



# Style statements

The nation's leading design competition promotes form and function, **DAVID WILSON** writes

**A**RTISTS and designers often sneer at awards as crassly cutthroat marketing exercises. However, when they win, invariably those same people smartly suppress their misgivings and start to see awards in a whole new light.

So, away with snobbery. Let's look at what hurdles a contender must jump to take part in one of the southern hemisphere's foremost and longest-running design competitions, the Australian Design Awards, which are now in full swing.

Jumping the first hurdle is easy: the entry the designer submits must simply be designed here or by an overseas Australian team. The second hurdle, the entry fee of \$825, seems rather stiffer.

The third, which must floor many wannabes, is that a product must be more than an idea or prototype. Indeed, it must be in full commercial production and available on the market before the final round of judging, conducted by Standards Australia – the country's "peak standards body" devoted to supporting excellence in design and innovation through the competition itself.

The prizes are trophies, winner logos, certificates and, above all, status boosted by the fact the awards, now in their 48th year, are our only national assessment program for product design. Victory extends the influence of the lucky few beyond these shores and even boosts the economy, says awards manager Stephanie Watson, who describes the awards as "benchmarks of quality and excellence".

"They are one of the few forums for Australian design to be exhibited and celebrated internationally and furthermore help build confidence and generate exports for Australian-designed products," Watson says.

She cites how the Ford Territory won the Australian Design Award of the Year in 2004. Sales of the Territory apparently later "shot through the roof".

Entrant Ross Didier believes the opportunities generated by the Australian Design Awards can be very far-reaching. "If I can win an award with superior design at this event then it adds to my credibility on the world stage," he says.

Below is just a glimpse of some of the 100-odd products vying for the judges' attention. All are available for purchase.

## 1 Centor Bi-fold Door Screen

This product stems from no less than 17,000

design and test hours conducted by Brisbane-based Centor Architectural. It may well catch on because bi-fold doors have become ever more popular over the last decade, as have fly screens.

But wide, bi-fold door screens were hard to come by or, as Centor, puts it "a little twitchy" in operation. Until now.

Centor's innovative design, which has resulted in two international patent applications, is a slick screen that could almost cover a cave mouth. Three metres high by 5.7 metres wide, it supposedly works "with fingertip ease" and is rugged – in testing, it stood up to 100 blows from a 17-kilogram bag.

## 2 Ensuites On Tow

Ever been stuck without a bathroom during a renovation? Now you have an alternative to going behind a scraggly bush, namely Ensuites On Tow.

Designed by Victoria-based Reality Concepts, this trailer-mounted luxury portable bathroom requires no chemicals. It is equipped with an on-board hot water system and a waste pump and can be used just like a normal bathroom.

But it has been spectacularly successful already, for instance winning recognition from the Australian Housing Industry Association for setting new standards in a poorly serviced building industry area. What's more, among further accolades, it was nominated as HIA National Innovation of the Year 2005 by the Victorian Housing Industry Association. Who would bet against Ensuites On Tow walking away with a prize this time around?

## 3 Zula

Decommission that moth-eaten hammock. There's a new kind of hanging bed to unwind and relax on, Zula, made by the Sydney-based design firm of that name.

Described as "the ultimate relaxation experience", Zula is made from marine-grade stainless steel but is more fluid than you might think. The "seat-bed" turns almost 360 degrees, allowing you to control the direction you face. The design also lets you gently rock, bounce or swing if that's your idea of relaxing. Alternatively, you can just lie still and revel in the sense of weightlessness.

## 4 Ross Didier's Obelisk

If the awards are starting to sound relentlessly practical, here's a short-listed



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item with bags of style. The Obelisk soft seating design, dreamed up by the Melbourne-based trendsetter it's named after, is lean, angular and something of a conversation piece thanks to its pronounced tilt.

But don't be thrown. The Obelisk is easy to pack, partly because, in a nifty touch, the leg frames can be stored inside the seat cavity. Another drawback is the materials, which include plantation-grown timbers and durable, recyclable stainless steel. Essentially, it's about as green as you get.

You can see why, like *Ensuites On Tow*, the Obelisk has already succeeded. It won a special mention at the most recent Salone Internazionale del Mobile (International Furniture Fair) in Milan.

## 5 Vertibral

Devised by rising Swinburne University graduate Joseph Keenan, Vertibral is an extraordinary creation that, like the duck-billed platypus, transcends standard categories. Vertibral consists of a set of four seats/boxes/tables that work as "a flexible furniture system".

That means you can slot, link or stack Vertibral together however you like, depending on your whim or requirements. For instance, you could assemble the thing into a small table, or a large table – or a seat you can make curved or wiggly.

In a practical application, Vertibral can act as versatile storage in the form of boxes you can stack high, wide or low. The oddity seems to know no boundaries but is not self-indulgent – as with the Obelisk, its materials, which include "low-toxic water-based glues", are environmentally kind.

## 6 QuickSmart Easy Fold Stroller

If you have ever had to take a baby on an outing, you will know how it feels to experience "stroller struggle".

This is because, although no longer the monster it was back in the 1970s and before, the typical stroller remains a rather unwieldy device.

The QuickSmart Easy Fold Stroller, devised by Melbourne-based Ideation Design, is an attempt to make pushing a baby around as easy as taking candy from it. Unfolded and ready for action in a matter of seconds, the QuickSmart can also be squashed back flat in a snap.

