

## **The Best Product Designs of 2005**

Many of the winning entries from this year's competition for Industrial Design Excellence Awards spring from a close observation of the customer

When people talked about innovation in the '90s, they invariably meant technology. When people speak about innovation today, it is more than likely they mean design. Consumers, who are choking on choice, look at design as the new differentiator. In a sea of look-alike products and services, design creates the "Wow!" factor. Managers, facing fierce global competition, look to design for the kind of innovation that generates organic growth, new revenues, and wider profit margins.

Design is fast becoming a must-have competency for corporations. It has evolved from a simple way of giving form and color to products into a powerful tool for "C" suite executives. Design methods get managers close to their customers, design research helps top execs visualize the future, and design strategies help companies innovate.

No wonder, then, that the annual Industrial Design Excellence Awards (IDEAs) have become so hotly competitive. Sponsored by BusinessWeek and run independently by the Industrial Designers Society of America, the contest is where global corporations test their design prowess against one other.

The 2005 winners represent the best of the best from the U.S., Asia, and Europe. Many of the prizes went to designs that solved highly complex problems. U.S. and Canadian companies used design to reinvent old product categories, revive tired brands, and simplify complicated products. Asian companies, led by Samsung, used design to leapfrog from invisible equipment suppliers to name brands on a global scale. And European corporations built on their design strengths in style and fashion. There were 1,380 entries in 2005, with 991 from U.S. companies and design consultancies and a record 423 from 29 other countries. Of the 148 awards, 38 are golds, 59 silvers, and 51 bronzes.

There were several surprises among the U.S. winners. Apple Computer (AAPL), of course, did well, picking up three IDEAs, but Hewlett-Packard (HPQ) led the pack with five, and Nike was right behind with four. RKS Design Inc., based in Thousand Oaks, Calif., worked with Dave Mason of the rock band Traffic to radically rethink the electric guitar.

Palo Alto (Calif.)-based IDEO again won the largest number of awards -- seven -- among design consultants for its work on products, research, and strategy. Design Continuum Inc. and fuseproject were not far behind, with five each. Antenna Design New York, Altitude, Smart Design, Tools Design, and Alto Design also won big.

Design's ability to solve complex problems was well rewarded in this year's contest. Design Continuum, known for its research for Procter & Gamble Co.'s (PG) Swiffer brand, won a gold in 2005 for research on how people shower. Design Continuum's insight led to a revolutionary showerhead for Moen Inc., the highest-priced and best-selling entry in its category in Lowe's.

Taiwan and China had their best year yet. Unfamiliar names, such as Taiwan's SQV Design and Lite-On Technology, won IDEAs in 2005. Taipei-based BenQ Corp. won an IDEA, its fourth. Leveraging its design prowess into global name recognition helped BenQ to acquire Siemens' (SI) global cell-phone business.

Beijing is spending millions of dollars on design, turning out thousands of design graduates each year. Six Chinese companies entered the IDEA contest in 2005, and Lenovo won its first IDEA. IBM (IBM) just sold its ThinkPad brand to Lenovo Group Ltd.

South Korea did extremely well again this year. Samsung won three IDEAs. It has garnered more awards over the past five years than any other company in the world, with Apple coming in second. This year, Korean companies won six prizes, tying with Japan. Japanese companies, such as Toshiba, Panasonic, Hitachi, Mitsubishi, and Toyota won for design research as well as industrial design.

In Europe, Philips Electronics is clearly setting the pace. Philips won four IDEAs in 2005, tying with Nike Inc. for second place among corporate winners. For more award winners, read on.



**Silver**  
**Jeep Hurricane**

Designer: ChryslerGroup  
This fully functional concept vehicle literally goes sideways, its wheels turning up to 45 degrees in the same direction. Powered by dual 5.7-liter Chrysler Hemi V8 engines. Awesome.



**Gold**  
**SHIFT Bike**

Designers: Matt Grossman, Ryan Lightbody, Purdue University  
This concept for a training bike uses two rear wheels that let a child balance at slow speeds. Speeding up moves the wheels closer, shifting the balance from bike to tyke.



