

## AHEC unveils Designposts for London Design Festival

10 bespoke district markers by next-gen design and architecture talent



Photography by Thom Atkinson, courtesy AHEC.

This September, for the first time, each of London Design Festival's districts will have its own unique sculptural centrepiece – a large-scale wooden waymarker to welcome visitors and capture its distinctive character and heritage.

Dubbed 'Designposts', the 10 monumental pieces will each be designed by students and recent graduates from one of two leading London creative institutions: London Metropolitan University and the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL. Each of the young designers will be working with wild-grown red oak – the most abundant species found in American hardwood forests, and therefore a highly sustainable material resource.

Developed in collaboration between London Design Festival and the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) and made by English furniture maker Benchmark, the Designposts project will not only introduce a thought-provoking new element to

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the festival, it will also serve to showcase the design potential of a relatively underused material, while providing a much-needed platform to the emerging generation of talent.

## A platform for next-generation talent

Over the last 18 months, architecture and design students have had their education significantly disrupted by the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown. Access to workshops and making facilities has been limited by restrictions, and – with no fairs or end-of-year shows – opportunities to showcase their work have been all but eliminated.



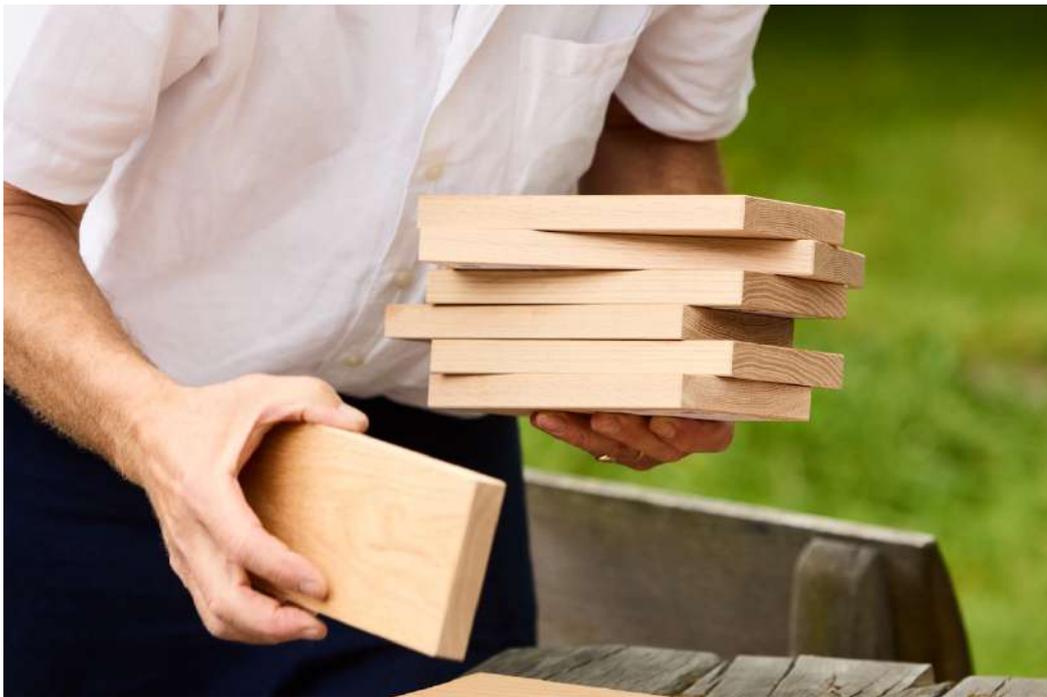
Photography by Thom Atkinson, courtesy AHEC.

Project mentors Peter Marigold, Professor of Design and Entrepreneurialism from London Metropolitan University, and Izaskun Chinchilla, Professor of Architectural Practice at Bartlett School of Architecture, have both collaborated with AHEC on creative projects in the past, and have a proven passion for timber as a material. They selected the 10 students and graduates, assigned them each an LDF district, and asked them to research and develop a concept that would capture its unique identity and idiosyncrasies.

## Designers and their districts

- Carrie Coningsby for Islington
- Fioralba Elezi for Kings Cross
- Daegy Kim for Mayfair
- Dartá Shokrzadeh for Southwark South
- Megan Makinson for Shoreditch
- Aude Saint Joanis for Park Royal
- Kate Woodcock for Clerkenwell
- Faye Greenwood for William Morris Design Line
- Jason Brooker for Design District at Greenwich Peninsula
- Jonah Luswata for Brompton

## Working with wood



Photography by Thom Atkinson, courtesy AHEC.

The 10 pieces will be made by renowned English furniture maker Benchmark. Over the course of an immersive four-day visit to its Berkshire workshops, the students and graduates will have the opportunity to catch up on lost hands-on making time. They will have the chance to hone their abilities working alongside Benchmark's highly skilled team of craftspeople, tapping into their expertise and experience, and

sharing in an exhaustive understanding of red oak's material properties and environmental impact.

