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DESIGN IN ASIA

Meets the Environmental Challenge

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Hong Kong Design Centre

香港設計中心

DESIGN IN ASIA

Meets the Environmental Challenge

The Winners of Hong Kong's 5th Annual Design Competition Combine Cutting-edge Innovation with World-class Conservation

“We've been talking about socially and culturally relevant design for a long time... It's just now that designers are putting these elements into practice.”

Perhaps it's no surprise that 2007 is shaping up to be the year of the environment. Every day we learn of new and novel ways to tackle global warming and pollution: caps on carbon emissions, outright bans on plastic bags, mandatory recycling. In October, the former U.S. Vice-president, Al Gore, won this year's Nobel Peace Prize for raising global awareness of climate change. The prize, more than anything, seemed to catapult the issue of protecting the environment into the mainstream of daily life.

In Asia, however, the story looks somewhat different. Here, efforts to protect the environment typically take a back seat to rapid (and polluting) economic development and most of today's consumer goods – be they electronic, automotive, household or other – are readily tomorrow's garbage, ending up in already crowded landfills or contaminated rivers, lakes and seas. In Asia, in fact, it seems the whole movement to protect and conserve the planet is woefully behind.

Or maybe not.

Consider the prizewinners of this year's Design for Asia Awards, the prestigious, 5th annual, international design competition in Hong Kong organized by the government-backed Hong Kong Design Centre and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council.

From a record 588 entries from 20 countries worldwide, including Hong Kong, a distinguished judging panel of international design experts – academics, architects, designers and business leaders – named 17 winners for 2007. They include ten designs that won the Grand Award, five that won the Best Design from Greater China award and two that won the Special Merit Award, a new category this year. Separately, a Hong Kong jewelry designer was named World's Most Outstanding Chinese Designer and a Japanese lifestyle and home products company won the Design Leadership Award, which each year is given to a company that uses design to achieve commercial success.

As in years' past, each of the entries for the main awards was judged on three basic criteria: good design, influence in

Asia and commercial success. Though “environmental friendliness” and “ecological responsibility” did comprise part of the “good design” criteria, they were not the most important considerations – nor did they extend explicitly to the awards' two other criteria: influence in Asia and commercial success.

Yet reading through the descriptions of each winning design – from innovative shop interiors in Hong Kong to a startlingly simple footbridge in China to a hand-made luxury resort high in the Himalayas – it emerges that each designer – whether an architect, a product designer, a graphic designer or some other creative force – found a way, through design, to express his concern for the environment and do his utmost to protect it.

“It's encouraging,” says Victor Lo, chairman of the Hong Kong Design Centre, co-chairman of the DFAA judging panel and arguably the single most important force behind Hong Kong's multi-year efforts to promote good design in Asia. “We've been talking about – and teaching – socially and culturally relevant design in the design schools for a long time. But it's just now becoming evident that designers are putting these elements into practice.”

Lo noted that this year's winners wouldn't have been so successful nor been able to incorporate green elements into their work without the abiding support of buyers.

“I often say: You can't have good design with just a good designer,” he says. “You also need good customers who appreciate design.”

And that, Lo says, is the main challenge in Asia: to educate the public on the need for more socially relevant products and services. “When awareness becomes a desire,” he notes, “the desire itself puts pressure on suppliers to design products that are environmentally sound.”

With the central role of the customer in mind, here, in no particular order, are the winners of this year's Design for Asia Awards. You'll see that creative forces across Asia have steadfastly met the challenge of good design and green design, a heartening development for an ailing planet.



DESIGN FOR ASIA GRAND AWARD WINNERS

2



THE ORGANIC PHARMACY STORE, EDGE DESIGN INSTITUTE LTD. (HONG KONG)

When the owners of The Organic Pharmacy Store, a London-based brand of all natural health and beauty products, asked Hong Kong architect and designer Gary Chang to create its first store in Asia, they couldn't have known how perfect he was for the job. Chang, you see, is a "metro-sexual," a heterosexual man who uses skincare and other "beauty" products. For years he's been searching for the right ones and in the process has developed a pet peeve about the utter mess of most product displays found in beauty and skincare shops. "They're like a jungle," he says. "You have too many things to view and the salesgirls have no idea what they're selling."