**Silver**  
**JetBlue Self-Service Check-In Kiosk**

Designers: Masamichi Udagawa, Sigi Moeslinger, Antenna Design New York  
Designed to make it easy, fast, and almost enjoyable to check in to JetBlue, the kiosk and interface are welcoming, easy to use, and efficient.



**Bronze**  
**Rubbermaid Paint Buddy**

Designers: Beyond Design Inc.; Shur-Line/Newell Rubbermaid Inc.

Great for touch-ups. Just store leftover paint in this bottle that comes with an applicator. No more storing paint cans. \$9.99.

Consumer Goods

These products have personality and listen to what users want

The award winners in 2005 reflected a backlash against mass-produced, overly complex, slick products. The winners were simple, elegant, and often beautiful. "There was a sense of personality revealed through their authenticity and craft," said juror Chee Pearlman. "They brought out an emotional response."



Silver

Alienware ALX Desktop Computer

Designers: Kyle Swen, Nathaniel Cervantes, Adam Barry, ASTRO Studios; Frank Azor, Alienware Corp.

The ALX desktop PC targets gamers. It's liquid-cooled to dissipate heat. The futuristic, bold "alien" design projects a sense of technological innovation for gamer culture. \$5,000.



Gold

Purist Hatbox Toilet

Designer: William Gordon, Kohler Co.

The Hatbox recasts the whole concept of the toilet. An electric pump does away with the tank, making for a modern, minimalist device that can be installed anywhere in the bathroom. The lid closes slowly and quietly. The seat is at a comfortable chair-level height. A new paradigm for an old product. \$2,890 and up.



Bronze

Solemates

Designer: Satish Gokhale, Design Directions

Made in India, this pair of inexpensive, disposable sandals is crafted from recycled paper. Only 50 cents per pair.



Gold

CafeSolo Coffeemaker

Designers: Claus Jensen, Henrik Holbaek, Tools Design

The elegant CafeSolo coffeemaker by Eva Denmark makes a virtue of simplicity. Just pour boiling water directly over ground beans and stir. No filters or machinery. A funnel keeps the grinds out of the cup, and a zippered jacket keeps the brew warm. \$75.00.

## Design Strategy

Design can provide a tactical advantage by delivering a powerful brand message

One of the hottest trends within corporations is using design research strategically to help identify new product categories and extend core brands into other markets. The tools of design research, such as consumer observation and fast prototyping, can challenge conventional wisdom and promote innovation. And by aligning design with advertising, marketing, packaging, and service, companies can deliver a more powerful brand message.



GOLD

[Moen Revolution Showerhead](#)

Designers: Design Continuum; Moen Inc.

A research team of designers, engineers, anthropologists, marketers, and managers observed people showering (in swimsuits). Their discovery? People liked different kinds of showers in the morning, after sports, and at nighttime. \$66.

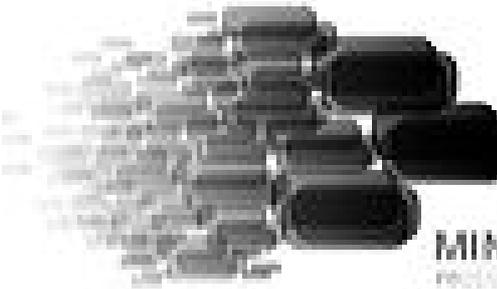


BRONZE  
Miniket Camcorder

Designers: In-Shik Kim, Yeon-Moo Chung, Samsung Electronics

The trend toward convergence led Samsung to design this camcorder that also is a camera, MP3 player, Webcam, and voice recorder. Palm-size. \$699.

GOLD  
MINI\_motion Strategy



Designers: Yves Béhar, Johan Liden, fuseproject  
Car accessories are usually about the car, but the MINI\_motion brand is about the lifestyle of the driver. It captures the emotional spirit of the Mini Cooper -- urban, fast, different, cool -- and translates a sense of motion into a series of high-end products. It marks "the death of the logo and the birth of the motif as brand strategy," says juror Michael McCoy.



