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Room & Board competition offers UW-Stout industrial design seniors spotlight for innovative storage solutions

Sroga, Nguyen, Gilbertson win top prizes for original designs

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Photos attached

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Menomonie, Wis. – For nine years, [Room & Board](#) has partnered exclusively with University of Wisconsin-Stout's [B.F.A. industrial and product design](#) program for its annual student design competition.

Senior industrial design students are challenged each year with a unique prompt to create a piece of furniture for Room & Board that seamlessly fits into the company's existing aesthetic and brand. This spring's project focused on storage solutions and could include concepts in various categories, including media, dining, living, entry, bathroom and kitchen systems.

"The project has been a wonderful yearly event and has allowed us to create a meaningful connection with the industrial design community while exposing us to some great talent," said **Brian Linehan**, UW-Stout alum and Room & Board merchandise and design manager, who started the competition.

After a fast-paced, three-week-long project, students presented their final designs at Room & Board corporate headquarters in Minneapolis, where their 1/8-scale 3D-printed models are showcased.

Three winners were selected and awarded a cash prize in exchange for the rights to produce their designs if they choose. Designs are evaluated on the practicality of manufacturing and cost restraints. This year's winners were:

- First place, \$1,500: **Sadie Sroga**, of Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota: design “Vera”
- Second place, \$1,000: **Moc Chau Nguyen**, of Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam: design “Ravi”
- Third place, \$500: **Bailey Gilbertson**, of Elk Mound: design “Ingrid”

“The project gave me a real sense of what it’s like to design for production in a professional setting,” Sroga said. “It pushes you to work efficiently and think critically about every design decision. It’s a great challenge that gives you a taste of working under real-world timelines while still allowing for a lot of creativity. Knowing the winning design could potentially go into production made it feel even more meaningful.

“Getting to work with a company like Room & Board made the experience even more special. Their commitment to sustainability, timeless design and thoughtful craftsmanship really resonated with me,” she added.

Room & Board sells modern furnishings designed to last, crafted by 12,000 craftspeople across the U.S. It makes an annual donation to support UW-Stout’s industrial design program.

“This project allows senior design students to show what their capabilities are in a short amount of time. We’re grateful for the opportunity to work with the designers at Room & Board,” **Program Director Jennifer Astwood** said.

Nearly 120 graduating School of Art and Design seniors will feature their capstone projects at [**SOAD Senior Show**](#), 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, May 9. Meet with students and talk about their creative works in exhibits throughout Applied Arts and Micheels Hall. Fine art sales will be held throughout the buildings. The Student Artist-in-Residence reception will be held in Furlong Gallery.

[**Design Wisconsin**](#), May 16-18, celebrates Wisconsin's legacy of industrial design and fashion design innovation and impact on culture, commerce, community and brand. The event includes an open house of major Wisconsin and Minnesota design and manufacturer groups. In the past, these have included TREK, Milwaukee Tool, Kohler, Mercury Marine, Polaris, Fiskars, Oshkosh and more.

Storage inspired by simplicity

Sroga and Gilbertson, who will graduate on Saturday, May 10, both created media cabinets inspired by the Scandinavian design principles of simplicity, functionality, use of natural materials and visual harmony.

“I was drawn to how Scandinavian furniture can feel both grounding and elevated at the same time. I wanted ‘Vera’ to evoke a sense of calm and quiet beauty in the living space,” Sroga said. “One of my main design philosophies is ‘less is more,’ and that really shaped how I approached ‘Vera.’ Since it’s meant for a living room, I wanted it to blend in seamlessly with someone’s home while still feeling special. At first glance, ‘Vera’ is clean and simple, but the closer you look, the more you notice the details.”

Each of Sroga’s design choices was intentional, from how the wood grain was laid out to how the pieces connect. “My goal was to create something that feels easy and effortless, but is actually full of careful design decisions,” she added.

Gilbertson thinks the challenge encouraged innovation and creativity. “The name ‘Ingrid’ is derived from the word ‘integrated,’ reflecting how the center shelf and legs are seamlessly incorporated into the overall design. The piece emphasizes clean lines, minimalist style and practical functionality,” she said.

Working in the Senior Industrial Design Studio, students began the creative process by researching Room & Board's design language, brand values, use of materials, and current trends to see where there might be room to create something fresh, Sroga said.

They then moved on to ideation and sketches "to explore as many ideas as possible. The first round was all about pushing creativity without limitations," she said.

After building small-scale models of their top designs, they each selected a final concept and constructed full-size prototypes out of cardboard.

Room & Board merchandising and design team members, all UW-Stout alums, worked with students throughout the process, providing guidance and offering constructive feedback during an in-progress critique before their final design presentations at Room & Board.

The [industrial and product design](#) program is part of the [School of Art and Design](#), one of the largest public art schools in the Midwest. It also offers bachelor's degrees in [animation and digital media](#); [fashion design and development](#); [game design and development-art](#); [graphic design and interactive media](#); [illustration](#); [interior design](#); [studio art](#); [arts administration and entrepreneurship](#); [fashion design and development](#); and [video production](#), as well as an [M.F.A. in design](#). UW-Stout also has a new program in [game and media studies](#).

UW-Stout, a member of the [Universities of Wisconsin](#), is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the [FOCUS2030](#) strategic plan.

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Photos

Room & Board storage competition design "Tremont" by Jake Banasik

Room & Board storage competition design "Declan" by Addie Evans

Room & Board storage competition design "Sartell" by Lauren Chukel