Cut now to The Organic Pharmacy Store in Hong Kong, two branches, one in the local Harvey Nichols, the British-based luxury emporium, and the other in the expansive Harbour City shopping mall. Thanks to Chang, the interior designs of both shops are paragons of simplicity and order with product displays so clear, compact and easy-to-use that sales assistants are hardly needed. Chang's nod to the environment was in his spare use of materials. "The three R's of environmental protection are reduce, recycle, reuse," he says. "Our focus is on reduction. We do more with less, which also fits the nature of the commercial product."



1 UT STORE HARAJUKU, KUBOTA ARCHITECTS & ASSOCIATES, INC. (JAPAN)

Convenience stores, let's face it, are a ubiquitous feature of modern life. On almost every street of every major city in the world, you can find a 7-Eleven, a Circle K, a Big Foot or any number of other small, well-organized shops designed to make the buying of essential foodstuffs fast and easy.

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before some clever designer borrowed the concept to sell another necessity of modern life: the t-shirt. The t-shirt? Uniqlo, one of Japan's most popular apparel retailers and a global leader in casual wear, asked art director Kashiwa Sato of creative studio SAMURAI, architect Shigeru Kubota of Kubota Architects and Associates and builder Hideto Irikawa of iRIKAWA Style & Holdings to join forces to design and build a user-friendly space to sell its UT brand of t-shirts, all 500 varieties.

The result? The ultra high-tech, four-story UT Store Harajuku on trendy Meiji Street in Tokyo. Now, instead of pulling out a can of fizzy sugar water from what looks like a refrigerated, stainless-steel soft-drinks case, you pull out a small, clear-plastic, fully recyclable "can" into which the t-shirt of your choosing has been neatly rolled. The beauty of the concept, besides the ease and convenience of the shopping, is that the plastic casing gets recycled into one of Uniqlo's hottest items found in other stores: trendy fleece jackets and vests worn by 20-somethings worldwide.



3

FUJI KINDERGARTEN, TAKAHARU + YUI TEZUKA ARCHITECTS (JAPAN)

It may take years, many years, for the 600 children who pass annually through the doors of Fuji Kindergarten to appreciate fully what they learned from the design alone of their beloved school. In 2004, when the kindergarten owner first asked Tezuka Architects in Tokyo to take on the suburban school project, he asked only that they incorporate a large roof-top space.

After numerous on-site visits, the architects, Takaharu and Yui Tezuka, a husband-and-wife team, designed an open-space school that would be at once so inviting and intimate with nature – the trees, the sky, the wind and the earth – that the environment itself would become a learning tool.

"I wasn't trying to control the environment but rather to let people into it," recalls Tezuka, the husband, after describing how they cut holes in the large oval-shaped roof to allow the site's old, leafy Zelkova trees through. Interestingly, Tezuka noted he didn't even try to design an energy-efficient building. "We were trying to make a no-energy building," he says. "Mostly we don't need so much air conditioning. The external environment is good enough." On this last point, Tezuka stressed that everyone these days must do something for the environment. "We have to withdraw," he says, "go back to the point where we know we can adapt ourselves to the environment and not the environment to us."



Design for
Asia Award
2007



4

DIGITAL CAMERA NV 10, SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS (SOUTH KOREA)

In 2005, when Sung Kyun Bai, a product designer who works for Samsung's future-concepts lab in Seoul, was asked to create a totally "new" camera, he immediately, ironically, thought of the past. He wanted "to bring back cameras," he recalls, fine, precision, mechanical devices like the Germans used to make but ones that would now incorporate the latest digital technology and modern design. "We wanted to make (the camera) more permanent," he says, "a sustainable product, something you actually would want to keep."

