



Student Awards Honor Bill Moggridge's Legacy While Supporting Young Designers

The best and brightest design student winners urged to broaden their horizons

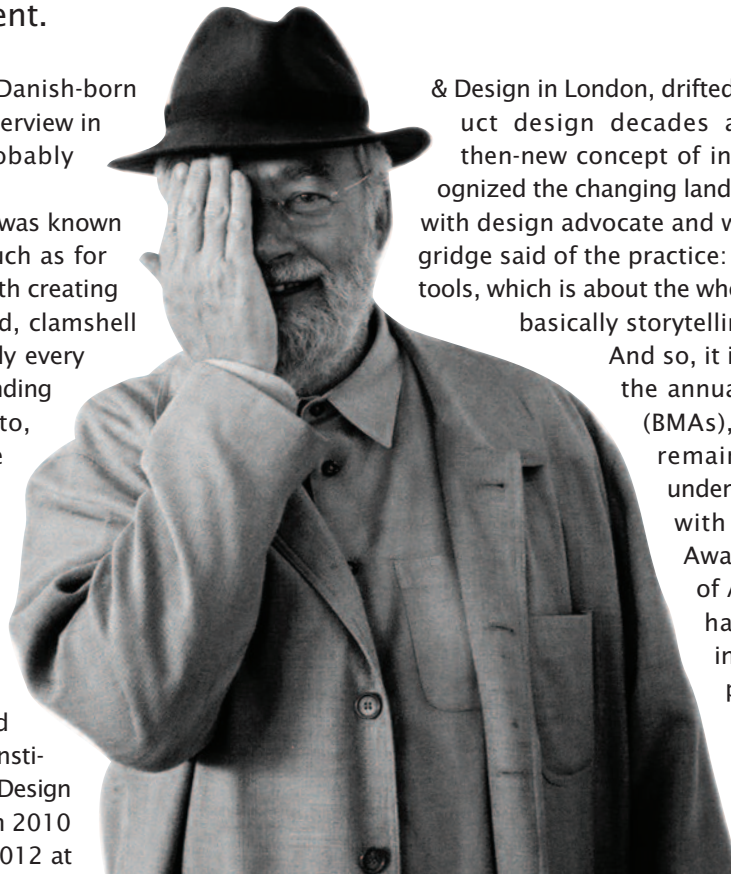
By Robert Grace

If legendary British designer Bill Moggridge were still alive today, he'd likely be a tad sheepish. Chances are he'd wonder what he did to deserve having a student design awards competition in his name—but he would see the value in recognizing and encouraging outstanding young talent.

"He'd go along with it," his Danish-born wife, Karin, said in a recent interview in San Francisco, "but he probably wouldn't promote it much."

The soft-spoken Moggridge was known for his modesty almost as much as for his brilliance. He is credited with creating in 1982 the ubiquitous hinged, clamshell form factor now used by nearly every laptop computer. He was a founding principal in 1991 of Palo Alto, Calif.-based IDEO, arguably the world's biggest and best-known design and innovation firm. He helped pioneer the discipline of interaction design, which studies how humans interact with computers. He wrote well-regarded design books, taught at the university level, and served as director of the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City from 2010 until his death in September 2012 at the age of 69.

As Moggridge, a 1965 graduate of Central Saint Martin's College of Art



Bill Moggridge created the clamshell laptop computer form, and pioneered the discipline of interaction design. Courtesy of IDEO

& Design in London, drifted away from physical product design decades ago and embraced the then-new concept of interaction design, he recognized the changing landscape. In a 2007 interview with design advocate and writer Gaylon White, Moggridge said of the practice: "You need another set of tools, which is about the whole experience. And that's basically storytelling or narrative."

And so, it is time to tell the story of the annual Bill Moggridge Awards (BMAs), which till now have remained intentionally well under the radar. The tale begins with the Student Design Awards of the Royal Society of Arts in London—and perhaps may offer some inspiration to others in the plastics industry to follow suit.

Moggridge, himself the recipient of an RSA Student Design Award more than half a century ago, credited the honor with giving him the confidence

to start his own design firm in London in 1969. He then added a second office 10 years later in Palo Alto, in the heart of Silicon Valley. In 1991, he joined his company with those of David Kelley and Mike Nuttall to create IDEO.