MINI\_motion Strategy

The MINI\_motion 2-part driving shoe has a soft bootie worn inside to drive and a sturdy outer sole for walking outside. \$125. The carpack fastens to the seat belt, preventing laptops and lunch from spilling. \$179.



### MINI\_motion Strategy

The MINI\_motion watch display changes from vertical to horizontal for easy reading when driving, plus a wristband that connotes motion. \$165.

## Disruptive Design

Creative destruction can transform markets, from footwear to musical instruments

Design can shake up conventional product categories and carve out entirely new ones. These award winners illustrate how design can achieve strategic market transformations -- in and out of high tech. Any brand category can be dramatically altered, from boots to guitars. It all depends on how well companies use design strategically inside their organizations.



### Bronze

### iRobot Roomba Discovery Floorvac

Designers: iRobot Corp.; Herbst Lazar Bell Inc.  
Friendly design increases the appeal of the robot beyond tech lovers to mass-market consumers. The vacuum is simple to use and requires no programming. \$249.



### Silver

### "Open Architecture" Electric Guitar

Designers: RKS Design; RKS Guitars  
The pickup selector and volume and tone knobs are intuitively located next to the play area. The guitar uses much less wood from the rain forests, is lighter, and sounds as good as the iconic Gibson Les Paul. The bold, colorful design does more with less. From \$2,500.



Gold  
Nike Considered Boot

Designers: Richard Clarke, Mike Aveni, Steve McDonald, Nike Inc.

A single piece of hemp is woven through the boot's three leather parts. The sole and upper body snap together without adhesives. Materials are recyclable and made near Asian factories, helping local producers. No two pairs are alike. \$110.

Brand Extension

Good design can also be an image enhancer and bring new life to existing brands

Companies have to go beyond the basics -- designing a great shape and terrific features for a product -- to win really big in the marketplace. They have to use design to reinterpret existing categories and open up new market spaces for their brands. They need to use design to understand what their brands really stand for in the minds of consumers. The following winners did just that and opened up new business opportunities.



Silver  
Timberland Travel Gear

Designer: The Timberland Co. (TBL) Design Team  
A modular system of inner cores and outer shells allows travelers to do more and pack less. Many trips include business and sports, and the various choices can accommodate any activity. \$250.



Gold  
Nike ACG CommVEST

Designer: Nike Inc. (NKE)  
Nike embraces its performance DNA by designing a mountain search and rescue vest. Speaker and microphone are at the collar, a push-to-talk tab allows people to communicate with gloves on. \$175.



Silver  
BRP/BV2s Snowmobile Helmet

Designer: BRP design team  
Snowmobilers often use motorcycle helmets, but seeing, talking, and even breathing is difficult. This helmet is designed to meet their needs. It cuts fogging with a new breath evac system and has side-mounted lights for nighttime. \$449.



Silver  
iPod Shuffle

Designer: Apple Computer Inc. ([AAPL](#))  
The Shuffle continues Apple's domination of the new music culture. It is one part of the whole music collection and listening experience Apple has created with iTunes, iPods, and the Apple retail stores. MP3 players alone just aren't enough. \$99.

### Asian Design

Coming up with signature looks has worked wonders for countries throughout the region

No region of the world has embraced design more emphatically than Asia. Japanese companies first showed the power of design in the 1980s. Korean corporations followed and began to brand themselves through design in the 1990s. And now Taiwanese and Chinese manufacturers are racing to use design to establish their names on the global scene.



Gold  
Toshiba Red Transformer

Designers: Yves Béhar, Shawn Sinyork, Pichaya Puttorngul, fuseproject  
This concept PC has a sliding hinge for a 17-inch screen that transforms a laptop computer into a dual-CD drive home entertainment center. A remote slides out from a deep red lacquer frame.



Silver

[iRiver IFP1000 Series MP3 Player](#)

Designers: Kim Young Se, Hwang Eui Du, Moon Eun Ki, Innodesign Inc.