Sung knew the idea was radical, the exact opposite of the trend for short-lived goods, but he felt it was his duty as a designer to start creating sustainable objects. "Why?" he asks rhetorically. "In Asia, in general, people consume fast and waste fast. Most Asian consumers do not question the throw-away culture."

Sung said he believes Asia's culture of waste can be blamed not only on consumers but on designers as well. "If we would make objects that would age in a graceful manner, like leather jackets or jeans or classic cameras, where even a scratch on the metal looks nice, people would keep them," he says. "Now, most consumer electronics, like mobile phones, are dumped every six months." To achieve sustainability in the NV 10 camera series (NV stands for "new view") Sung used quality materials like aluminum and stainless steel and made sure the craftsmanship was masterful, an art that hasn't been seen since the good old days of the classic camera.

5



THE CUBIC FLOATER, DESIGNED BY TOKYO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY FOR NAKAGAWA PACKAGE CO. LTD. (JAPAN)

If designer Toshihiko Suzuki has anything to say about it, the days of using layer upon layer of gorgeous, voluminous packaging for a whole host of Japanese products, from ceramics to sake, will come to an end. An architecture and design professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University, Suzuki designed in 2004 what he calls "The Cubic Floater," an uncannily simple – and sustainable – packaging system made of recycled cardboard and urethane film that molds itself to whatever object is being wrapped. When done, the transparent, urethane-encased item is displayed in a cardboard "frame" which, according to Suzuki, serves as "the picture or the adornment that makes the item look attractive."

"From the start, I wanted to do something environmental," he says. "That's why we used all recycled materials, the cardboard and the urethane... We didn't even use glue because, again, it's bad for the environment. Instead, the urethane film and cardboard is welded together by heat."

The Cubic Floater, which Suzuki designed for the 100-year-old Nakagawa Packaging Co., has done well in the marketplace, adopted by Tukasabotan, one of Japan's most famous sake brands, and Hitachi Maxell to package hard discs. "As a designer, avoiding waste is important because good design should be economical, simple and spare – all at once," says Suzuki.

6

BANYAN TREE LIJIANG, CHINA, BANYAN TREE HOTELS & RESORTS (SINGAPORE)

If you're a designer and your older brother happens to be your boss, there's no telling what kind of impossible requests might be thrown your way. That's certainly what happened to designer Ho Kwoncjian, the managing director of design services of Singapore's Banyan Tree Holdings, when Ho Kwon Ping, his older brother and chairman of the group, told him he wanted "contemporary Naxi architecture" in the latest Banyan Tree resort project in Lijiang, in China's southern Yunnan province. "There was, at the time, no such thing as 'contemporary Naxi,' as my wicked brother knew well," says designer Ho. "I cracked my head over this issue for a long while..."

In the end, Ho solved the problem himself by designing contemporary Naxi architecture, a design that re-interprets traditional building-design yet remains true to the original courtyards and the sweeping curves of local roofs. Ho's modern approach also included sustainable materials and energy conservation throughout.

"Being environmentally sound was important to us," explains Ho, "which is why we tried, whenever possible, to use renewable resources in our construction." During the building phase Ho said he consistently favored steel and concrete over precious wood. He also installed water-and-energy-saving systems in all public spaces and guest villas. "Put simply," he says, "we feel it's a necessity to be environmentally friendly. We take it as a given."





7

812SH PANTONE® MOBILE PHONE, SOFTBANK MOBILE CORP. (JAPAN)

You could fairly ask executives of Japan's SoftBank Mobile Phone – or for that matter any number of mobile phone manufacturers worldwide – why it took so long. Why did it take decades, literally, to substitute a dash of color – dollop is a better word – for the ubiquitous and drab black and grey mobile phone? You know the kind: it sets the color standard for mobile phones worldwide, at least at the market's low-end.

