

Canadians Hit Tokyo Design Fest

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VANCOUVER - A group of Vancouver designers is heading to Tokyo next month to prove that Canadians are more than hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The six members of the BARK collective, representing close to three dozen designers from across the country, will present "No Apologies Necessary: Design from Canada" at Tokyo Design Week, one of the world's largest international design fairs.

This year, more than half a million participants from 35 countries are expected at the event. Besides designers, the fair typically draws major corporations, companies looking for innovative ideas and government representatives.

The convergence of the economic, cultural and artistic marketplaces is a major focus of the event. And this blurring of the lines may explain why BARK was passed from department to department when it sought government funding.

Each claimed the collective did not belong in its jurisdiction.

BARK member Robert Studer says that if Canada is to compete in the 21st century, the government has to move beyond this way of thinking.

"In some countries, like Sweden, there is no separation between culture and commerce," Studer said. "Those two are symbiotic, they're integral to one another, and that's the thing that I think we have to start to change in Canada"

BARK will bring a range of ideas and designs to Tokyo, including an integrated shirt-and-tie garment from a group of Montreal designers and, from British Columbia, a coffee table fitted with a special lamp, allowing owners to grow a small patch of lawn inside.

Christian Blyt, an industrial design teacher at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Arts and Design, says it took only three weeks after the call went out to pull together enough material for the exhibit.

"Good things come to those who try," Blyt said, "and now, it's happening."

The Department of Foreign Affairs, the Western Diversification Fund and the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo eventually came up with a total of \$44,000 for the trip, but it only covers half the budget.

The BARK collective hopes the rest will come after the fact, once they've shown the design world that Canadians do more than ship raw logs and sell cheap power downstream.

Tokyo Design Week runs from Oct. 9-24.

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