



Design
Emphasis
2026



Student Furniture Design Competition



Competition Overview

Design Emphasis is widely acclaimed as one of the foremost furniture design competitions for students in the U.S. Sponsored by IWF and its owners, the competition offers design students a unique opportunity to demonstrate their talent and originality before a judging panel of furniture and design industry designers, manufacturing and retail executives, and members of the trade press who have design-oriented backgrounds. Design Emphasis has helped turn the spotlight on such previous winners as internationally acclaimed designers Ini Archibong and Sean Yoo. The competition provides a unique chance to experience an international industry trade show, make important career contacts and exchange ideas with other students from around the nation. Participating in Design Emphasis can help launch your career in design.

Who May Enter

Any student currently enrolled in an undergraduate degree program at an accredited college or university and enrolled in an undergraduate furniture design course at the time the entry is designed may enter a project in the competition. Projects must be designed or completed in the Summer or Fall Semesters of 2025 or Spring Semester of 2026. Entries must not have been entered in any student or design competitions prior to Design Emphasis.

The competition is intended for full or part-time undergraduate students, not for continuing education students who have established design shops or careers. Students will need their instructors endorsement to enter the competition.

Prizes

A Winner, Merit, and Honorable Mention award will be given in each category. In addition, there will be a "Best of Show" prize given to the outstanding furniture piece in the competition. The following cash prizes are given:

Best of Show:	\$1,500
Winner in each category:	\$1,000
Merit in each category:	\$ 500
Honorable Mention in each category:	\$ 250



Categories for Judging

Seating

To include upholstered and non-upholstered seating. Style, function, comfort, and stability must be addressed.



Case Goods

Bedroom, dining room, wall systems, display/storage case goods designed for residential or business use. Stability, style and function are important.



Accent Furniture

Traditional tables and small accent pieces. Lighting, coffee tables, etc.

Commercial/Office/Hospitality Furniture

Furniture designed specifically for use in office, hospitality, health care, college and university markets. Functional and design considerations, as well as adaptability/integration of computer and/or communications technology (when applicable) must be addressed.



Design Creativity

A furniture item that expresses uniqueness in design, use of materials, construction technique and/or creative solution to a functional need. Design execution and craftsmanship on a high order is expected in this category.



Entry Process

Contest Requirements

Design Emphasis 2026 must be the first competition in which the piece has been entered.

School Registration is required prior to student entry.

Any instructor at an accredited college, university or trade school may enter their school by completing the "School Registration Form" which can be downloaded from the IWF 2026 website (<https://www.iwfatlanta.com/attend/design-emphasis-student-furniture-competition/>) or by emailing LCH@iwfatlanta.com. **All schools must be registered to enter by February 27, 2026.**

Once the School Registration Form is received, detailed instructions on student registration process will be emailed to the school in early 2026.

Student Registration

All students who wish to enter a project **must register no later than May 1, 2026**. Instructions on Student Registration will be sent to the school's instructor. Note: All registrations must be endorsed by the instructor of the furniture design course in which the student is enrolled.

Project Entry

To enter the competition, students must submit by May 8, 2026:

4 High-Resolution Photographs

All registered students must submit 4 unaltered high-resolution digital photographs of the project (without props and on a blank background - preferably white or light colored) showing front, back and any distinguishing features of the project. Do not submit schematics or 'life-style' settings.

Written Description

Photos must be accompanied by a written description of 100 words or less in a MS Word or PDF format. The dimensions of the finished piece must be included in the description as well as the materials used in the construction.

Students may enter more than one design, but must use separate entry forms for each entry and a separate zipfile/link or email for photos of each entry.

Finalist Entry Requirements

Finalist entries must be accompanied by an illustration board. This must be 22" x 28", show the function of the piece, and be self-explanatory. To enhance the project, the illustration board should be as informative and attractive as possible. Use the illustration board to identify features which may not be readily apparent. Design schematics and lifestyle settings are appropriate here. The board itself is not judged, but is a submission requirement.

Student's name and school must not be written on the board, but should be written on a card attached to the back of the board which can be removed and placed on the front after the judging at the Fair. **Please email a picture of your board to LCH@iwfatlanta.com before including it in your shipping container.**

Finalists must ship their project, illustration boards, and assembly instructions to Atlanta (shipping paid by IWF) or deliver the project in person to the Georgia World Congress Center on August 23rd and 24th, 2026. Detailed shipping instructions will be provided to all finalists.



