

'Sitting Pretty' – Young architects and designers bring London rail stations to life

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A series of witty and challenging benches by emerging architects and designers have been unveiled at some of London's largest railway stations, following a design competition organised by the London Festival of Architecture and Network Rail.

From a playful oversized rocking chair to seating that uses the clay beneath Londoners' feet to absorb the pollutants around them, this engaging series of new installations demonstrates how inventive architecture and design can make a real difference to the everyday travelling experience in Britain's railway stations.

For the London Festival of Architecture, the commissions are the latest in a series of public installations that harness and celebrate emerging architectural and design talent, while improving London's shared spaces and connecting people with new architecture and the buildings around them. For Network Rail – already responsible for many of Britain's finest buildings – the series is part of an enhanced focus on applying the highest design standards across Network Rail's built environment, whether it be new stations and signal boxes or bridges and benches.

Over 70 design teams responded to an open call for entries, and a challenge to consider how better station seating might look, with the potential for winning ideas to be replicated across stations managed by Network Rail in the future.

The five new benches are:

1. Beluga by Hylemo & Ai Build – Victoria Station

Hylemo and Ai Build have combined their expertise in digital fabrication and 3D printing to create seating that challenges the way furniture in the public domain is produced. Beluga explores the application of 3D printing to bioplastics to create waste-free furniture, offering limitless forms and intriguing passers-by.

www.hylemo.com

Instagram: @_hylemo

www.ai-build.com

Instagram: @ai_build

2. ConvoStation by The United Suburbs – Charing Cross Station

ConvoStation is a brightly coloured oversize rocking chair, and a fun station bench where people – parents with children perhaps – can pass the time while waiting for friends or a train. At a time of social distancing, it reminds us of the joy of safe human interaction, while generating an awareness of the spaces around us through motion. ConvoStation is supported by Universal Spraying Ltd.

Instagram: @president_ofthe_unitedsuburbs

www.unispray.co.uk

Instagram: @unispray_co.uk

3. Lacuna by Nick Tyrer with Victoria Philpott – Waterloo Station

Nick Tyrer and Victoria Philpott have brought together seating and striking planting through a design that offers a spatial experience while remaining functional and comfortable. Lacuna offers a sense of security and personal space on a large station concourse, while also creating a much larger visual impact upon the identity of the station. Lacuna is supported by James Lathams and Garnica, and fabricated by Raskl.

www.tyrer.io

Instagram: @tyrer.io

www.victoriaphilpottgardens.com

Instagram: @victoriaphilpottgardens

www.lathamtimber.co.uk

Twitter: @lathamsltd

www.garnica.one

Twitter: @garnicaplywood

Instagram: @garnicaplywood

www.raskl.co.uk

Twitter: @rasklstudio

Instagram: @rasklstudio

4. Reclaim, Re-invent, Re-purpose by Atelier La Juntana – London Bridge Station

This bench takes inspiration from the complex relationships between railway lines, stations and the cities they serve. The design treats reclaimed timber track sleepers with steam bending and digital CNC forming techniques, creating geometries that recall snaking railway lines, and offers a modular system allowing multiple configurations in different settings. Reclaim, Re-invent, Re-purpose is supported by Shadbolt, University of East London and Kohn Pedersen Fox.

www.atelierlajuntana.com

Instagram: @atelierlajuntana

Twitter: @atelierlajuntana

www.shadbolt.co.uk

Twitter: @ShadboltDoors

Instagram: @shadboltinternational

www.uel.ac.uk

Twitter: @UEL_News

www.kpf.com

Twitter: @KohnPedersenFox

Instagram: @kohnpedersenfox

5. Sitting on London's Clay by Local Collective Studio

Local Collective's seating uses London clay – a natural material found beneath Londoners' feet – to offer a social furniture that is breathable and sustainable. The bench's modular system offers different arrangements, while the materiality of clay improves indoor air quality by absorbing humidity and toxins. In response to climate change, Sitting on London's Clay encourages a re-think about centuries-old construction techniques and materials. The bench is supported by Pro-duck, Clayworks and Guy Valentine.

lcstudio.co.uk

Instagram: @itsalocalcollective

The 'Sitting Pretty' competition was judged by an expert panel comprising:

Anthony Dewar (Professional Head Buildings and Architecture Safety, Technical and Engineering, Network Rail)

Frank Anatole (Principal Architect, Network Rail)

Paul Priestman (Director, PriestmanGoode)

Tamsie Thomson (Director, London Festival of Architecture)

Will Hurst (Managing Editor, Architects' Journal)

Tamsie Thomson, director of the London Festival of Architecture, said: "It has been a real pleasure to work alongside Network Rail on the 'Sitting Pretty' competition, and to give such a talented cohort of outstanding architects and designers a brilliant opportunity to celebrate their work. London's station concourses are amongst the city's most important public spaces: for our winners they create an outstanding platform to showcase their skills, and for the public I hope these benches will be a joyful encounter with architecture and design in the midst of the city."

Frank Anatole, Principal Architect at Network Rail, said: "We are so looking forward to seeing these imaginative concepts finally installed at our stations at Waterloo, London Bridge, Charing Cross and Victoria, and we hope people will love them. The young designers have faced additional pressures resulting from the current health emergency, including material supplies, workshop availability and the measures that we've had to put in place at our stations to keep passengers and station users safe. But all have risen brilliantly to the challenge, and the results will undoubtedly bring a ray of sunshine and a welcome smile to station users over the coming weeks."

Photo credit: Luke O'Donovan

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