British designer David Turner—another RSA Student Design Award winner—did not know Moggridge back then, but shared his enthusiasm for the value of winning such an honor. After earning his Master's degree in design from the Royal College of Art, Turner moved to the United States and worked in the textile and fiber industry, before joining Clinton, Tenn.-based plastics compounder and materials design firm Techmer PM in 2004.

Several years ago, while president of the RSA U.S. board of directors, Turner spearheaded the launch of a series of RSA Student Design Awards in the States. The first such honors, which carried a \$1,000 prize, were presented at the Cooper Union in New York in 2013 and 2014; from 2013 through 2015, the RSA U.S. gave out a total of 29 RSA U.S. Student Design Awards. Following the success in the U.S., the Royal Society of Arts expanded the SDAs into a global program.

In 2011, Turner used the RSA U.S. Fellows' network to connect with Moggridge—who by then was a globally renowned designer and heading the Cooper-Hewitt Museum—to seek his support in expanding the student awards program. Moggridge readily agreed, but shortly thereafter fell gravely ill with cancer, which claimed his life the following year.

In 2014, with the support of Techmer PM founder and chief executive officer John Manuck, the Tennessee company formally launched the Bill Moggridge Awards, in conjunction with the RSA Student Design program, initially with a cash prize of \$1,000 for each BMA recipient. The prize money rose to \$5,000 each in 2015, and then doubled to \$10,000 per winner in 2016.

“At Techmer, we’ve always placed an extraordinarily high value on the discipline of design, while also seeking ways to both identify and develop new talent,” noted Manuck. “Through these awards, we’ve been able to advance these principles while simultaneously shining a well-deserved spotlight on one of the pioneers of the industry.”

When the RSA took the SDAs global, Techmer PM part-



Stanford University d.school graduate student Alexa Siu (right) received her \$10,000 BMA prize check in person last month from Karin Moggridge and Techmer's John Manuck. Siu's advising professor, Sean Follmer, is second from the right. Photo by Robert Grace

nered with IDEO to keep the Bill Moggridge Awards in the United States. That year, the Bill Moggridge Awards added three new supporting institutions where Moggridge's teaching and presence had a significant impact: the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London where he was a visiting professor in interaction design; the Stanford University d.School (started by IDEO co-founder and CEO David Kelley), where Moggridge was an associate professor; and the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco, where he received an honorary doctorate.

There is no judging of nominees, *per se*; instead, participating schools nominate their best students and put their names forward. The winners have quietly received the monetary prize, and a huge boost to their confidence and young careers, with little fanfare.

The only stipulation to the winners has been that they cannot use the money to pay for tuition. Instead—just as Moggridge would have preferred it—they are to use it however they see fit to further their careers and life experience, to include traveling abroad. The sponsors then ask only that the winners report back in a year about what they have done or accomplished. Some of the stories are truly remarkable and inspiring.

The first BMA recipients, in 2014, were Sam Bertain and Leslie Greene, students of the California College of the

Arts. The following year's winner was Keshav Ramaswami of the New York City-based Pratt Institute, which got involved via the RSA U.S. Student Design Awards.

2016 winners include Hoda Khoja of RSA-Global, Axel Bluhme of the Royal College of Art, and CCA's Stephen Moore.

Teagan Daly of Stanford's d.school won the 2017 award, and this year's winners—who received their winnings in person last month from Karin Moggridge, John Manuck and David Turner—are d.school's Alexa Siu and CCA graphic designer Mark Andrew Buenafe.

For more about the past recipients, visit the BMA website's Award Winners page (www.billmoggridgeawards.com/award-winners). Meantime, here are some more details about a few of the notable winners, the work they are doing, and how they leveraged the BMA winnings to advance their goals.



The ninth BMA winner—Oman-born Filipino Mark Andrew Buenafe, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen last year—earned the honor for his excellent graphic design work at the California College of the Arts, where he is about to start his senior year. He is pictured here Karin Moggridge and CCA President Stephen Beal. Courtesy of Techmer PM

Hoda Khoja

A native of Libya, Hoda Khoja graduated from the Winchester School of Art at England's University of Southampton, Graphic Arts, thanks to a government grant from her home country. Her winning project, called Iro, involved creating a new material from reprocessed paint and ink waste that helps produce things like furniture, jewelry and interior finishes.

