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Joe Kaplan
 Broker Associate, Ecobroker

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Design Museum exhibit explores travel alternatives

PHOTO
 By Diane Chin Lui | Enterprise art critic | March 03, 2008 14:04



The former information boards that describe the UC Davis Design Museum, and its use of eco-friendly materials, have been replaced with new tableaus designed by Kenneth Fung. The new boards offer larger and brighter graphics with less text, but the information remains the same. In keeping with the venue's green practices, the boards are held with giant clippers to the wall panels. (Courtesy photo)

Driving along Highway 99 between Fresno and Bakersfield, one may become bored, sleepy or hungry. In need of a break.

A likely spot would be one of the 87 safety rest stops found along California's highways. But consider: After finding the restrooms and scanning the huge semis, have you ever paid attention to the design of the roadside rest stop?

Most folks probably just hop back into the car and continue on their way.

The UC Davis Design Museum's current exhibition, which features designs for roadside 'GreenStops,' may make you linger a bit longer at the next rest stop ... or, in some cases, avoid getting out of the car altogether, in favor of finding a fast-food place instead. The exhibit designs are highlights from the Great Central Valley GreenStop Design Competition.

In 2006, Caltrans and the Great Valley Center sponsored a competition to design a 'green roadside rest area.' The sponsors wanted to generate innovative ideas for future rest stops in California. The Tipton rest area, found along Highway 99 in Tulare County, was chosen for this competition, which boasted a \$10,000 grand prize. An estimated 3 million travelers pass through the area each year.

The clever exhibition design weaves a continuous ribbon of posters, like a winding highway, through the exhibition space. In keeping with the museum's eco-exhibitions theme, a minimum amount of glue was used, and the walls weren't punctured much. Instead, the posters are suspended from the ceiling on reusable hooks and wires.

Each competitor's name has been printed on the lower edge of the posters, instead of using a label that would have wasted resources and required environmentally damaging glue.

The posters are printed on eco-friendly materials, rather than plastic. The material is bio-degradable and odorless. Design Museum director Tim McNeil said that the print-maker still is experimenting, which may explain why some of the text is out of focus. The pebbly texture of the materials also interferes with one's ability to read the text.

When the exhibition closes this weekend, the posters will be given to design students, who will use them to create purses, wallets and carrying bags.

While following the twists and turns of the posters, one can hear the sound of cars driving by; these noises are piped in by gallery speakers. But as is the case with an actual drive on Highway 99, the gallery experience can become tedious. One poster after another, on this continuous exhibition path, forms a monotonous presentation without break.

At times, it's difficult to distinguish one competitor from another.

Dense visuals and information-rich text fill each submission. Each entry requires close study, since it's hard to take in the wealth of detail in a brief glance.

The posters reminded me more of a science fair than an exhibition.

The designs range from the practical 'Actively Resting,' by Michael Wenrich - the grand prize winner - to Emily Nakashima's frightening 'The Bold and the Fearful.' Wenrich presents seven design strategies that include recycling water, employing solar panels for energy usage, waterless urinals and green roofs (with plants atop them).

In sharp contrast, Nakashima offers designs for drivers who want drama in their lives. Her illustrations reveal night scenes of people peeping from behind trees in the parking lot, a couple making out, and a driver peering out a car window at another driver. A particularly creepy picture shows a lone woman standing in front of stalls in a darkly lit restroom, with ghostly shadows on the walls.

For 'Highway Turbulence: Wind Tunnel - A Dynamic Experience,' Margo Angelopoulos erected panels along the highway to create a sort of wind tunnel. As automobiles and trucks drive past, the resulting draft spins the panels, which in turn generate electrical energy.

Laura Garofalo illustrates possible ways to recycle fog in 'Fog Harvester,' an honorable mention. Darryl Booker's 'GreenStop Oasis' presents an aesthetically pleasing, multi-pointed star-shaped canopy of solar panels.

Other contestants offer innovative ways to design a rest stop. Andra Areshta, in 'The Moveable Picture Show: The Rest Stop as

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Highway Spectacle,' places semis as locations for waste water filtration, picnic areas and restrooms (a novel method of re-imagining the 'porta-potty').

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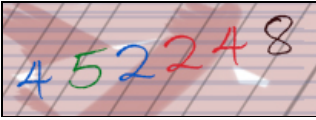
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