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Designing a Naturalist Trust Exhibition

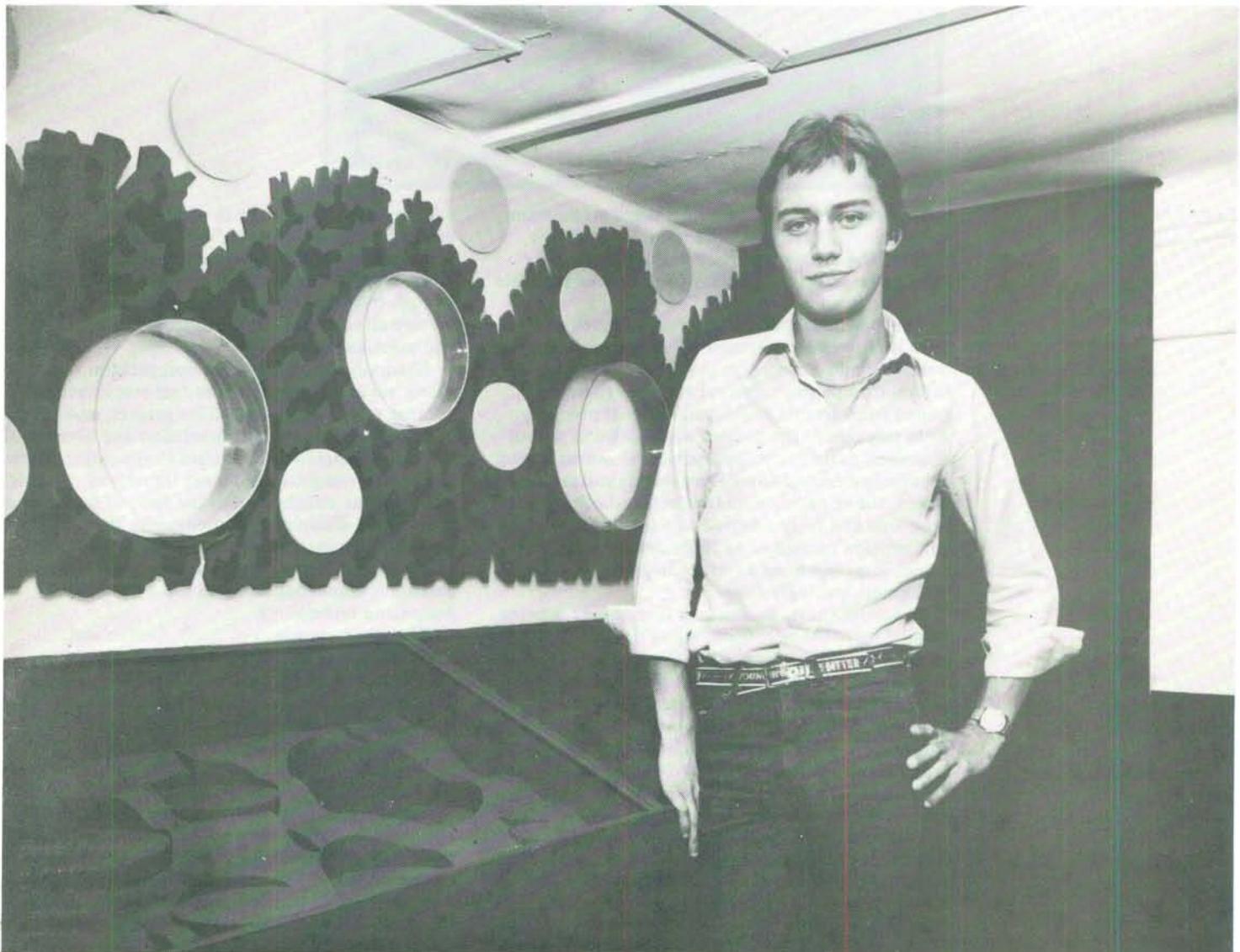
I have always been somewhat sceptical about the value of any competition concerned with the aesthetic or practical areas of the curriculum. The results of many of these competitions are usually determined by the submission of excellent artefacts, superbly produced and seeking judgement in adult terms. It was therefore with some misgivings that I encouraged David Peach to enter part of his 'A' level design course work for this year's Design Council GEC Schools Design Prize.

