

Houtlander's curvilinear Interdependence II bench voted Most Beautiful Object

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In an open public voting process, Houtlander's curvilinear Interdependence II bench was judged the Most Beautiful Object in South Africa and announced as the winner on Friday 1 March 2019 at the annual Design Indaba Conference.

Houtlander's strikingly sinuous bench secured 20% of the total votes. The polls officially opened on Friday, 25 January 2019 and members of the public submitted anonymous votes online via conference.designindaba.com/mboisa.

Houtlander's winning seating design is punctuated by flowing lines and beautiful curves with an unexpected twist. Not to mention statement-making colour – a strident blue that sits midway between Azure and Persian. The bench is typical of Houtlander's pared-back aesthetic, but with a decidedly playful and conceptual element.

Pieces that endure

Houtlander was started by two passionate furniture designers, Phillip Hollander and Stephen Wilson who are concerned about the human principles of inclusivity, environment and legacy. Their aim is to create pieces that endure. They explain:

“ We admire modernist design, especially the Scandinavian aesthetic, respect the tried-and-tested methods of centuries of traditional joinery and challenge ourselves to employ modern methods to create functional pieces with a future heritage. ”

As for heritage and collectability, Interdependence II has that in bounds.

The unusual bench evolved from the design duo's initial Interdependence bench, which was first launched at the exhibition 'Extra Ordinary' by Southern Guild. Houtlander then went on to win the prize for South African Designer of the Year at 100% Design South Africa 2017. Interdependence II is the culmination of a process of development and refinement.

The bench was on exhibition at the Design Indaba from 27 February to 1 March 2019. It was exhibited on the Artscape

Piazza as part of an exhibition showcasing all the nominated objects and the display was open to the public. Each of the objects on show was nominated by a prominent public figure. Interdependence II was nominated by Nandi Dlepu, the managing director of Johannesburg-based creative agency Mamakashaka.

Public-facing initiative

The transparent nomination and selection process encourages debate around the definition of beauty. For some, value lies in function and social relevance; for others, pure aesthetics are king.

‘We want the public to decide what they think constitutes a “beautiful object” – and it’s not just about what something looks like, it’s also about smart functionality, or a design’s ability to enhance the quality of life for its user or effect change. In the selection process itself we want to foster a sense of appreciation, accessibility and engagement,’ explains Design Indaba festival manager Bev Cupido.

Most Beautiful Object in South Africa is a public-facing initiative that was propelled into being 12 years ago by the Design Indaba, which is itself heading into its 25th year in 2020.

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