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PMAG048073 R09/064



LOOK, MA: I ACED DESIGN

Eighth graders from New York's School at Columbia University reinvent classroom furniture with the help of design studio Aruliden

BY ELIZABETH PAGLIACOLO



IF DESIGN IS SUCH A BIG PART of our lives, why isn't it taught in early education? Bringing this question to this year's grade eight class from The School at Columbia University, Rinat Aruh and Johan Liden of New York studio Aruliden guided 44 students in devising a stellar set of furnishings.

These same pupils were on hand at ICFF in May to explain the process behind their desk, chair and locker, which were prototyped by Bernhardt Design. After taking a good look around - at lockers that look like "toxic waste dumps" by year's end, and at hard plastic chairs and desks on metal legs - they began their research. Just like the pros, they created inspiration boards, interviewed teachers and visited other schools before sketching out their ideas. Aruliden taught them how to extrapolate from tiny models to larger

furnishings and then pare back. While one chair concept featured "storage, wheels, extensions for length and width, reclining functions and arm and leg rests," the final prototype is much simpler, integrating a basket, a handle and an invisible swivel mechanism. The matching desk, complete with accessory panel, contributes to a flexible environment that encourages collaboration. But the pièce de résistance is the locker: its doorknob and name tag, not to mention a wealth of storage, make it a personal haven in any chaotic hallway.

While the project taught students how to use design to solve problems, it also gave them a taste of what it's like to be a design star. At ICFF, Tools at Schools took the Editor's Award for Best Design School, and in November it will be the subject of an exhibit at New York's Museum of Art and Design.

New school The kid-friendly finalists of the Index Design Challenge - Designing for Education



Teddy Bag, François Veréz and Ane Eguiguren's winning design, is a backpack that transforms into a desk and bench when school's out temporarily.



Elephant Walk Desk, designed by Stephen Pennington, incorporates storage nooks and a writing surface into a playful unit.



Akshara (Hindi for "letter") is a box set of tactile cue cards designed by Sayantani Dasgupta and Meghma Mitra to spark young imaginations.