Seoul-based Reigncom Co. designed an MP3 player with a digital camera for Koreans who want to listen to music and take pictures. \$260.



Bronze

[Smartphone ET960](#)

Designers: Lenovo Innovation Design Center; SQV Design International Inc.

China's Lenovo packaged four other features into this phone -- GPS mapping, TV, camera, and MP3 player. Designed for the Chinese market. \$800.



Silver

[Samsung Techwin UF-80 Digital Presenter](#)

Designers: Joo-bok Kim, Samsung; Michel Arney, James Wilson, Alan Mudd, Design Continuum

A long, graceful arm holds a camera that captures images of both flat documents and 3D objects, relaying them to an LCD projector or the Internet for videoconferencing. \$3,999.

## European Design

The Continent is pulling ahead by virtue of elegance and élan

All across the board, British and Continental design is making huge strides. Europe's strong showing in the IDEA competition proves that it is building on its strength in style by making winning products, from great cars to beautifully crafted home grills. Led by Philips, Europeans are also expanding into more sophisticated design strategies to better understand their consumers -- whether retail shoppers or hospital patients.



Bronze  
iXi Bike

Designers: Phil Karl, Errol Drew, Delta Cycle Corp.  
France's iXi Bicycle Co. uses oversize aluminum tubing and a greaseless drive belt for a stable, clean ride for city cyclists. The frame separates for easy storage. \$1,289.



Gold  
Barrel Grill

Designers: Claus Jensen, Henrik Holbaek, Tools Design  
This grill from Eva Denmark can be used for barbecuing or even as a fireplace. A portable bucket carries away ashes. A flat lid makes it a patio table. \$560.



Gold  
Ambient Experience for Health Care

Designer: Philips Design Medical Team  
This exhibit showcases Philips' new program to reduce patient stress from MRI exams by allowing people to choose their own music, lighting, and wall images in hospital rooms.



Bronze  
PerfectDraft

Designer: VanBerloStudios  
Belgium's Inbev company wanted people to be have a perfect draft beer at home. The stylish housing surrounds a beer keg, a light indicates when the beer is ready, and a big tap handle shows the way. A beer appliance. \$266.

## Catalyst Award Winners

Fine design, dandy sales: These products get the prize for also adding to the bottom line

There is no greater testament to the power of design than its ability to deliver on the bottom line. The Catalyst Award goes to previous idea winners that really succeed in the marketplace. A jury screens candidates for market and financial performance as well as strategic, industrial, and social impact. This year's jury was composed of Ken Musgrave, director of industrial design at Dell; Walter B. Herbst, CEO of Herbst Lazar Bell Inc.; and Sam Farber, founder of Copco, Oxo, and Wovo.



### Winner

#### PalmOne Zire 21

Designer: NewDealDesign

One of the fastest-selling PDAs ever. Zire widened the market for the palmOne ([PLMO](#)) brand by expanding its appeal beyond the techie and corporate communities to the broader consumer market, especially women and first-time buyers. Design cut the number of parts and costs sharply, while maintaining Palm's easy-to-use experience. Target Corp. ([TGT](#)) and RadioShack Corp. ([RSH](#)) signed on to sell the Zire. \$99.



### Honorable Mention

#### Siemens c.cam

Designer: Siemens Medical Solutions ([SI](#))

By designing a heart camera that allowed patients to sit rather than lie down, Siemens improved comfort and image quality and allowed for smaller rooms. Its small size and simplicity cut costs and training time and lifted market share from 20% to 45%. \$180,000 to \$200,000.



### Honorable Mention

#### Sub Zero 700 Series

Designer: Jerome Caruso Design

Deconstructing the fridge to offer separate small freezers and refrigerators around the house created a new line for Sub-Zero. Modularity allows for cold foods and beverages in any room. Designing the units as cabinets with pull-out drawers made them easy to use. The 700 series now accounts for 24% of all Sub-Zero sales. \$2,000 to \$3,000.