Until now.

Last year, SoftBank joined forces with Pantone®, the famous U.S. company that indeed sets color standards worldwide, to create a mobile casing that would offer a range of 20 vibrant Pantone® colors in one phone model. The resulting phone, the SoftBank 812SH, was designed specifically for young people, mostly women in their early twenties, who are attracted to it for its hi-tech features, yes, but even more for its fashion value.

Since its launch earlier this year, the 812SH has been a super hit. According to SoftBank, it's been the country's best-selling mobile phone for the last two months' running. Environmentally, a SoftBank spokeswoman said the company encourages its customers to "re-use, reduce and recycle mobile phones" and noted it voluntarily collects its phones for re-use.

9

XUE XUE INSTITUTE OF TAIWAN, DESIGNED BY E15 DESIGN AND DISTRIBUTIONS GMBH (GERMANY)

An arts academy has never looked so good – or been so inviting. If you don't believe this writer, take a look for yourself at www.youtube.com. There, in the most unlikely of places, you'll find numerous home-made videos showing the new loft-like interior design of Taiwan's new Xue Xue Institute. (Xue Xue in Mandarin means "learning learning.")

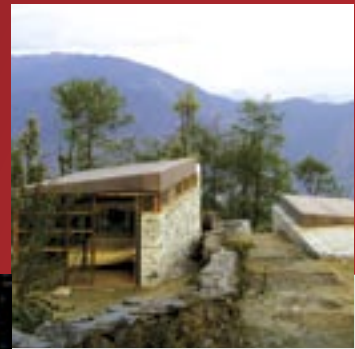
"I didn't think anything here would interest me," narrates one visitor over a five-minute video tour of the institute's well-appointed classrooms and library. "But this place, man, is the bomb!"

For German architect and designer Philipp Mainzer of e15, the international furniture-cum-interior design firm outside of Frankfurt, this colorful slang to describe greatness must be music to his ears. After all, the design goal from the start for the aging 10-story building was to re-configure the space and use materials to promote a "lively exchange as a basis for creative learning and working."

"It makes me really happy to see people here exchanging ideas," says Lin Wen Yuan, Xue Xue's creative director. "The space is simple but creative. It's what we want this place to be."

As for environmental concerns, Lin said the whole approach of the institute – and good design in general – is to be more conscious. "We're trying to be greener," she says. "In our canteen, we cook local food not food that is imported. We don't generate so much garbage. In everything we do, we try to be more conscious."

8



LEITI 360° RESORT, STUDIO MUMBAI ARCHITECTS (INDIA)

The idea of traveling four hours by car and then hiking another two hours up a steep, narrow, dirt trail – and that's just to get to the hotel entrance – is not for everyone. But for certain travelers, adventurous souls with a taste for luxury, the kind that comes from the view, the sky, the air and privacy, the new five-star Leiti 360° resort, located 9,000 feet above sea level in the Himalayas of India, is the ultimate in sustainable tourism.

From the start, architect Bijoy Jain, of his own Studio Mumbai Architects in Mumbai, wanted to build an environmentally sound lodge that would integrate contemporary culture with local culture. "The project emerges from its local context," he explains. "That, by default, is more with less."

On the ground, this means the four double-sized guest rooms and the one glass-fronted public room were all constructed, largely, using indigenous materials such as Leiti stone. The other materials such as timber, glass and plumbing fixtures were carried in by porters and mules. For energy conservation Jain did away with wires altogether and equipped each room with solar panels, for lighting and heating water. He also banished refrigerators. "Food is grown locally and everything is fresh so there's no need for storage," he says.

Leiti 360° opened for business last summer. Now, it's so successful it's fully booked until May next year. "It's been extremely well received," says Jain.





