

Crash! Bang! Whizzo!

I love fireworks displays, but for the first time I have a sense of what it might be like to watch one from inside a post-box !

The date was 3rd November. The place was on the south bank of the Thames overlooking the beautifully illuminated Tower Bridge and the City of London. And the event brought 'the great and the good' representatives of design and technology education from all over the country. Being in the fortunate position of working in sunny down-town New Cross, the event was in my backyard so all I had to do was pop up the road.

I am referring of course to the launch of a new facility at the Design Museum: the Dyson Centre for Design Education and Training. For those readers who are not au fait with the vacuum cleaner world, Dyson is the chap who completely revolutionised it. A conventional vacuum cleaner (which beats as it sweeps as it cleans) sucks up dirt into a bag. The air then passes through the bag leaving the dust and dirt trapped inside so that we can subsequently empty it out. The snag is that as it gets full of dust and dirt, the air finds it harder and harder to pass through the bag. So the suck-factor is reduced – with an inevitable reduction in the cleaning power.

Raised on generation after generation of vacuum cleaners with bags, it is a bold step (not unlike the young child pointing out that the king has no clothes) to see that this design is essentially flawed. The better it sucks up dirt – the quicker it becomes inefficient. But it takes a visionary designer to go the next step and create a better solution – i.e. one without a bag! Thus was born the Dyson dual cyclone vacuum cleaner. Dirty air enters the outer cyclone and spins at 200 mph. All the large debris and 90% of the fine dust are spun out. As the air and the remaining fine dust passes to the inner cyclone, they are accelerated to 900+ mph (faster than the speed of sound!) and tremendous centrifugal forces are exerted on the fine dust particles, driving them also out of the air. The rest is history. And now you can see some wonderfully designerly Dysons in high street windows (I love the De Stijl – primary colours – model)

and Dyson now heads a very successful design enterprise.

To his immense credit, James Dyson has not lost sight of his own debt to design education, and his gift has now enabled the creation of the Dyson Centre for Design Education and Training at the Design Museum.

'as part of Dyson's commitment to encouraging design and innovation throughout society, I am delighted to help the Design Museum provide a national resource for design education'

The Centre is at the back of the Collection Gallery on the top floor of the museum, and houses flexible teaching areas for up to 100 pupils or students. The real contribution is that these teaching spaces will enable groups from schools to work on the museum's 'handling collection' in relative peace and privacy and without disruption from other museum visitors. The spaces will also of course provide accommodation for workshops, displays, lectures and seminars.

The original idea of the Design Museum grew from a series of exhibitions known as the Boilerhouse Project at the V&A museum, funded by the Conran Foundation. In 1989 it moved to the new purpose-built site beside Tower Bridge and the world's first Design Museum was created. And its services are becoming more and more in demand, particularly from schools and colleges. The Collection gallery presents a series of historic thematic displays (the current one [to the end of March] is on bicycles), while the Review gallery provides the opportunity to study some of the most innovative products on the market today as well as concepts and prototypes suggesting future trends. It is also great to hear that the Conran Foundation each year provides one individual (e.g. a designer or a design journalist) with £27,000 to spend on mass-produced objects in current production – providing future generations with a growing archive of design in the late 20th century.

That's all very well, I hear you moan – from Penzance, Pontypool and Penrith. We don't have the delights of living in south-east

Prof Richard Kimbell

*Technology
Education Research
Unit, Goldsmiths
University of London*

London so we can hardly pop up the road to avail ourselves of these opportunities. I have news for you. You can. And there are two ways in which you can do it.

With the support of the Design Council, the Design Museum runs a nationwide network of design education training and resources for primary and secondary teachers. The work focuses on the products and applications section of the National Curriculum and involves teachers investigating disassembling and evaluating strange products from the Design Museum's mystery loan box which contains unusual products whose function is not immediately apparent. In 1997-8 events have been/will be run in the North West, East Anglia, Central England, North East, Midlands, South West and the South East. (contact Lesley Butterworth [head of education] for details 0171 403 6933).

Even more interesting and available however is the second option – the Loan Box Service. Once again with the support of the Design Council, the Design Museum has created six themed loan boxes – history LB, kettle LB, telephone LB, Victorian LB, radio LB and mystery LB – and these each contain selected products along with supporting texts to help students get to grips with the key design features. The kettle LB for example has seven kettles that illustrate the transitions from early 20th century copper, through the classic Russell Hobbs, the Tefal and Philips cordless, and ultimately to Hot Bertaa which (I assure you) challenges any preconceptions of how a kettle should look and function. The boxes [approx 1m x .6m x .4m] are available for fortnightly loan for £25 – which includes a free resource pack "Working With Objects".

One of the more satisfying outcomes of this service is the empowering nature of it. A kettle Loan Box is not merely a collection of kettles; it also provides a terrific model for teachers, helping them to see how they can begin to compile their own special boxes. My colleague Kay Stables has awesome collections of hats, pens, pop-up cards, carrier bags, glasses cases, etc. that become the focus of attention for particular projects. The LB service therefore exemplifies one of the most powerful

professional development functions; it provides both a material support, and at the same time it exemplifies how you can create your own support. The car-boot sale takes on a whole new function.

I make no apologies for turning this editorial into something of an advertisement for the Design Museum. It is a terrific institution providing a very timely and supportive service to teachers of design and technology. Such supports are in very short supply and we should all be delighted at the quality of their ideas and the care with which they are being developed.

But back to my post-box comment. The formal 'launch' of the Dyson Centre was accompanied by huge [and very seasonal] crashes and bangs of exploding fireworks on the waterfront beside the Design Museum. I rushed to the window to watch. Dark figures moved cautiously lighting salvos of multicoloured rockets and mortars. Or at least I'm told they were multicoloured. All I saw was their preliminary trail, as they flashed up through my field of vision at the window. Having disappeared upwards (beyond the field of vision provided by the window) their beautiful exploding climax was invisible to me.

Never mind, I expect the residents over the river enjoyed it. And anyway the event we were there to celebrate – the formal opening of the Dyson Centre – was quite whizzo enough.