

## Industrial Design Excellence Awards 2003

# DESIGN IN AN EVER

**C**hange is happening more rapidly than ever before. As companies are struggling to keep up with its rapid pace, many find that the old ways of doing things are no longer feasible. Globalization. Technological advances. A flagging economy. For better or worse, these are but a few of the trends that are changing the nature of competition and ushering in a new role for industrial design.

As companies seek to gain competitive advantage, they are turning to industrial designers for far more than style; they want products that are based on sound market research and feedback from the range of potential users. Products must no longer meet the demands of users; they must exceed them. Naomi Gornick, I/IDSA, this year's IDEA jury chair, says, "As a result of the rapid technological and global changes, design professionals must increasingly be able to stimulate innovation, make connections to a global network of expertise, understand broad contextual issues and have a broad understanding of future trends."

At the same time, the trend in industry is to stay the course; it is a time of caution. As they watch the corporate giants fall, companies settle back on their haunches, cautious to move too far ahead of the trends, careful not to make a mistake that will cost them their earnings or their reputation. Designers are asked to create exceptional products at minimal cost.

Design educators are fully aware of the multiple, sometimes conflicting skills needed for industrial designers to succeed. "It is more important than ever before to understand the need for good, relevant, design education for the continuing well-being and

# CHANGING WORLD

success of the design profession as a whole,” says Gornick. “We need to make sure that we produce future graduates who are able to navigate all new areas of responsibility with increased confidence.”

Over a third of the 2003 IDEA jury were design educators, perhaps influencing the winning selections toward those who focused not just on eclectic design but made use of these many skills a designer needs to make a product succeed. The review process was rigorous, the debates were intense; but they resulted in some examples of true excellence in form, functionality, innovation and inspiration.

This year's IDEA submissions tended to be pragmatic rather than experimental. “The mood in industry worldwide is one of caution at the moment,” suggests Gornick, “and designers are affected like everyone else.” **The jury was particularly impressed with the move toward solving everyday issues and the sheer functionality of some of the products. Among the winners are several that demonstrate substantial human-factor and user-related improvement in existing product lines, as well as the incorporation of new technologies into entirely new products.** “These winners show that design is not about style but about problem solving and context,” concludes

juror Charles Burnette, IDSA.

In general, winning products include simple, clean aesthetics. Juror Mike Laude, IDSA, says, “Winners are cleaner, a little more judicious with detail, less ornamentation.” Thus, overmolding is used as a design functionality, not as decoration.

This year's winners clearly demonstrate that companies are beginning to recognize the link between brand and design. Especially where brand is the mirror of customer value, design creates the customer value; the loop is closed in a successful product lifecycle. A product's success depends on appreciating the needs of consumers—the real needs, not just those that people can articulate. Success also means understanding the opportunities and limitations presented by the marketplace.

With design taking the lead, even in a tentative industry environment such as today's, people will experience an easier, more fulfilling tomorrow. ●