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Working model

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WORKING MODEL

HKDI student Tristan Yeung was one of this year's Hong Kong Design Centre Award winners, sharing the spotlight with some of Asia's most successful creative talents. As DANIEL JEFFREYS reports the annual event shows that awards raise awareness of design and promote creativity.

Horst Pudwill, winner of this year's HKDC Design Leadership Award is a good example of why prizes for creativity and innovation are important. His company, Hong Kong-based Techtronic Industries (TTI), does not make the kind of products that appear in *Vogue* magazine but its success, like that of any high-fashion house, has been based on the brilliance and innovation of its designs.

TTI specialises in making cordless electrical appliances such as drills, vacuum cleaners and hedge trimmers. The company's brand names (such as Ryobi, Milwaukee, AEG power equipment and Hoover, Dirt Devil and Vax floor care products) are most readily associated with the United States but for Pudwill Hong Kong was - and is - the best place to base their design driven company.

"Hong Kong people are creative and very flexible, and they respond well to the international climate," says Pudwill. "The design community is quite sophisticated, and these are features that are difficult to replicate elsewhere."

Pudwill's award is based on his company's use of design to drive its success in a highly competitive and globalised market and it takes into account the fact that "design has emerged as a key differentiator in producing sustainable results."

Pudwill acknowledges that it has

increasingly been design and innovation as much as price that has made his company successful. When he started out cordless technology was in its infancy and the batteries used for hand held power tools were of poor quality. A considerable part of TTI's success has been based on developing high performance patented battery technology which powers wide ranges of high performance portable power equipment devices, many of which have led to break through innovations in the industries TTI serves. His experience leaves him with high regard for Hong Kong's design industry.

"Hong Kong is justified in its claim to be the design hub of Asia but not just because of the money that flows here for investment, but also because of the city's heart," he says. "There is an inspiring passion for creativity in Hong Kong."

Pudwill acknowledges that Hong Kong's pre-eminence in design is not immutable. The rise of the creative industries on the mainland, as China shifts from a low-cost manufacturing economy, poses a significant threat, as well as offering new opportunities.

Yao Yingjia, the winner of this year's World's Outstanding Chinese Designer Award, has a deep understanding of both the risks and rewards that China's rise poses for Hong Kong.

Yao's award is for his "outstanding achievements" and dedication "to furthering design through social commitment." Since 1996 he has worked for Chinese computer giant Lenovo, blending culture with high technology, seeking for ways to inject ethereal Chinese ideas about harmony into plastic and silicon. His work recently won a prestigious red dot award to compliment the prize he has been given by HKDC.

"China has such a storied history of design including the compass and paper making," he says. "What I have been doing at Lenovo is in some ways the paradox of going forward by looking back, finding ways to inject ancient ideas about harmony and simplicity into high-tech products."



Yao says harmony is the key element of Chinese craftsmanship and the element that distinguishes Chinese designers from their European counterparts. At Lenovo he has injected his aesthetic into the company's products by working with an international team that can provide a creative counterpart to his ideas. He recently began collaborating with Giovanni Alessi Anghini from the Italian-based Alessi family that is to kitchenware what Ferrari is to cars.

"The world is getting smaller," says Yao. "We should be

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: YAO YINGJIA; TRISTAN YEUNG; JOHN HESKETT; HORST PUDWILL

« I HAVE BEEN GOING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK... INJECTING ANCIENT IDEAS ABOUT HARMONY AND SIMPLICITY INTO HIGH TECH PRODUCTS »

designers for the world. Culturally, the east and west look at things very differently, but in the end all roads lead to Rome. Design is akin to yeast in the fermentation process. It is not the main factor but you need to produce chemical effects, to set off interconnected results.”

Yao was an Olympic torchbearer for Shandong province in 2008 and his work has lit the path for many young designers at Lenovo. He is the kind of man who may one day become as influential a mentor as John Heskett, this year's HKDC Design for Asia Lifetime Achievement Award. Heskett spent fifteen years as Professor of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology's Institute of Design in Chicago before becoming the Chair Professor of Design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Design. He is the author of the iconic *Industrial Design* (1980) and his most recent book was *Toothpicks and Logos: Design in Everyday Life*, published in 2002.

Yao's view that China is building a new capability in integrating design and decision making is shared by Heskett (Deng Xiao-Ping, regarded as the architect of China's economic renaissance, is called “the great designer” by Yao) and he warns that Hong Kong needs to have a carefully calibrated response in two areas.

“The English language skills among design students are not good enough for them to establish an international connection,” says Heskett. “Secondly students lack

a general, structural knowledge of economics, values and ideologies.”

Heskett's point is a vital one and worthy of a prize in its own right. Designers need a deep source of references consisting of different languages, codes and symbols in order to feed innovation.

“Design students should have a much broader view of the context of design, one that questions its cultural relevance in the wider world, is more systematic in thinking, and embraces socio-economic issues and business,” says Heskett.

Heskett has always emphasised the need for design to be focused on the end user and “the extent to which it satisfies their needs or gives meaning to their lives”. That's a view shared by Tristan Yeung, a HKDI Fashion and Image Design department student who won this year's HKDC Young Design Talent Award.

“My design was humanised,” says

Yeung. “There are side panels where the wearer can attach accessories and that can be used to attach bags and other items. It's about giving the client a wide range of choices.”

Yeung's award was based on his innovative use of materials, his creative application of hand-drawing and laser cuts and the couture details he worked into his pieces. His prize includes financing to help him develop his career by gaining experience overseas.

“I want to learn from Jean-Paul Lespagnard, a Belgian designer,” he says. “I will also learn systems and production line techniques from foreign companies and attend overseas fashion week shows to build more connections.”

All of Yeung's fellow award winners agree that exposure to different cultures is a key ingredient for Hong Kong to maintain its excellence in design. The HKDC's Business of Design Week has been tremendously successful in bringing overseas design talents to Hong Kong but there is no substitute for being submerged in a foreign culture. The HKDC's goal of promoting creativity is served by all its prizes, but above all by the opportunities it provides for talented young people to travel. ☺

BELOW AWARD WINNING WORKS OF TRISTANYEUNG



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GEORGE ORWELL