10

PCM-D1 RECORDER, SONY CORPORATION (JAPAN)

Professional recording engineers who remember the bad old days of lugging heavy, bulky, analog recorders around will think they've died and gone to heaven with Sony's new, light PCM-D1 advanced digital recorder. Amateur recording enthusiasts will also be smitten; for them the palm-sized PCM-D1 offers a first-time opportunity to record musical concerts or outdoor field-events that will sound just as good, maybe better, than hearing them live or on TV.

"I have not designed many products for consumer use," says Sony's Chief Art Director Hiroki Oka who worked on the PCM-D1 without realizing the sleek device would cotton to the enthusiasts' market almost as much as the professionals'. Oka knew, though, about designing recording and photographic products for professional use (which means to the highest, most rigorous standards) and he proceeded to do just that. "My goal was to create a 'tool' that incorporated cutting edge technology yet could be operated intuitively thus encouraging people to want to continue using it."

Oka says the titanium-encased PCM-D1 is more than just beautiful. "Try operating the dials and buttons," he says. "The recorder has been designed for one-hand operation... My goal was to create something that can be used for a long time and which people would become more attached to the more they use it."

To address environmental concerns, a Sony spokeswoman said the recorder comes with a rechargeable battery and charger that allows repeated use. Because of its design and quality, it's also unlikely to end up in a landfill anytime soon.



BEST DESIGN FROM GREATER CHINA AWARD WINNERS

1

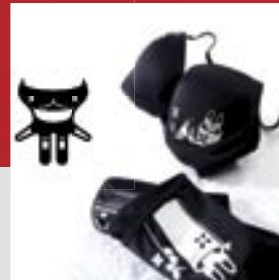
"BLA BLA BRA" RETAIL SHOPS, TOMMY LI DESIGN WORKSHOP LTD. (HONG KONG)

You gotta' love a guy who can turn a dying, 20-year-old line of Asian lingerie into a modern profitable brand that reaches the most sought-after segment of the Asian lingerie market: teenage girls – and does so without using sex. "I start everything from market research," explains Tommy Li of Tommy Li Design Workshop Ltd. of Hong Kong when asked to describe the secret of his success in re-vitalizing the lingerie business now branded as "bla bla bra."

Li said focus groups revealed that most young women in Asia share a passion for text messaging because they like to gossip. "We found they like to chat or 'bla bla bla,' as they would say, which to me was an important point," he says. "Now, when a teenager looks at 'bla bla bra' she smiles and says: 'That's me.'"

Additional research showed that teenage girls in Asia often shop with boys and don't like being pressured to buy, especially potentially embarrassing under-garments. In response, Li designed the shops and graphics to resemble a theme park. "We designed a "bra" citizen who lives in a "bra" city," he explains, "all of which became a major visual identity."

Turning "bla bla bra" green was the final step in Li's successful makeover. He did everything from changing the packaging from plastic to paper to cutting back on ink. Today, he says, the brand is profitable, with sales figures tripling since last year. Then he shouted into the phone: "I'm so happy!"



2

CHOCOOLATE MEN'S FASHION LABEL, I.T. APPAREL LTD. (HONG KONG)

Wallace Chan, a fashion designer and creative director of Chocoolate, Hong Kong's hottest menswear brand, recalls that he always liked men's clothing. When he was younger, in his 20s, he wore "crazy clothing" and sometimes spent a lot of money on it. Now, at 35, he says he's "getting more stable and thinking: What do I want to wear now?"

"I want to wear Chocoolate," Chan says without skipping a beat. And that means smart-casual dress shirts, five-pocket basic jeans, chino pants, striped shirts – everything a man needs to go to work.

"I'm a typical customer," he explains. "I know what 30-something men want. They want classic, basic, good-quality clothing. But the secret? They don't want anything too fashionable. Fashion scares men. And they don't want too much change every year, only a little."