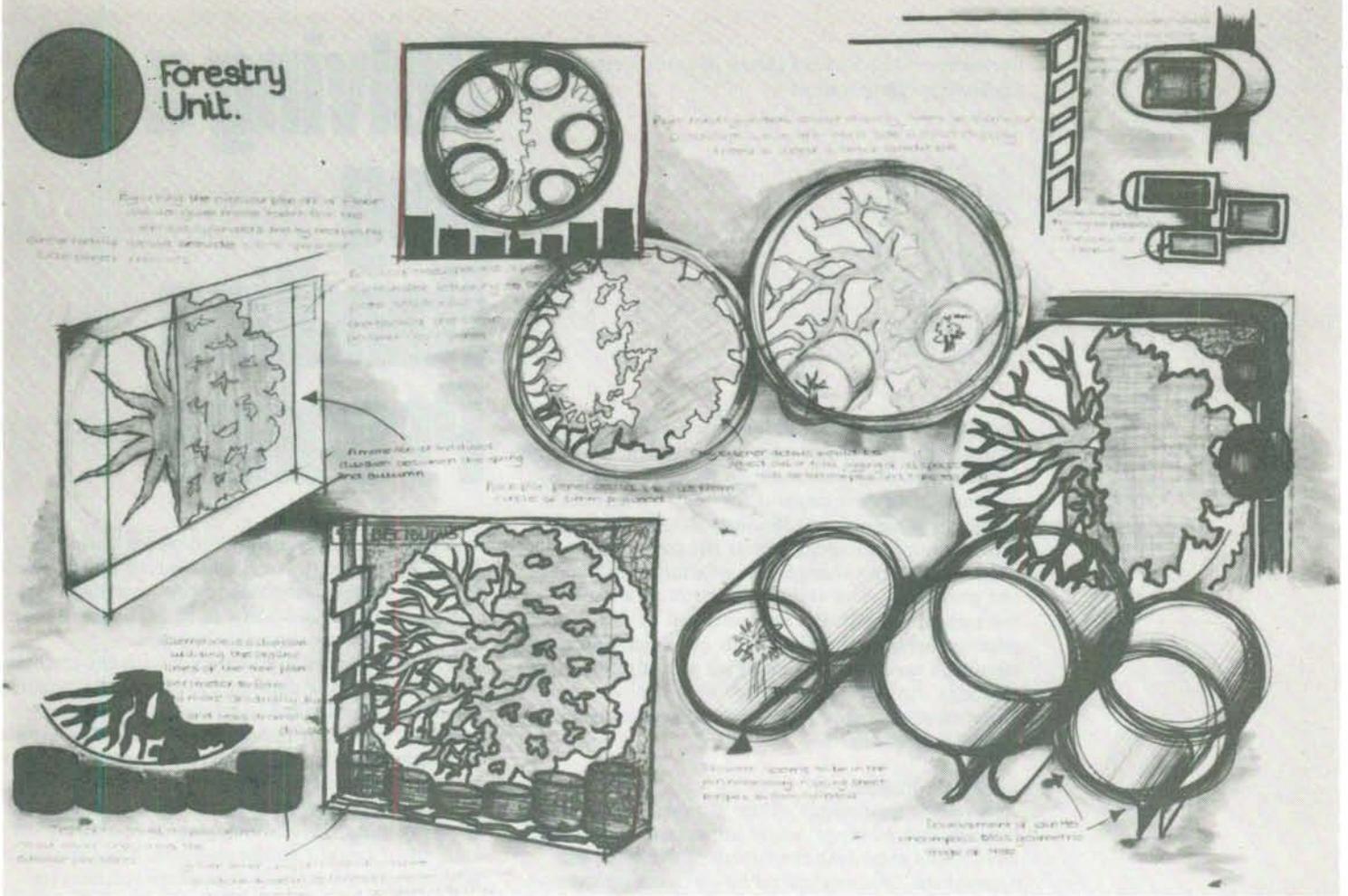
David's work seemed to epitomise an approach to design education that I, together with the staff of my department, have been striving to develop and teach for several years. It seemed to me that the strength of David's entry lay not in the finished product but in sheet after sheet showing graphic evidence of the thought and consideration behind his manufactured conclusion. From the outset I was

