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## Eyes on the Prize | Design That Does Good

DESIGN | By PILAR VILADAS | OCTOBER 13, 2010, 12:15 PM



Public housing designed by Elemental, a Chilean design firm. *Courtesy Elemental*

Design isn't only about the latest cutting-edge chair or yet another must-have coffee maker. As demonstrated by the winners of two different design awards, it can sometimes make a fundamental difference in the quality of people's lives — and can even make the difference between life and death. Just look at Longreach, the winner of the **2010 James Dyson Award**. The compact, easy-to-handle buoyancy deployment system, which was

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designed by Samuel Adejolu, shoots an emergency buoyancy aid up to 500 feet out to sea — which could prevent some of the 150 deaths that occur each year in the United States alone when swimmers are swept out to sea by currents or riptides.

The runner-up is Kimberley Hoffman's design for the Sea Kettle, an insulated emergency life raft that uses sunlight to desalinate a day's supply of seawater for up to five people, to minimize the danger of dehydration.

Another design-for-good award, the **Curry Stone Design Prize**, has been given this year to **Sustainable Health Enterprises**, founded by Elizabeth Scharpf, a Harvard M.B.A. who is working with networks of women in Rwanda to make (and sell) sanitary pads from banana leaf fiber, a readily available local material. Rwandan women and girls can miss a considerable number of work and school days each year because they don't have access to the kind of sanitary protection that developed countries take for granted.

Elemental, a Chilean design firm, won the second-place award for "raising the bar in public housing in the developing world" with its design for the Quinta Monroy shantytown in Iquique, Chile. Duplex units are stacked at diagonals to maximize density, and are also designed to make it easy for residents to expand and individualize their homes. Another finalist in the program this year is Maya Pedal, a nongovernmental organization that was founded in Guatemala in 1997 by Carlos Marroquin to turn used bicycles into "bicimaquinas," or pedal-powered machines that can be useful in places without electricity or gasoline. So far, 24 different kinds of machines have been made, from washing machines and blenders to water irrigation devices — putting a new spin on the idea of spinning.