Judging Process

Prescreening

Pre-screening of all projects submitted by the deadline will take place in mid-May 2026. A limited judging panel will review all entries and determine finalists in each of the categories. The pre-screening judges may determine that an entry is better suited for a different category than the one to which it was submitted.

Final Judging Takes Place at IWF 2026!

These finalists will be invited to show the actual projects at IWF 2026 in a specially designed booth on the trade show floor. Winners will be selected by a panel of experienced professionals associated with the furniture industry, including manufacturers, designers, trade press and retailers.

Winners Announced on the Show Floor at IWF 2026

Winners will be announced in the Design Emphasis booth during a special ceremony at IWF 2026.

Judging Criteria

The following is the criteria used by the judges and the value of each criteria.

DESIGN (40%)

- Originality or improvement of an existing design.
- Adaptability or interpretation of furniture from other periods.
- Development / refinement of function, use and construction issues.
- Creative use of materials.

MANUFACTURING (20%)

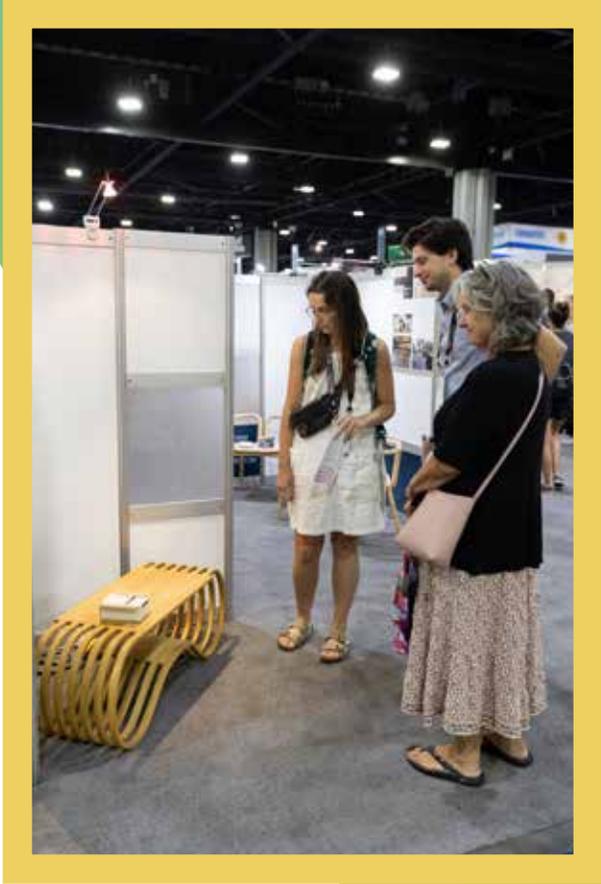
- Is the design reasonably adaptable or suitable for volume production methods?
- Possibilities and ease of packaging for distribution.

MARKETABILITY (20%)

- Does the product meet a need of the market for which it is designed?
- The product must effectively perform the function for which it is designed (ergonomics, stability, durability, no tip danger).

WORKMANSHIP (20%)

- Attention to construction and finishing.
- Design / product execution and craftsmanship must be complete and fully functional.



Finalists and Instructors are invited to attend IWF 2026 with their projects

Students whose projects are selected as finalists will be notified in late May 2026 and will receive detailed instructions on preparing their project for shipment and judging at the show.

IWF provides two nights complimentary lodging at a hotel selected by IWF staff for finalist students and their instructors who plan to attend IWF 2026. Additional nights may be arranged in exchange for volunteer hours working in the Education Conference (limited availability).

Travel to and from the fair and expenses while attending are at the student's or instructor's expense.

IWF will prepay the freight costs for shipping finalists' projects to Atlanta. Shipments must be made through the freight handler designated by the Fair or delivered personally by the student. For those who personally deliver, reimbursement will be based on zones rather than actual mileage.

Security is provided throughout the Fair. However, IWF and its sponsors assume no responsibility for damage or loss during shipment to and from Atlanta or display at the show.



IWF and its sponsors reserve the right to photograph projects and participants for use in publicity without compensation and shall not be responsible for any copyright or design infringement. While the design remains the property of the student, commercial transactions should be avoided during the Fair.

For more information contact: Liz Hosp

Email: LCH@iwfatlanta.com

Phone: 404-693-8333

International Woodworking Fair
3520 Piedmont Rd., NE
Suite 120
Atlanta, GA 30305

www.iwfatlanta.com/attend/design-emphasis-student-furniture-competition/