Judging from the sales figures, which Chan describes as "really good," it seems his sartorial instincts are good. (Chocoolate's parent company, publicly traded I.T. Apparel Ltd. of Hong Kong, doesn't release sales figures for any of its brands.) "I've talked to lots of 30-somethings," he says. "Fashion, to them, feels exhausting because they have to change everything. And they don't want to spend so much money; they've started a family and their financial plan has changed. It's for these men we created Chocoolate, for men who want to look smart but not boring."



3

PHILIPS IN-EAR NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES SHN7500, PHILIPS DESIGN (HONG KONG)

In this year of heightened environmental concern, it's no small irony that Philips Design, one of the powerhouses of electronic design worldwide, has come up with a novel, state-of-the-art solution to the growing urban problem of noise pollution, especially from trains, planes and buses: block it out. Until technological remedies can be found to cancel the deafening sounds at their root, the roars, hums, screeches and squeaks, Philips' new In-ear Noise Cancelling Headphones SHN7500 are a brilliant, sanity-saving alternative.

"This is just one version of noise-canceling technology," explains Senior Product Designer Laura Taylor, an American from Arizona who's been with Philips Design Hong Kong for the last five years. "But the real benefit of this one is it's much more compact than others in the market."

No kidding. Before the SHN7500, a consumer on, say, a long flight or a commuter train would have had to use ill-fitting, full-sized headphones to get the same noise-canceling effect. But these new headphones are ergonomically shaped to fit snugly and comfortably into the ear canal. "You don't have to worry about them," says Taylor. "You can relax and even sleep with them and they won't affect you. They'll just conform to you."

Taylor explained that even the most advanced noise-canceling technology will never cancel out all ambient sound – nor would that be desirable. But canceling out 80 percent, as do the SHN 7500 headphones, is effective for the traveling public. She says: "You can hear your music much, much better."

5 DESIGN REPUBLIC, NERI & HU DESIGN AND RESEARCH OFFICE (CHINA)

In San Francisco in the 1970s, a hip radio station would end its hourly news bulletin with a memorable tagline: "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own." It was good advice.

The story comes to mind because, in a way, that's exactly what architect and designer Lyndon Neri and his wife Rossana Hu, also an architect and designer, did in Shanghai in 2005 when they co-founded Design Republic, a high-end, designer-driven, home-furnishings shop.

In an interview, Neri said they opened the store precisely to counter all the copying that goes on in China (and that drove them bonkers) and the wrong-headed notion that Chinese design means either "images of serpents and dragons" or "pagoda tops to 50-story buildings.

"We felt a need to create a destination where the world's best design products could be displayed," explains Neri, noting the shop carries pieces by iconoclastic design firms such as the Netherlands' moooi and Britain's Tom Dixon, among others. It also publishes "Manifesto," a quarterly design magazine and designs its own home furnishings, everything from glassware to furniture.

Neri hopes the endeavor, which to him is primarily educational, will help inspire many Chinese to respect authenticity and create something unique. "We Chinese need to think about how to contribute to the world," he says, "how to contribute without being parochial, limited by serpents and dragons."



4

JUSTGRAPES™ WINE SHOP, ASENTIO DESIGN (CHINA)

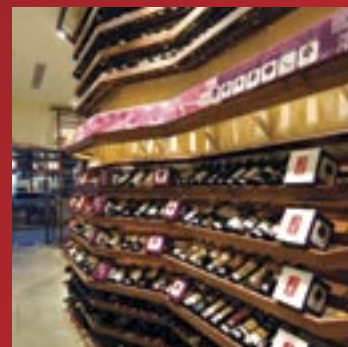
Like many aficionados of the good life, product designer and entrepreneur Jonathan Li loved wine. But also, like many, he didn't know much about what he was drinking. His blissful ignorance went on for years, at university in the States, in his first job in China, in his own hi-tech start-up in Shanghai in 2002. Then he started thinking about how to make wine more accessible, especially to the Chinese who buy more and more of it each year. His answer? JustGrapes™, Shanghai's first retail wine shop to organize and market myriad brands of wine according to taste and flavor, not country.