*"Our hope is that we can share our knowledge and love of making with this group of graduates. All of whom have suffered an acute lack of access to workshop time over the last 18 months. Four days won't see the projects start to finish, but we'll be ensuring that each graduate gets meaningful involvement in the process. It's going to be a festival of making."*

– Sean Sutcliffe, Founder and MD, Benchmark

For the graduates, it will be an immersive design-and-making experience that will enrich their understanding of the performance and sustainability of hardwoods as well as invaluable real-world experience of dealing with diverse stakeholders, presenting ideas, and handling press.

*"It is very exciting to be working again with young talent, from our experience they have a freshness and a willingness to explore and engage with new thinking. We have done many projects now with multiple designers, which is also very exciting, because it always produces surprises and variety and shows the power of creative minds, as each interpretation is always different. What sets this project apart for us is the fact this is the first time we are working in multiple locations, which will have its logistical challenges, but will enable us to embed our messages and ideas across London at a time when design is a focus for the city."*

– David Venables, European Director, AHEC

Installed by 15 September, the completed Designposts will act as beacons, signalling to festival goers that they have arrived at an LDF design district, and serving as a natural starting point from which to explore the other projects and installations within it.

## Sustainability and carbon storage



Photography by Thom Atkinson, courtesy AHEC.

One of the key aims of the project is to communicate to both designers and the wider public that hardwoods such as red oak are viable material options from a sustainability perspective.

Red oak is the most abundant species in American hardwood forests yet is rarely used in European design. Over-reliance on a small selection of woods can have a damaging effect on forest ecosystems, so AHEC believes that designers have a responsibility to use whatever nature provides. Growing wild rather than planted, red oak represents both a highly sustainable and renewable material option, and one with significant aesthetic appeal for designers and architects.

Furthermore, as a timber, red oak serves as a carbon store, locking away the CO<sub>2</sub> absorbed from the atmosphere during the tree's lifetime, and reducing the Designposts' carbon footprint as a result.

The Designposts will be erected on plinths manufactured from cross-laminated panels of tulipwood, repurposed from LDF and AHEC's 2019 Landmark project MultiPLY, which will in turn be used again in future editions of the festival. After the

festival, the Designposts themselves will likely be donated to London institutions, either to live permanently or be repurposed for new student projects.

## Notes to editors

For more information about Designposts at LDF, and AHEC's other creative projects, please contact [emily@zetteler.co.uk](mailto:emily@zetteler.co.uk).

### **About the material**

American red oak is the dominant species in US hardwood forests, representing 17.9% of the overall resource. The distinctively grained wood is not always red; its name comes from the colour of its leaves in the fall. Red oak trees grow naturally almost exclusively in North America, although the species is planted elsewhere. They are widely distributed throughout most of the eastern United States in mixed hardwood forests. The trees are very tall and there are many subspecies, growing from north to south; some high in the mountains and others on lowland, giving rise to different characteristics. Red oaks are regarded as highly sustainable for both domestic and export consumption and are more abundant than white oaks.

### **AHEC**

For over 30 years the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been at the forefront of wood promotion in Europe, successfully building a distinctive and creative brand for US hardwoods. About American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC)  
For over 30 years the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been at the forefront of wood promotion in Europe, successfully building a distinctive and creative brand for U.S. hardwoods. AHEC's support for creative design projects such as Connected, Legacy and MultiPly for the London Design Festival demonstrate the performance potential of these sustainable materials and provide valuable inspiration.

AHEC has pioneered the modelling of environmental Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for hardwoods, an approach that has since been adopted by other industries. LCA measures a number of impacts: primary energy demand (from renewable and non-renewable resources); global warming potential; acidification potential; eutrophication potential; and photochemical ozone creation potential.

[americanhardwood.org](http://americanhardwood.org)  
[@ahec\\_europe](https://twitter.com/ahec_europe)

### **Benchmark**

Benchmark is one of the UK's leading furniture-makers. Founded by Terence Conran and Sean Sutcliffe in 1984, the company has a mission to create furniture that contributes to human health and wellbeing, using natural, sustainable, and non-toxic materials.

With workshops in Berkshire and Dorset, Benchmark works with many of the world's leading architects and designers on commercial and residential projects. From forest to finished piece, it is positioned as a leader in sustainable enterprise, having pioneered and invested in the use of metrics to provide clear, unambiguous and independently verified information about the impact of its products.

Benchmark's approach marries forward-thinking design with exemplary levels of craftsmanship and creativity, producing furniture that exudes natural warmth and soul.

benchmarkfurniture.com  
@madebybenchmark