She says she may pursue a Master's degree in industrial or interdisciplinary design, but also is leveraging her BMA

win to further educational opportunities for others in Libya. She said she has interest in establishing a partnership to create a "school workshop center" aimed at design training and education for kids who lack opportunities to study abroad.

Winning the award, she told the BMA leaders, "showed me that no matter where you came from, no matter the background that you had, no matter if you were able to speak English a few years or not, you are the human able to change, able to develop if you got the chance to do so."

Though she began by studying computer science and medicine in her home country, she discovered she had a strong interest in storytelling and thinking creatively, and she was inspired by reading about designers such as Moggridge.

"Bill Moggridge, as a designer, has been a huge inspiration for me," she said. "It was insane for me when they told me this award was named after him. I was like, 'This is not a coincidence.'"

Axel Bluhme

For Axel Bluhme, a Swedish interaction design student, winning the Bill Moggridge Award was like music to his ears. Bluhme, who studied at London's Royal College of Art, won for his project called the XOOX Composer.

He has described it as a "sound sample instrument that



Khoja wants to leverage her BMA winnings to encourage other young designers in her home country of Libya.

Courtesy of the Bill Moggridge Awards

uses magnets to create digital music in a playful and visual way.” It is a plug-and-play hardware and desktop app that helps compose everything from 1980s to hip-hop beats by snapping magnets into place on eight rotating discs. Those discs enable sound samples to be played “dynamically” with one another at the same time, Bluhme has explained on his website. Each disc is quantized into 16 steps, with potential to create complex rhythmical patterns. Below each disc is an interface for pitch tuning and volume output.



Axel Bluhme's creative work with digital music landed him a job with Google UK. But he has since returned to his native Sweden to chart his own course.

Courtesy of the Bill Moggridge Awards

Bluhme told BMA leaders upon winning that the award money would enable him to fund and further the XXXX Composer's capabilities. He's experimenting with making discs that have different types of “quantizations,” or step

divisions. This means the user is able to make polyrhythmic compositions, something that can become complex and experimental.

“The award has been very helpful in establishing contact with companies I am particularly interested in,” said Bluhme, who got hired by Google in the U.K. after receiving his award. At Google, he worked full time on a project called NSynth Super, which is part of an ongoing experiment by Magenta: a research project within Google that explores how machine learning tools can help artists create art and music in new ways.

But even though he very much liked Google, and they wanted to keep him, Bluhme since has chosen to push himself to new extremes by moving back to Sweden, where he his goal is to establish his own design firm.

Like Khoja, Bluhme said he was heavily influenced by Bill Moggridge after reading his influential 2007 book (of 766 pages with accompanying DVD featuring 37 designer interviews) called “Designing Interactions”. While Bluhme's background is in classic industrial design, he felt compelled to pursue interaction design at RCA. Bill Moggridge would be proud.

Alexa Fay Siu

A third-year Ph.D. student in Mechanical Engineering (ME) in the Shape Lab at Stanford University, Alexa Siu is of Chi-

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The Automotive Division of the Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE®) is announcing a “Call for Nominations” for its 48th-annual **Automotive Innovation Awards Gala**, the oldest and largest recognition event in the automotive and plastics industries. This year's Awards Gala will be held Wednesday, **November 7, 2018** at the Burton Manor in Livonia, Mich. Winning part nominations (**due by September 15, 2018**) in 10 different categories, and the teams that developed them, will be honored with a **Most Innovative Use of Plastics** award. A **Grand Award** will be presented to the winning team from all category award winners.

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

This annual event currently draws over 800 OEM engineers, automotive and plastics industry executives, and media. A variety of sponsorship packages - including tables at the banquet, networking receptions, advertising in the program book, signage at the event and more are available. Contact Teri Chouinard of Intuit Group at teri@intuitgroup.com.



