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LEAF

It was, in a way, appropriate that the jurors debated so long before deciding on the Best of Category. After all, the Leaf light's stop-and-start journey from concept to product took five years, as Béhar and his team at Fuseproject worked doggedly to solve the technical problems long associated with LEDs, such as poor light quality and heat control.

Leaf's final form was achieved through the graceful merging of design and engineering. While the lamp's fluid, bladelike aluminum arms lend it a striking profile distinctive from the mechanical look of traditional task lamps, they also provide extra surface area to help dissipate heat. When the designers proposed adding bubble forms to the top side of the head to visually echo each LED bulb, the surface distortions further improved the results the engineers were getting from their heat-simulation tests. Moggridge commended the expressive nature of these structural elements. "We've seen a lot of LEDs today. But I came across this and I thought, 'I have to have it,'" he said.

Hales deemed the Leaf a "21st-century sequel to the Tizio. Where Richard Sapper's minimalist icon was black and angular, with light floating at the end of a delicate but very industrial balance beam, Béhar's is charged with emotion. It's voluptuously organic and colorful, which is a perfect reflection of the moment we live in today." Priestman was reticent because he hadn't seen the lamp in person, but like his fellow jurors, he appreciated its sustainability. For Herman Miller, a company with a tradition of eco-awareness, this, too, was important, especially given that lighting represented an entirely new market for them.

"At some point Herman Miller realized that this product could be a real breakthrough, like the Aeron chair," says Béhar, who, discouraged early on by the company's flagging enthusiasm for the tough project, went as far as developing a \$30,000 working prototype in order to win his client over. "It's been nice to see that level of excitement, especially after a few years of crossing the development desert."

Design Fuseproject (San Francisco): Yves Béhar, president and creative director

Client Herman Miller

Materials Aluminum, LED

Software Adobe Creative Suite, Autodesk AliasStudio, Rhino, Pro/Engineer

Q+A WITH YVES BÉHAR, FUSEPROJECT

What was the design brief from Herman Miller?

Actually, this is the only client that I've ever approached. Five years ago, I thought it would be interesting to work with a furniture maker, so I called them and they gave me a sort of mini-assignment to look at lighting. It became a personal pursuit that I kept working on through the industry downturn in 2002, when Herman Miller put the project on the back burner. After a year, they brought it back, and then it almost died again.

What convinced them to commit?

Because lighting was an entirely new business for the company, the only way to really make the light happen was to deliver the full assignment. So we turned the small exploratory job into a large project and produced a \$30,000 working model. Early on we also created the name, the logo, the packaging, and the website; along with the technical features, those were key to selling the project internally at Herman Miller.

LEDs pose daunting challenges to lighting designers. What was your approach?

We hired a team of software and hardware engineers to work closely with the designers. Our first goal was to develop an LED bulb with a pleasing light; typically it's too cool. By 2004, the bulb had been developed, and the remaining problems were heat and the interface, which I wanted to be universal and magical.

With so many engineering problems to solve, when did you start to focus on the design?

We strove for a form that would reflect the personality of the LED technology. Our second goal aesthetically was to get away from the technical look of most task lights—no mechanical arms and springs. And the thin, fluid aluminum form did that, in addition to solving the technical challenge of heat dissipation.

Is Leaf the first of a product line?

We have another Herman Miller lamp launching at NeoCon this year, and though we haven't started in on other designs yet, I'd like to.



BEST OF CATEGORY

OLPC LAPTOP XO

Last year's jury gave Boston-based Design Continuum this award for designing the \$100 child's laptop commissioned by the MIT Media Lab. This year, the prize went to San Francisco's Fuseproject for designing the latest prototype, the XO, for One Laptop Per Child (OLPC), the nonprofit spin-off formed to make and market cheap, durable laptops to kids in developing countries. With a slew of new physical features, the XO clamshell seals up tight for transporting by handle or strap. Opened up, it comes to life, with flip-up rabbit-ear wi-fi antennas and a transformer hinge that lets the screen swivel around to serve as e-book reader, gaming device, or regular laptop. The super-wide touchpad doubles as a digital tablet for drawing and writing. Less impressed by the redesign than by the demand multiplying throughout Africa and Asia, Jeremijenko stipulated that the editors include graphics to show that successful "sales is the reason the project is being given yet another award." All three jurors, however, admired the niftiness of the design: rugged, animated, and happy.

Design Fuseproject (San Francisco): Yves Béhar, president and creative director

Client One Laptop Per Child

Materials PC/ABS, rubber

Software Adobe Creative Suite, Autodesk AliasStudio, Rhino, Pro/Engineer

UNIVERSAL CONNECTIONS: OBJECTS BETWEEN ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL

Only a decade ago, plug-and-play, or your computer's ability to merge instantly with a hundred different kinds of external peripherals—PDA, camera, scanner, printer, etc.—was radically new. Today, we're so comfy with the Universal Serial Bus, we use the term USB as a synonym for a universal connection. Fascinated with the rise of a USB "subculture," five people collaborated on messages about love, health, and security with the design and exhibition of USB-enhanced objects from daily life. Among these were "eternal love," two wedding rings bearing USB connectors; "lauschangriff," a stethoscope with a USB chest piece; and "French connection," a bra with USB-hooked cups offering "unplug and play" potential. Jeremijenko admired the "tangible wit" of showing that information is not limited to screens. Doyle liked the way the project's "satire about connectivity" reminds us that "in the end, technology comes down to the interface

Design Dialog05 (Munich): Christian Busse, Roman Gebhard, Markus Mayer, Jochen Scholer, Ina Jade Seng, designers

Materials Acrylic, various plastics, aluminum, textiles

Software Freehand, Adobe Creative Suite, Rhino 3D

