The Troldtekt Award 2014 – jury's report

The Troldtekt award has gained increasing attention since it originally started as a Danish only competition. Now it is international and has gathered over 115 entries from 39 different countries.

This year, because of the high number of projects, it was impossible to compare the quality of all the entries, based on 'simple' criteria. As a result, the jury - consisting of Peer Leth, managing director of Troldtekt, Niels Kappel, product developer at Troldtekt, Mikkel Frost, architect/partner of CEBRA, based in Århus, Jorge Vidal, architect/partner at Rahola Vidal in Barcelona and Bjarne Mastenbroek, founding architect of SeARCH in Amsterdam - decided to have four different categories in order to give room for the enormous diversity and different qualities of the entries. Tina Kristensen and Camilla Jakobsen, both from Troldtekt, also assisted.

- The first category is "CEILINGS" (horizontal or sloping). That one is obvious because Troldtekt is a market leader when it comes to acoustic solutions for ceilings.
- The second category is "PANELLING", wall hangings and room dividers (vertical use of the material).
- The third category is "SPACES", micro architecture and "space making".
- The last category, "CONCEPTS", embraces all the entries that deal with a more general or conceptual use of the material. This category was not limited to a specific, finished product or design.

Since the start in 2010, the Award has developed rapidly from national to international, promotion via printed media to an Internet based competition and from a hard copy submission entry to an upload possibility for the participants. Clearly, globalisation is there and the speed of development increases.

How can we compare all this with an extremely reliable product that has been produced for over 80 years but is also "trapped" in its extremely simple and sustainable high performance tradition?

As we know, the Internet is there and will never go away. It gathers information at a speed that is comparable with the expansion of the universe. It is a new source of intelligence and solutions to a problem. Design potential is out there, somewhere, and it is just a matter of connecting the right people, giving them the right tools and waiting. In the category CEILINGS we have seen very nice examples of an alternative use of material and the best proposals did have a very simple "twist". In PANELLING we saw a lot of proposals but once again, with such a strong, simple product as Troldtekt, it is quite hard to beat it and again "simplicity killed the cat". The winning design is smart, optimistic and has an appealing aura. SPACES was a complex category with an extremely different outcome. In the end, we didn't choose a space that doesn't completely balance the "touch-ability" of the material but in fact matches very well.

We selected eight finalists in these four different categories. We then choose three winners and a final Award, one for each category.

In this edition, for the jury, the real beauty lies in the more conceptual approach of the material, giving way to many uses yet to come.

It opened our eyes, in fact, the winning entry over all categories was found here. Another entry, a mushroom shaped stool cast by students, was in fact the perfect example of the powers of the overall winner. The real beauty is out there, somewhere on the Internet and yet to come. We all invite you to look for it.

FINALISTS – FIRST PRIZE

Troldtekt Raw - Proposal # 00300 – first prize (CONCEPT category)
"Troldtekt Raw" takes us back to the essence of Troldtekt – namely moulding a mix of wood fibres and cement. In this case the author suggests that the Troldtekt raw materials are simply sold as do-it-yourself-kits for the users to explore new ways of building with the material. Obviously it takes a lot of knowledge to produce perfect off-the-shelf Troldtekt boards –in fact, it's a process which requires professional experience, certificates and much more. However, we believe that users and even professional builders would come up with new ideas for using the material if they were given the base materials – we have already seen students moulding their own chairs and at the 2012 Troldtekt award a special prize was given to a "home-made" unique Troldtekt panel.

If taken a little further this could be seen as a kind of crowd harvesting comparable to the present day app stores where people – not programmers – come up with fantastic ideas for new applications. We might even see a "moulding community" sharing personal Troldtekt inventions on modern social media which would be a natural part of the new maker culture.
There isn´t a lot to say about this proposal since it leaves us to go and do the design and therefore you might even accuse the author of not making an actual proposal. However, it is exactly this brilliant mind trick that seems so compelling and makes us focus on the essence of the material.

FINALISTS – SPECIAL PRIZES

Acoustic Forest - Proposal # 123452 - special prize 1 (CEILING category)
This new ceiling system is awarded a prize because it demonstrates a new way to hang Troldtekt panels from the ceiling – an application which is already so widely explored that you´d think it impossible to come up with yet another idea. It is also refreshingly simple both to understand and mass produce.

