

# WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **What Design Can Do reveals the thirteen winners of the Make it Circular Challenge.**

The winning projects showcase the best in climate innovation to create a more sustainable society.

**Amsterdam, 3 May 2023** – The wait is over. What Design Can Do (WDCD) has announced the thirteen winners of the Make it Circular Challenge, representing innovative strategies for building a more circular society. Initiated in partnership with the IKEA Foundation, the competition now enters an exciting new phase as finalists gain access to a €10.000 award and development training package designed to launch their ideas into action.

Tasked with selecting the winners was an international jury comprising twelve leading experts in design, climate action and entrepreneurship, including **Arthur Huang (founder, Miniwiz)**, **Bas van Abel, founder, Fairphone**), and **Corine Gray (Unreasonable Group)**. Deliberating together both online and in-person, the jury selected thirteen winners from a shortlist of 50 high-potential nominees. In the end, the winning projects won over the Jury by exceeding expectations across the competition's five criteria: impact, creativity & design, feasibility, scalability, and teamwork.

*"This year's selection process was very competitive," says WDCD's co-founder and creative director Richard van der Laken. "Not just because there were so many engaging and innovative ideas—but also because we recognise how urgent and complex the circular transition really is. The winning projects reflect this in their diversity and vision, and I'm looking forward to seeing the impact they'll have, both individually and together."*

The Make it Circular Challenge asked creative entrepreneurs worldwide to come up with circular products, services, spaces and systems that would help us tackle the root of the climate crisis. Participants were encouraged to submit their projects in one of five categories, representing key value chains and industries like consumer goods, packaging or food. The 13 winning projects are divided loosely among these categories, but also closely relate to the three fundamental aspects of circularity: designing to last, working with nature and using what already exists.

The first is all about taking the long view and learning to think about how products can be designed in terms of its entire lifecycle. This approach can be seen in projects like **Alterist Marketplace** (United Kingdom), a community-led platform for upcycled products, **Nivogo** (Türkiye), a pioneering circular economy startup refurbishing and recirculating products collected from users and partners, and **Balena** (Israel), a new kind of bioplastic that is both durable and compostable.

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The second approach is a matter of working with nature and bringing about a more-than-human approach to design. This was a particularly popular strategy used by winners like **Mujo** (Germany), a biodegradable packaging made from seaweed, **Apidae** (Mexico), a system of breeding boxes for pollinating insect, **CoolBricks** (the Netherlands and Uganda), a bio-stabilized brick made from cow-dung, **Landless Food** (Hungary) a project that highlights the issue of food insecurity and explores the potential of microalgae to regenerate extinct flavour families and revive culinary traditions, and **Drinking Sea Water** (Germany) an Open Source purification device that can make nearly any water drinkable at a household level.

Lastly, there were also projects that focused on reuse and recovery, looking at how we can create new value out of discarded or neglected materials that already exist. This includes **Resortecs** (Belgium, a startup that is developing solutions for textile disassembly and recycling, **Guiding the Runoff** (Mexico), an adaptive reuse and urban renewal project in Tijuana, Mexico. In particular, three projects looked at how crop waste could be used to create new products: **Rethread Africa's** (Kenya) textile solution uses maize husk residue to reduce resources and emissions. **Saathi** (India) offers biodegradable sanitary pads made from banana fiber, while **Craste** (India) creates packaging from crop residue using circular fiber technology.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE WINNERS?

Work now begins on strengthening each winning idea, deepening their potential impact, and putting their ideas into action. All 13 winning teams will receive €10.000 in funding, and access to a development programme co-created with Impact Hub Amsterdam. This programme begins with a week-long bootcamp, and is tailor-made for the special blend of change-makers present among participants. Winners can expect mentorship on a range of skills they need to make their projects a success – from developing a viable business model, to impact-assessment and networking. Combined with valuable exposure and publicity, the programme is set to provide unique support for the thinkers, doers and makers of the new economy. All winning projects can now be viewed online via the Challenge platform.

To view all the winning projects, visit: <https://makeitcircular.whatdesigncando.com/winners>

## ABOUT THE MAKE IT CIRUCLAR CHALLENGE

The Make it Circular Challenge is What Design Can Do's fourth climate action challenge in partnership with the IKEA Foundation. Launched in October 2022, the design competition called for bold solutions to. The Make it Circular Challenge provided in-depth design briefs presenting original research on circularity and highlighting opportunities for designers and entrepreneurs alike. Ove 650 participants submitted projects across themes: what we eat, what we wear, what we buy, how we package and how we build. The Make it Circular Challenge is active in six cities around the world: Nairobi (with partner **Kenya Climate Innovation Center**), Tokyo (with partner **Shibaura House**), São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (with partner **Mandacaru Design**), Delhi (with partner **Quicksand**), Mexico City, and Amsterdam. All projects can now be viewed on the Challenge platform at: [makeitcircular.whatdesigncando.com](https://makeitcircular.whatdesigncando.com)

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## FOR THE EDITORS

For photos and winners animation, view our press kit. More information about past Challenges and What Design Can Do is available on our [press webpage](#).

For any press enquiries or more information regarding the Make it Circular Challenge, please contact: [louise@whatdesigncando.com](mailto:louise@whatdesigncando.com)

## ABOUT WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

What Design Can Do (WDCD) is an international platform that advocates for design as a tool for social change. Since 2011, we have undertaken numerous activities to promote the role of designers in addressing the world's most pressing societal and environmental issues. WDCD has hosted 15 successful conferences in Amsterdam, São Paulo, and México City. In 2016 WDCD launched an ambitious design challenge programme that engages the creative community with urgent societal issues such as the well-being of refugees and climate change.

To see previous Challenge winners, visit <https://www.whatdesigncando.com/projects/>

For more information, visit [www.whatdesigncando.com](http://www.whatdesigncando.com)

## ABOUT THE IKEA FOUNDATION

The IKEA Foundation is a strategic philanthropy that focuses its grant-making efforts on tackling the two biggest threats to children's futures: poverty and climate change. It currently grants more than €200 million per year to help improve family incomes and protect the planet from climate change. Since 2009, the IKEA Foundation has granted more than €1.5 billion to create a better future for children and their families. In 2021 the Foundation decided to make an additional €1 billion over the next five years to accelerate the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions. Learn more at: [www.ikeafoundation.org](http://www.ikeafoundation.org)