"It's all about education," says Li. "Wine can be intimidating. You need strong background knowledge."

From the start, Li and three partners aimed to design an unconventional shop that would make wine "easy to purchase, easy to understand and easy to discover and enjoy." They also wanted a green interior.

To that end, Li and partners built thermal earthen walls using a modern version of an old Chinese energy-saving technique called "rammed-earth wall." They also reclaimed wood from Shanghai's old houses. He said the materials "ultimately save costs and energy."

When JustGrapes™ opened earlier this year, the brochure cleverly described the overall design "like a beautiful glass of wine...a harmonious blend of retail store concept, architecture, and graphic design to create a strong consumer brand."





SPECIAL MERIT AWARD WINNERS

2

1 PAPER DESIGN NEWSPAPER, PPGROUP (TAIWAN)

PPaper, Taiwan's best-selling journal of design and lifestyle, advertised as a "must read for everyone creative," is for print media these days the exception to the rule. The rule is that most print publications – newspapers, magazines, journals and the like – are on the raggedy raggedy edge, struggling to find new sources of revenue as traditional advertising dollars migrate to the Web, along with readers. It's an industry-wide crisis of historic proportions.

Then there's PPaper. Defying all predictions of imminent demise, especially when it launched in December 2004, the bi-weekly journal, an A4-sized broadsheet, was "an overnight hit," according to Wang Chih-Ling, the design director of the PP Group, PPaper's parent company. "It made money from the beginning," she says.

Wang credits the success of the 80-page paper, the circulation of which grew to more than 100,000 in less than two years, to its accessible content, budget-conscious price and mass distribution.

"It's not heavy reading," she says. "It's fun. It's for everyone." PPaper itself boasts that it "interviews the best designers in the world," and introduces "common household products that demonstrate creative and inspirational design concepts." In the mix, Wang says the journal focuses regularly on recycling and caring for the environment. "We try to educate people," she says.

Besides content, Wang believes PPaper thrives because of its pricing and distribution. At about US\$1.50 a copy or "the cost of two cans of Coke," far less than any other design magazine, PPaper sells throughout Taiwan in more than 4,000 7-Eleven outlets.



MAOSI FOOTBRIDGE, GANSU PROVINCE, CHINA, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE, CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (HONG KONG)

Edward Ng, an architecture professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong, knew the brief: design and build a durable, 90-meter footbridge in remote Maosi Village in northwest China's Gansu Province. Construct it with local, mostly natural materials to withstand the yearly flash-floods that periodically inundate the Po River, endangering, even killing children who must cross the water daily to get to school.

The problem: Ng had never built a bridge and had no idea how.

"I then remembered my old teacher in England, Norman Hunt, a structural engineer," recalls Ng. "He normally works for people like Sir Norman Foster. So I went to him. But he wasn't interested – until I told him the bridge could only be made of mud; we couldn't bring in heavy equipment or measure flow of velocity. We had to trust our instincts. Then he got interested."

But not only Hunt. Ng rounded up colleagues and about 50 student volunteers from CUHK and Hong Kong's Polytechnic University. Even Sir David Akers-Jones, Hong Kong's former chief secretary, now 80, joined the group to "advise, encourage and help raise money."

In July, 2005, Professor Ng and crew, along with villagers, erected, with their bare hands and in six days, an ingenious, sustainable, incredibly inviting footbridge of rocks, steel, bamboo and mud.

"This is a bridge of the heart," explains Ng. "And it's far more important than the one that sits on the site. Young people learned they can help others beyond Hong Kong. It's been the most important lesson."





WORLD'S OUTSTANDING CHINESE DESIGNER 2007

**KAI YIN LO,
JEWELRY DESIGNER,
YIN EXPRESSIONS LTD.
(HONG KONG)**



Depending on the day of the week – sometimes even the time of the day – Hong Kong designer, Kai Yin Lo, wears a different hat. On Monday, she might be her old, much-acclaimed, jewelry-designer self, working with New York's Asia Society or the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum in Las Vegas to open yet another glamorous show of her elegant, Chinese-inspired adornments.