aware that his actual conclusion could only partially influence the judges' deliberations. For being part of an exhibition caravan, David's conclusion was far too big to submit. Only the evidence of photographs could be made available to the judges.

By emphasising that my department's teaching is very much concerned with the approach to a design rather than the conclusion I would not like it to be thought that as a group of teachers we see no place for spontaneous inspiration which can give an instant opinion on a problem, or that craftsmanship and skill are not considered as being an important part of our teaching. Indeed, I hope there can be seen in

David Peach of Kingsthorpe Upper School, Northampton, beside one of the display units he designed for the Northampton Naturalist Trust.





Drawings of the forestry units designed for the Northampton Naturalist Trust.

David's work a spontaneous flow of expression in the graphic development of his thoughts and ideas. Such spontaneity can only come from a highly developed graphic skill matching the student's pace of thought. In submitting David's entry I hoped that his approach to and research of his design problem would be seen as being equally important as the material and technical skills demonstrated in constructing his conclusions. As the result of the competition show, I was not disappointed. Yet I wonder within the limitations of the illustrations of this article how David's work will come over? It certainly did not prove too popular with the press viewing the results, obviously because there was no photogenic end product. This publication will no doubt go out to many educationalists, who, like myself, have been caught up with the development of design in general education for at least a decade. The verlose hierarchy that this development has produced does not seem to have made the theory of design education any more tangible for many teachers than it was a decade ago. The well tried and extremely valuable preoccupation with teaching the skills needed for making, even though under the guise of design education still seem to be widely prevalent. This preoccupation with skills is still vehemently and sincerely encouraged from many sources. During the presentation of this year's prizes the winners were exhorted to work towards designing better products to satisfy both industrial and national needs. Only the Duke of Edinburgh in his prize giving speech seemed concerned with personal involvement and honest self-appraisal as being the main concern of young designers. He urged them to ignore commercial, economic or even fashionable reasons to design but to do it for themselves.

As a teacher and a parent I see so much of our children's involvement with life both in and out of school as being concerned with instant solutions, instant facts, instant answers. Advancing technology seems certain to broaden this instant involvement.

This almost overwhelming situation demands an area in the curriculum where a thoughtful and creative approach is encouraged. An area where material problems can be explored without a saleable item or a work worthy of exhibition is the only aim. I hope that David's work will show that this approach is possible and can be developed to a very high level.

The exhibition caravan is an on-going project commissioned by the Northampton Naturalists' Trust. The caravan will provide both a permanent and travelling exhibition to encourage public awareness of the Trust and its valuable work. David's brief was to provide an exhibition area within the caravan that would show information on various sites and reserves. His exhibition needed to cover specific habitats, namely woodland, hedgerows and pasture, giving information on the flora and fauna found in the county within these habitats.

Officers of the Trust provided the brief and David consulted them as his design work progressed. David constructed his design for the exhibition mainly in wood and acrylics. The construction work called for the acquisition of new skills, experiment with materials, techniques and improvisation to overcome constructional problems. The rest of David's 'A' level course work consisted of ceramic and graphic design. All the materials for this exhibition project were carefully researched and costed. The N.N.T. persuaded Weetabix Limited to sponsor the work.

As for the rest of the caravan we hope to complete the work this summer. The remainder of the interior and the whole of the exterior are engaging two further students with problems for their major project within the 'A' level design.

David Peach has now left Kingsthorpe Upper School. He gained an A in his design examination and creditable grades in three other 'A' levels. He has chosen to follow a foundation course at Middlesex Polytechnic and hopes to go to study for a degree in graphics.