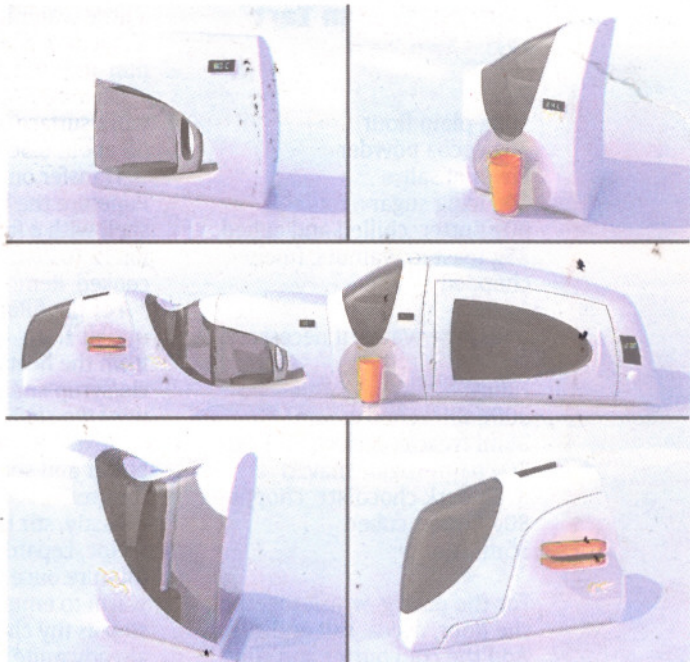




Ahmad Abedini believes in tailoring designs to local needs.



(Above) By putting together components like the juicer, coffeemaker and toaster, among others, the Kitchen Train provides a neat and space-saving profile (below).

The Train that saves space

The only Malaysian entry to make it to the final stages of a global design competition caught our eye, so we tracked down its originator to find out the details.

IT'S not uncommon to find electrical appliances scattered about in most home kitchens. There could be an oven installed at one end and a toaster plugged into a wall socket at another, while a coffeemaker occupies the counter opposite. Well, what if all these components could be merged into a single unit as a space-saving measure; a unit that allows for flexible individual detachment at any time?

That is the idea behind Ahmad Abedini's Kitchen Train concept. Abedini's design integrates six commonly-used components – a coffeemaker, toaster, microwave oven, juicer, blender and vacuum cleaner – into one unified element with modular functionality. The shape of each item is cleverly blended into the next with the resulting design taking on the recognizable appearance of a train, hence its name, Kitchen Train.

It's an idea that seems to have struck a chord, as Abedini's design idea was awarded the Golden A' Design Award in the Home Appliances Design category 2011/2012 from the online A'Design Awards & Competition. (adesignaward.com).

The PhD student from Iran who is currently pursuing studies in industrial design at University Putra Malaysia had also submitted Kitchen Train for the Electrolux Design Lab Competition 2013. It emerged as the only Malaysian entry that made the initial cut of 105 shortlisted entries out of 1,700 submissions from 29 countries. However, the Kitchen Train was later disqualified because only entries that have not been published or exhibited elsewhere are eligible for the Electrolux competition (something Abedini had overlooked).

"Designing innovative yet practical home appliances has always been my area of interest," says Abedini, 39, during a recent interview.

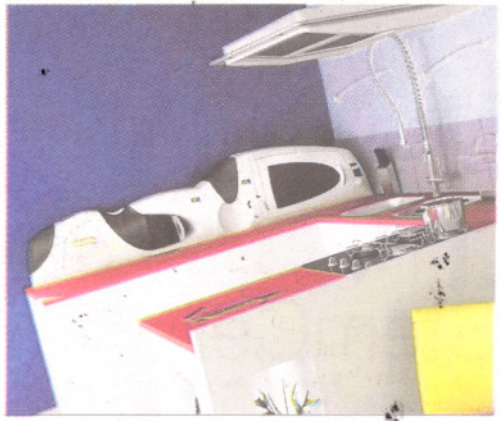
"The idea for the Kitchen Train is to cut wastage of space, as many of these appliances occupy a large chunk of a kitchen's layout, especially with smaller kitchen sizes these days.

"In their separate forms, they are termed visual noise because they conjure up the image of a disorderly cooking environment," says Abedini.

The Golden A' Design Award is his first win and it has encouraged him to spend his time designing for competitions when not studying or sitting for exams.

"I must thank my supervisor Dr Ahmad Rizal (Abd Rahman) in my industrial design department who encouraged and supported me throughout."

He is hoping that his concept will translate into a real product and says he may approach



manufacturers to see if there is any interest in producing the Kitchen Train, with even more enhanced features, of course.

"In industrial design, we study the 'architecture' of products with thorough consideration and emphasise factors like materials, colours and texture. For instance, the design of a chair would involve careful regard for ergonomics by noting how the dimension and body size of humans differ across different nationalities."

This former lecturer at an Iranian university says industrial designers have the ability to combine multiple knowledge areas such as mechanical science, ergonomic science and analysis of markets.

"For me, it's interesting because there's a lot of creativity and innovation involved. You can also be part of the change to design a new product if you find flaws in the existing one.

"My rule of thumb, however, is that you can neither design for the poor nor rich without knowing anything about them, their lifestyles and needs. Consumer behaviour is influenced by different attributes, hence it's important to know who you are designing for and your intention," he opines.

What does he consider bad design?

Abedini says that would depend on the individual's beliefs and the kind of parameters and culture his working with: "I personally don't subscribe to the concept of producing a generic product for universal use, as that would disregard the culture and needs of a local audience.

"Now that I'm in Malaysia, it has been most rewarding to learn and observe the amalgamation of three big cultures in one place; this could perhaps spark an idea or two for my next design!" he enthuses.

■ Final results of the Electrolux Design Lab Competition 2013 can be seen at electrolux-designlab.com.

Kitchen Train concept images from Ahmad Abedini.