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nese descent but was born in the U.S. and raised in Panama. She moved back to the U.S. in 2011, at age 17, to earn a Bachelor of Science degree at Georgia Tech, with a minor in computer science focused on artificial intelligence, followed by a Master of Science degree in ME at Stanford.

Now 25, she has worked on some mind-bending projects—from a medical device capable of making an incision in the eardrum and delivering an ear tube all in one step, to developing an autonomous mobile robot—to her current labor of love, dubbed shapeShift.

Working with colleagues in Stanford's Shape Lab, and being advised by Prof. Sean Follmer, Siu has developed shapeShift, a compact, high-resolution, mobile tabletop shape display. ShapeShift (see it in action at bit.ly/shapeShift) is an open-source platform that works in conjunction with a user who is wearing a virtual reality (VR) headset. It renders physical shapes using 288 actuated square pins (4.85mm width, 7mm pitch). Passive and active mobile tabletop platforms enable lateral motion, with user inter-



Known as a gentle and modest but brilliant man, Bill Moggridge has inspired countless designers with his designs, teachings and writings.

Courtesy of IDEO

action and platform motion both tracked using either an infrared motion capture system or an HTC Vive-based VR tracking system.

In an April review, Gizmodo contributing editor Andrew Liszewski stated: "ShapeShift looks like a small desktop PC augmented with a dense grid of rectangular 'pins' on top. When it's moved around on a flat surface like a table, a tracking marker syncs the location of the ShapeShift box to the location of the user's hands in a virtual reality world. When the user's virtual hands reach out to touch a virtual object, the pins atop the ShapeShift extend and retract to form a crude representation of that object in the real world, allowing it to be felt and touched.

"While it's fascinating research even at this small scale," Liszewski concluded, "imagine an entire room with wall-to-wall undulating rods instead of a floor: The terrain inside a VR experience could be perfectly recreated under foot, allowing someone to physically climb over hills, debris, or other objects, enhancing the overall experience."

And in an Aug. 9 interview in the Stanford Shape Lab, Siu and Follmer said they are working with a small team at Volkswagen AG headquarters in Wolfsburg, Germany, to explore how this technology—which combines virtual



While using a Vive VR headset to view virtual objects in front of you, you can reach out and run your hand over those "objects" and feel, via the undulating metal pins on Alexa Siu's shapeShift device, the approximate shape of those objects. This is still very much a research project, but companies such as Volkswagen are taking notice and seeking to leverage its potential for product development. Courtesy of Techmer PM



reality with haptic technology to simulate the feeling of a physical object—could be leveraged to help speed the design and development of vehicles.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on VW's interest this past April, and said the automaker's aim is "to identify potentially costly design problems earlier in the development cycle."

"They want to use more virtual reality than just foam and clay models, to get more of a sense of touch," explained Follmer, who once took a course from Moggridge, and is thrilled that a student awards program has been established in the late designer's name to help extend his legacy.

Meanwhile, Siu, who is considering teaching full-time once she earns her Ph.D., is excited to use her recent BMA prize money to further her work in this area.

Making a difference

Fittingly, like Moggridge, Hoda Khoja says: "I want to be remembered as a designer who can really make a change." Ironically, indirectly because of Bill Moggridge, for her and other BMA winners, that is more likely than not.

For her part, Karin Moggridge recalled recently being "shocked" at learning nearly five years ago that an awards

program had been established in Bill's name. Now living in Portland, Ore., and a well-regarded artist and textile designer in her own right, Karin is still adjusting to life without her partner of nearly 50 years. But seeing the good that is happening to other young designers because of the awards is giving her strength.

She would like to see the BMAs evolve by adding more participating colleges, and she believes firmly in the winners using the prize money to travel abroad. "That mission is so important," she says, "to go out and see the world."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Grace is a writer, editor and marketing communications professional who has been active in B2B journalism since 1980. He was founding editor of and worked for 25 years at *Plastics News*, serving as editorial director, associate publisher and conference director. He was managing editor of *Plastics Engineering* from July 2016 through October 2017, and now is both editor of SPE's *Journal of Blow Molding* and directing content strategy for SPE. He runs his own firm, RC Grace LLC, in Daytona Beach, Fla., and can be contacted at bob@rcgrace.com.



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