On Tuesday, if you catch her at the right time, she might be her cultural-consultant self, advising any number of Hong Kong commissions and governmental organizations on whose boards she serves, such as the Hong Kong Design Centre or the Commission on Strategic Development, about using design to advance Hong Kong's competitiveness. Wednesday might be editor's day. Since 1998, Lo has edited or co-edited four internationally distributed books on topics involving Chinese design, from furniture to Tang Dynasty white ceramics to the traditional vernacular house. And so the week goes...

"Five or six years ago, I decided to change direction in life," she explains. "I didn't want to go before shops anymore (with my jewelry.) I wanted to pursue exhibition and cultural pursuits having to do with encouraging design and cultural policy."

Lo also wanted to encourage fellow designers to follow their own ideas, to persevere, though the road ahead may not be smooth. "I would like to set an example," she says. "I've gone through very difficult times. Now I want to ally design with deep cultural content and awareness. All great designers understand their own culture and heritage."



DESIGN LEADERSHIP AWARD 2007

**TADAMITSU MATSUI,
PRESIDENT,
RYOHIN KEIKAKU CO. LTD.
OWNER OF MUJI BRAND
OF LIFESTYLE AND HOME
PRODUCTS (JAPAN)**



It would be difficult to imagine a more design conscious – or environmentally friendly – brand than Muji, the 27-year-old lifestyle and home products emporium owned by Japanese retailer Ryohin Keikaku Co. Ltd. Available in 329 outlets in Japan and 75 shops overseas at the end of November, Muji's entire range of products is synonymous with good design, good quality and reasonable prices.

From humble beginnings in 1980 as an in-house brand for a Japanese supermarket, Muji today is a design powerhouse with a cult-like global following. It sells more than 7,000 products – everything from stationery to apparel to compact cars – and all goods are based on an economical, reductive approach to design and the concept of "eliminating product-related waste" in materials, processing and packaging, according to Tadimitsu Matsui, Ryohin Keikaku's president since 2001.

That was the last year of Muji's financial crisis due to inventory overload and brand neglect. Matsui brought the label back from the edge by focusing on design, what he describes as Muji's "key asset."

"To enjoy good design you need to invest in employing good designers," he wrote. "Even if it costs a bit more, they are as important as the rent and the electricity." He noted that for Muji in particular, a company that prides itself on anonymous design (though many famous designers such as Yoji Yamamoto and Enzo Mari work on the products), "it is the design that needs to speak for itself."

With its sights set on global expansion, Muji plans to open 40 to 50 outlets in the U.S. alone in the next five years and is considering franchise operations in Russia and the Middle East. For all the self-described "Muji obsessives" and "Mujiaholics" in the world, that's good news indeed. •



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HONG KONG DESIGN CENTRE

The Hong Kong Design Centre is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping local designers and businesses to realise their full potential. Our mission is to use design and innovation to drive value creation and improve the well-being of society. Our vision is to establish Hong Kong as a centre of design excellence in Asia.

The Hong Kong Design Centre was established in 2001 by the Hong Kong Federation of Design Associations, the founding members of which are Hong Kong Designers Association, Interior Design Association Hong Kong, Hong Kong Fashion Designers Association, and the Chartered Society of Designers. Our principal financial supporter is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government.

We organize year-round seminars, workshops and conferences, on the one hand, to promote awareness of the value of design and use of design in the business / industry communities and, on the other hand, upgrade the business and design expertise of design professionals and students. We promote design excellence and awareness by organizing prestigious design award schemes and exhibitions. Through joint efforts with Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, we contribute to building InnoCentre's facilities for design tenants and incubating design start-ups. We also provide professional input to the admission of tenants and incubatees to the InnoCentre and coaching of the latter.

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