

DOIR, REB, Scarab and the Aichi Gift Box



In March 2005, Karel Wohlnick of REB Design, and Peter Cook and Ian Collishaw of Scarab Wood Design were commissioned by the WA Government's Department of Industry and Resources, to collaborate on the design and production of a prestigious timber gift box. The gift was to be presented by the WA Premier Geoff Gallop to dignitaries and VIPs at the 2005 World Expo Aichi, Japan, to be held in the coming July.

At the initial conceptual stage, the project gave REB an opportunity to explore the gift giving experience in the Japanese culture from a western perspective. The result of this research was a gift box design represented as a small, tactile and ergonomically rounded object, expressed through the use of two separate curved elements that nest together, one within the

other, to form a complete unit. The object itself has become the 'wrap' of the gift giving ritual.

Following the conceptual design stage by REB, Scarab was engaged to further resolve the design and carry it through into its production phase. In the early stages continued collaborative discussions were held, alongside technical research and numerous experiments aimed at discovering a viable production means for creating the challenging timber forms depicted in REB's graphic design.

In the course of prototyping, researching and 'crash' testing, Scarab experimented with a wide range of approaches in the search for effective production techniques. Perhaps one of the most important keys to the successful realisation of the design was a highly innovative 'hybrid' moulding system, developed within Scarab's studio specifically for this project. The system combines mechanical and vacuum forming processes, in order to mould the laminated timber material into the tightly curved shapes required for the design. Along the way many other ground-breaking innovations were also developed in order to achieve the final production result, the ultimate creation of some 410 finished gift boxes.



The extensive use of native timber veneers in the creation of the Aichi gift box leads to another profound point of note about this project: With so much talk in current times - both locally and globally - about moving towards wiser and more sustainable uses of our native timber resources, timber based manufacturing activities that can demonstrate significant improvement in value-adding are to be strongly highlighted and fostered. A major catalyst in



this improvement in value-adding is the application of fine design. This, together with pioneering approaches to fine craft and manufacture, can yield powerful results in the value-adding quest. Specifically, this project has been highly successful in bringing these elements together, demonstrating an extraordinary value-adding achievement of some AUD\$60,000 per cubic metre of native timber used. It is worth noting further that the main timber resource consumed in the project was knife-cut timber veneer - produced at WA's Yarloop veneering plant - itself returning a further AUD\$10,000 per cubic metre to the veneer supplier.



In the final analysis: The commissioning by the Department Of Industry and Resources of such an innovative project as the Aichi gift box has brought together cutting edge conceptual and industrial design, pioneering craftsmanship and timber manufacturing techniques, and an extraordinary degree of value-adding of our native timber resources. The project has clearly demonstrated that the use of local resources and talent by a government department can produce a multitude of notable outcomes, one of which has been the collaboration of REB and Scarab to produce an outstanding product for Japan.

All this has been achieved whilst showcasing and promoting Western Australia's capabilities within an international context.

It would seem that the end has been well served indeed and both REB Design and Scarab Wood Design are proud to have been a part of such an outstanding endeavour.

The Aichi gift box project has been a resounding success with praise and commendations coming from all levels, including the WA premier himself, Dr. Geoff Gallop. This has been reinforced with the receipt in October 2005 of a prestigious Award of Merit from the Design Institute of Australia for the project.