Given that it weighs just six kilograms, you should be able to cart the contraption around easily. The result: more energy for you to lift your baby.

HCSA

## 7 Smooth Tub Chair

If the idea of metal, angular chairs makes you feel uncomfortable, consider the charms of the Smooth Tub Chair. Although perched on skinny legs, the Smooth Tub is curvy and spacious, inviting you to flop in the softness enhanced by mellow yet luminous colour. The creator of the sculpted blob, Sydney-based Schamburg + Alvisse, paints it as "comfortable and tactile". In line with more and more products, it's also sustainable so you can sink back knowing that neither nasty fibreglass nor fabric glue played a part in the making. Smooth your conscience.

## 8 Furi Ozitech Diamond Fingers Sharpener

You have to admire a firm that has a "No Bull Zone" on its website. Queensland-based Furitechnics offers just that, courtesy of the firm's founder, Mark Henry, who has done more than 16 years "of real, primary engineering research solely in knives and cutting edges".

It shows. The Furi Ozitech Diamond Fingers Sharpener takes the fine art of stropping to a new height, allowing you to sharpen and hone a blade in less than 30 seconds. Thank eight stainless-steel spring fingers bonded with crushed industrial diamonds and set inside a clam-shell case which doubles as a handle and hand guard when unfolded. Throw away that whetstone.

## 9 Silenceair Brick Vent

On paper, this innovation has everything. Developed by the Sydney-based firm it's named after, the Silenceair Brick Vent claims to remove more than 85 per cent of the noise that enters a room through an opening such as a window.

Its cunning secret: "A suite of patented technologies that use the energy of the soundwaves themselves to reflect and dissipate sound." As the vent has no moving parts, it requires almost no maintenance except an occasional rinse in soapy water.

And it should last indefinitely – even through a blaze – as it's made from fire-retardant materials. Finally, the vent is made from fully recyclable materials and won't remind you of flapping gills because it's streamlined and discreet – you can even customise the look of its faceplates and louvres.

## 10 Ultraguard Aluminium Gutter Protection

Cleaning out the gutter that runs around the roof is one of those tasks nobody gets around to. The result: rainwater sliding over rotten leaf debris directly onto the head of whoever walks underneath.

The Ultraguard Aluminium Gutter Protection addresses this problem with a



simple, effective design. A malleable mesh that blocks leaves and vermin, the protector can be contoured into a kind of ski-slope that encourages detritus to slither away.

Better yet, the mesh is made of aluminium that has been coated with a mysterious powder, and requires minimal maintenance. No wonder the product comes with a 15-year warranty (longer than you may well get for your roof). Life expectancy is more than 25 years.

### 11 Esky Ice King Cooler Range

You wouldn't think there was much you could do to the small, box-like portable fridge we call an Esky. But the Esky Ice King Cooler Range, manufactured by that Aussie

institution Nylex, breaks with convention.

For one thing, the Ice King has a rugged sports-car look. For another, the bodies and lids of the three coolers (65-litre, 45-litre, 27-litre) have been fully insulated, increasing "ice life" in extreme heat to more than five days for the largest size and three for the smallest.

Other features include heavy-duty, all-terrain wheels (65-litre and 45-litre), a slot for a waiter's friend bottle-opener (27-litre), and even "moulded-in fish rulers for easy verification of legal fish sizes".

For more information on all entrants, see [www.designawards.com.au](http://www.designawards.com.au).



CENTOR ARCHITECTURAL SOLVES THR PROBLEM OF HOW TO ADD A SCREEN TO POPULAR BIFOLD DOORS.



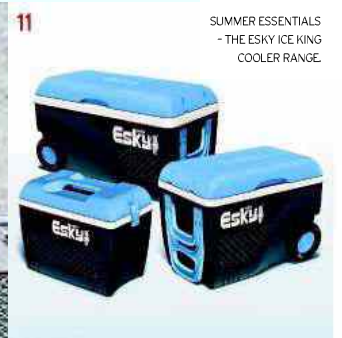
ENSUITES ON TOW IS A WELCOME RELIEF FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE RENOVATING THEIR BATHROOMS.



LOUNGE IN STYLE IN ZULA - ROCK, BOUNCE, SWING, TURN ALMOST 360 DEGREES OR JUST RELAX. SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THE BASE IS MADE OF TOUGH MARINE-GRADE STAINLESS STEEL.



THE ULTRAGUARD ALUMINIUM GUTTER KEEPS LEAVES AND VERMIN OUT OF THE GUTTER.



11 SUMMER ESSENTIALS - THE ESKY ICE KING COOLER RANGE.



ROSS DIDIER'S OBELISK WON A SPECIAL MENTION AT MILAN'S INTERNATIONAL FURNITURE FAIR.

THE QUICKSMART EASY FOLD STROLLER WEIGHS ONLY SIX KILOGRAMS AND NEATLY FOLDS AWAY.



7 THE 'COMFORTABLE AND TACTILE' SMOOTH TUB CHAIR.



5 THE VERSATILE VERTEBRAL CAN BECOME SEATING, TABLES OR STORAGE.



8 THE FLURI Q2TECH DIAMOND FINGERS SHARPENER KEEPS KNIVES IN TOP CONDITION.



9 THE SILENCAIR BRICK VENT CAN REMOVE OVER 85 PER CENT OF NOISE THAT ENTERS A ROOM.