

Design Museum selects its picks of the year

The Designs of the Year contenders include the Olympic cauldron and Beijing's Galaxy Soho building

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Designs of the Year contenders

A folding wheel, a non-stick ketchup bottle and a chair made from sea waste are some of the more innovative products unveiled today at the Design Museum's annual designs of the year exhibition, which this year sees a welcome emphasis on practical problem-solving rather than fantastical forms.

Comprising more than 90 nominations, covering fields from architecture and fashion to furniture and transport, the design of the year in each category will be announced at a ceremony in April.

The longlist includes some of the more obvious blockbuster achievements of the year, from Renzo Piano's Shard to Thomas Heatherwick's Olympic cauldron and Random International's Rain Room installation, which saw a torrential downpour installed in the Barbican. Zaha Hadid earns two nominations, for the Galaxy Soho building in Beijing and the Liquid Glacial Table, which resembles running water.

But the show also features many lesser-known designers whose work is tackling big issues around the world.

With scarcity of resources high on the agenda, several projects focus on combining new techniques for low-cost, low-skilled recycling and mobile manufacturing.

E-Source, developed by Hal Watts, is a bicycle-powered cable recycling system that tackles the widespread practice in developing countries of burning electrical wire to remove the plastic coating and recover the valuable copper within. Watts's ingenious solution takes the form of a granulator, fixed to the bike's gearing, that shreds the cable and separates the materials – increasing the metal's value and providing healthier working conditions.

In a similar vein, the Sea Chair project, by Kieren Jones and Studio Swine, explores a process of mobile manufacture from waste at sea. The designers have developed a system that harvests plastic from the

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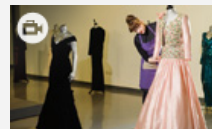
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oceans' vast floating garbage islands and transforms it into furniture while still on the boat.

Jolan van der Wiel's [Gravity Stool](#) is made by a medieval-looking contraption that physically pulls a gloopy bowl of magnetic resin apart into the form of a stool, in an inverse process of conventional casting. A mobile 3D-printing kiosk and custom vase-casting station also join the growing trend for projects that predict a return to itinerant makers and menders, with production increasingly seen as a collaborative, social process, decentralised from mainstream manufacturing.

Challenges in healthcare have provoked some of the most groundbreaking solutions in the exhibition, with several projects that tackle obstacles in the processes behind getting the products to the people that need them most.

[ColaLife](#), designed by Simon Berry, focuses on the problem of distributing medicine in far-flung corners of developing countries. Berry realised that Coca Cola had the furthest reaching supply chain around the world, and so developed a medical packaging case that neatly slots into the gaps between crated Coke bottles – and which also serves as a measure and drinking cup.

Piggy-backing off an existing distribution network, this unlikely alliance allows these "social products", from oral rehydration salts to zinc supplements, to reach further than ever before.

[The Centre for Vision in the Developing World](#) presents an equally revolutionary design for a pair of children's glasses that can be manually adjusted, providing corrective eyewear for those without access to opticians. Incorporating clear silicon-filled lenses, which can be calibrated by two removable adjusters, the glasses could help millions of children worldwide that don't have access to clinical eyecare.

Many of the products on show seem so obvious that it's hard to imagine how we have survived without them for so long. One such invention is the [Morph folding wheel](#), developed by young design agency Vitamins, for a new generation of folding wheelchairs. Taking up almost half the volume of a fixed wheel when folded, the Morph is designed to be easy to pack away into the storage compartments of aeroplanes and small cars.

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