago the best advice to a British design graduate keen to get on would have been to learn Italian, German or Spanish. Now, most are staying put and the tide of migration may even be running in the opposite direction. European design students have always been attracted by the excellence of British art schools, but the new currency of modern design in the UK is encouraging many to stay on after their courses. It's exciting that no fewer than three of this year's category award winners, including Hector Serrano, the Spanish winner of Oxo/Peugeot's £16,000 first prize, were by overseas-born designers living here.

But not all is rosy in British design. The company that snapped up Serrano's prizewinning light is Dutch, not British. This is disappointing, but not surprising. Britain might be a great place to get noticed, but what we need now are the British manufacturers to turn the ideas into reality. *The Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards 2000, until July 30, the.gallery@oxo, Oxo Tower Wharf, South Bank SE1, 020-7401 2255. We have arranged an exclusive evening there for 200 lucky space readers. See the Roundup pages for more details.*



### Super Patata Hector Serrano

The amoebic form of the Super Patata, the squidgy light which has won this year's top Oxo/Peugeot award, might seem simple enough. But, according to Hector Serrano, the likeable 25-year-old Spanish Royal College of Art (RCA) student who created it, getting the design right was hair-tearingly frustrating. “I almost chucked in the towel several times — it was driving me crazy,” he recalls. “It took me six months to get it to work properly.”

Serrano says he often makes use of “garbage to create luxury designs” — his RCA portfolio includes a

light made of shimmering shredded plastic encased in the string bags that normally hold Spanish oranges. The inspiration for the Super Patata was the cheap flour-filled rubber dolls sometimes found in street markets; but actually turning this shape into a malleable lamp was fraught with problems. “For one thing, I couldn't find an easy way to stuff the rubber skin. I also couldn't find the right material to fill it with. Eventually I decided to use salt, which has just the right amount of translucency.”

Hector's persistence is paying off. Gijs Bakker, head of the Dutch design collective Droog and a

visiting tutor at the RCA spotted the Super Patata on a lecturing visit. Since then the light has been shown as part of Droog's range at the Milan Furniture Fair, and is now set to be produced by DMD, Droog's manufacturing arm.

Serrano has just completed his Masters degree in product design, but he isn't planning to return to his native Valencia just yet. “I'm trying get a part-time job and set up a studio here,” Hector told me, before he knew he had won the £16,000 prize. “There are many more design opportunities in London than Valencia, as long as you can manage to survive.”

The Oxo/Peugeot Design Awards throw Britain's brightest new designers into the spotlight. David Redhead picks his favourites from this year's finalists and exclusively reveals the winner, Hector Serrano's squidgy Super Patata light. *Photographs by Harry Borden*

# Little acorns