

Forming the future

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Hape Challenges International Design Students To Create Original Bamboo Toys

NINGBO, CHINA

Twenty international design students presented original bamboo toy designs on September 24, 2011, at the culmination of Hape's fourth bamboo workshop at the Hape facilities in Zhejiang.

The students, invited from [German Bauhaus University](#) and [China Academy of Arts](#), have spent three weeks intensively working and learning about the process of toy design and the unique properties of bamboo. For many of them, bamboo is a totally new medium. Visits to bamboo facilities in Anji, as well as lectures and hands-on demonstrations have exposed them to the possibilities and limitations of the material. Additionally, theoretical introductions to toy design, an overview of the Hape product lines, and toy safety guidelines have been presented. At the end of their first week, the students unveiled their initial ideas.

The next two weeks were spent perfecting their designs with the help of expert feedback. Hape's craftsmen were available to assist in building. Bruce Xu, Hape's designer and head of the sample workshop, and Markus Hirche, an established Hape designer from Germany, guided the students throughout the process.

Three days before the final competition, the students tested their concepts at Beilun Central Kindergarten. This let them see their work in the hands of the final players.

"Unless it's fun, the most beautiful toy will sit on the shelf," says Peter Handstein, Hape founder and president. "Putting the product in the hands of a child is one of the most important parts of the process."



Once final tweaks have been made, the students made their presentation to the six person jury in the Hape bamboo workshop set in the middle of Zhejiang's vast bamboo forests. The jury was composed of senior Hape staff, as well as Francisco Porras, design strategy manager of CBI China Bridge in Shanghai, and Prof. Peter Litzlbauer, pro-rector of the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart, Germany. Entries were judged on educational value, design, and production ease, and in each category three prizes were awarded. The winners were offered an internship opportunity at Hape where the chosen product will hopefully become part of the Hape's bamboo toy line. Second and third place winners took home cash prizes.

This is Hape's fourth bamboo toy workshop. In 2004, the company held an initial event in conjunction with Unesco. As a result of that effort, Hape developed the first full collection of bamboo toys in 2005. The unique designs and utilization of bamboo established Hape as a leader in the bamboo toy industry. The unique collaboration of young designers, new materials, and an international sensibility meshes with the Hape philosophy of creating toys that cross cultures, language and gender barriers. In the past, students from Shenkar University in Israel have also participated in the Hape workshop. Top design schools in America are currently being considered for future events.

