

Press Release



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Brunel University student wins Design Innovation in Plastics competition with balcony shelf product

Judges hooked by versatility of design

A student from Brunel University has scooped top prize in the annual Design Innovation in Plastics (DIP) competition with a cleverly designed shelf which can fit on a balcony railing and accommodate anything from a plant to a bottle of wine.

Product Design student, Alex Roquero, impressed the competition judges with his 'Hook', a portable shelf which is integrated with a flowerbox, and fits to any kind of railing – ideal for people who have no garden, or reduced space, and want something which hooks onto a balcony.

Thanks to its unique shape, as well as plants, it can also carry day-to-day products such as coffee mugs, wine glasses, beer bottles or even books.

DIP, which is organised by the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining and the Worshipful Company of Horners, and is headline sponsored by Covestro, gave students the brief of 'Branching Out – Design For Garden Innovation'.

They were asked to come up with an innovative product, primarily from plastics, which could be used in a garden, that would better connect people with nature, enhance the pleasure of gardening or leisure activities within the garden, or help sooth mind and body after a long and stressful day.

Chairman of judges, Richard Brown, commented: "It was evident that this product could become a marketable item, as living spaces become smaller, and more 'Juliet' balconies are integrated into new builds, especially in Europe. Alex tackled a problem that he was familiar with from the environment in his home country of Spain, and took a holistic approach to provide a multi-purpose solution. We were impressed by the way he took into consideration all the



elements of the brief, from initial concept, patent and IP search, manufacturability, point of sale options and sustainability. He used polypropylene, which has the mechanical properties required for this kind of product and is completely recyclable.”

Alex wins a trip to Germany to visit the Covestro, the global polymers manufacturer, and also wins placements with competition sponsors, RJG Technology, which provides injection moulding industry support, training and advisory services, and PDD, the product and service design and innovation consultancy.

He said taking part in the competition and getting this far had driven him to develop expertise and gain experience in areas he had not studied before and to be especially aware of considerations such as sustainability, which had influenced even small decisions in the design and production of his balcony shelf.

“Being able to produce a physical working prototype helped me realise how challenging and satisfying it is to make your designs work in real life,” he added.

In second place was William Oughton, an Integrated Product Design student, also from Brunel University. William created ‘Bulb Garden Furniture’, a concept set of garden accessories which fit to any type of panel, wire or post built fences, and can be used as bird feeders, planters, bird houses or solar outdoor light.

In third was Olivia Alexander, a Product Design student from De Montfort University, with Buzz, a bee-friendly planter which administers an anti-mite substance directly to the bees to protect them from the Varroa mite.

Three other students gained highly commended:

- Fatima Abedi Manji, De Montfort University: Gingko – a planter for urban spaces designed specifically with children in mind to help their development and promote the joy of gardening.
- Lewis Brown, Teesside University: Dynamic Grip – an ergonomic garden multi-tool targeting gardeners with arthritis.
- Zeina Mofti, Brunel University: G Cycle – a product which combines modern indoor gardening with home aquariums to enhance wellbeing, by providing a calm and relaxing environment.

All the finalists are being offered a short placement with one of the competition sponsors, Brightworks, HellermannTyton, Innovate Product Design, PDD and RJG Technologies, as part of their prize, and Olivia Alexander, who won the



Covestro Award, chosen by Covestro judges, will visit the company alongside the winner.

The Design Innovation in Plastics Award is the longest running student plastics design competition in Europe, having been established in 1985.

About Covestro:

With 2017 sales of EUR 14.1 billion, Covestro is among the world's largest polymer companies. Business activities are focused on the manufacture of high-tech polymer materials and the development of innovative solutions for products used in many areas of daily life. The main segments served are the automotive, construction, wood processing and furniture, and electrical and electronics industries. Other sectors include sports and leisure, cosmetics, health and the chemical industry itself. Covestro has 30 production sites worldwide and employs approximately 16,200 people (calculated as full-time equivalents) at the end of 2017.

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