The idea of the "Acoustic Forest" completely nails the fine balance between innovation and realism. Inspired by hangers the author proposes a rectangular stick with a cutout making it possible to simply hang it from a suspended grid. Even though these elements could of course be cut with a regular saw, it is also possible and more realistic to line up a modern and more efficient production line based on laser cutting. You simply receive a box of stick hangers and mount them rapidly on site using no tools at all. Besides the very convincing

decorative and acoustic qualities of the ”suspended forest” it is quite nice to avoid nails - seen from both an environmental, mounting and conceptual perspective.
The idea is simple and beautiful and it would be wonderful seeing a prototype of the Acoustic Forest installed in a real space.

Yes…it´s a f.....ing. Vogelhaus - Proposal # 24737 - special prize 2 (SPACES category)
So, why the f…k is a Vogelhaus awarded a special prize? First of all, and this is the main reason, we think that bringing the Troldtekt panel into a totally new context (housing for birds) is a really simple and yet original idea. Actually when you look at the material which has an almost bird’s nest like structure you might even say that the idea is obvious. The design is “organic” even though is it based on flat panels so it is certainly buildable and with its beehive inspired is probably very appealing to birds. Even so, the actual shape is almost secondary – the main reason for awarding this project is the new undiscovered market of birds.

It should be added that the Troldtekt material is very suitable for natural environments since it is 100% organic and therefore biodegradable. The Vogelhaus would first weather and deteriorate and in the end it would simply disappear like the material in a compost facility.
The project is clever and it is very refreshing to receive a proposal written with such a great f……ing sense of humour. It reminds us that architecture should be fun.

Season modules - Proposal # 18658 - special prize 3 (PANELLING category)
The “Season modules” project is presented in a very clear and compelling way with fresh and provocative colours which add a new dimension to the Troldtekt material.
This building block system of equilateral triangular blocks and tubes can be put together in a number of ways. The author suggests placing them on the floor, hanging them from the ceiling or erecting them as free standing space dividers. Thus the different configurations may become many different things and support many uses. It is a system which involves the user since he or she can in fact combine them freely and build highly personalised structures to suit specific spaces or be part of certain building projects.
The design is very simple and quite believable in terms of production. We think this proposal takes the use of Troldtekt further in a both inspiring and convincing way.

FINALISTS

Be interwoven - Proposal # 7777 – finalist (CONCEPT category)
This project caught the eyes of the jury because of its poetic qualities. “Be interwoven” is dealing with the very essence of the Troldtekt material and what the material could be. The proposal offers a new and sensual experience from an old material. The transformation of a panel into a curtain suggests something else inspired by the flexible strength of the wood fibres.

We believe that each material has its own poetic qualities which can, through the process of transformation, be emphasised as well as the material´s beauty itself. Looking for beauty is an important part of architecture which should never be forgotten.

From the little scale to the big - Proposal # 11999 – finalist (CONCEPT category)
“From the little scale to the big” is a strategy trying to rediscover the characteristics of prefabricated Troldtekt natural acoustics solutions. In this proposal, we find a clear idea and a method for producing multifunctional objects supporting present and future needs. The author of this proposal suggests a computer system helping consumers to design their own pieces. This is an idea the jury wants to encourage and support.

Porosity Exploration - Proposal # 11111 – finalist (CONCEPT category)
The entry “Porosity Exploration” is research on new ways to understand the Troldtekt panel. Porosity is the main point and the proposed challenge is about introducing a new biological system into the panels during the manufacturing process. How to do this is not yet clear but one way could be a natural transformation of space providing a comfortable atmosphere. The jury would be delighted to see these ideas developed further.

Troldtekt metal line - Proposal # 10789 – finalist (CONCEPT category)
The “Troldtekt metal line” project works with material processing. The jury much appreciates a proposal in which the actual surface and function of the Troldtekt natural acoustics solution is explored and reinvented. The research done by the author leads to a material with new aesthetics and capabilities while preserving the inherent qualities of the product. The jury believes that further research might open up almost infinite possibilities.