

## Three-page special

# DESIGNING OUR FUTURE

Still think that design is just about drawing castles in the air?

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# Less handweaving, more medical devices: and designers intend to hammer home that THE BACKBONE

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## Design: business and education

BY FIONA NESS

When Adam de Eyto takes to the hills, he wears a 20-year-old rucksack he designed as a prototype for outdoor gear manufacturer Lowe Alpine, back when he was a rookie product designer. Lowe didn't go for this particular design – not enough bells and whistles on it – but as a former scout, de Eyto knew that a really good rucksack should be durable, light, accessible, comfortable, weatherproof and streamlined.

As a designer, he also knew how to deliver that – and make it aesthetically pleasing to boot. A quick scan of the rucksacks mountaineers are packing today, and the best of these are just as de Eyto imagined back in 1995.

Now, as the director of the University of Limerick's design research group, Design Factors, and a former lecturer in industrial design at Carlow IT, de Eyto has been instrumental in bringing Irish product design into the 21st century. His students populate the R&D departments of the multinational medical devices firms with bases here in Ireland: Boston Scientific, Johnston and Johnston and Logitech are all key employers for UL graduates.

According to the government's design czar Alex Milton, the programme director of Irish Design 2015, design is the new backbone of

Alex Milton, the programme director at Irish Design 2015; Bono wearing his 'Fly' glasses designed by Design Partners in Bray



## ‘Cartoon connection’ sees Irish animation set for further success

BY COLETTE SEXTON

With five Oscar nominations since 2002 and a sector valuation of €150 million, the Irish animation industry is thriving. The sale last week of award-winning Dublin animation studio Brown Bag Films to 9 Story Media Group for a projected sum of €40 million is a further boost to the sector, with news of 50 more jobs to come at the company.

There are about 30 animation companies in Ireland, the vast majority of which are indigenous outfits, producing content watched by 100 million people in 120 countries worldwide. About 90 per cent of their turnover is export and they employ a workforce of almost 2,000 people.

Andrew Kavanagh, chief executive of Dublin-based Kavaleer Productions, said this would increase as Animation Ireland, a group of Irish animators which promotes the work of the industry internationally, is becoming a force for change. “Having cut its teeth at an entrepreneurial level, the animation industry has now turned its attention to changing the political landscape so its potential can be truly unfettered,” he said.

The group has a mandate to work with third-level institutions to improve training and increase graduate levels, expand co-production treaties to increase international sales opportunities, and work with the broadcast sector domestically to improve quotas around children's broadcasting.

“If the Irish animation sector can change the script, there will be a happy ending. Judging by its tenacity to date, there is no reason to doubt that the sector could increase its worth to €500 million by 2025. And, like every good story, there's sure to be a sequel,” Kavanagh said.

Susan Broe, co-founder at three-year-old production company Wiggleywoo, said the success of bigger companies such as Brown Bag Films and Cartoon Saloon had shown new firms it was possible to compete internationally.

“We've now proved that animation produced in this little country can compete with some of the big animation studios the world over,” she said.

She said that video-on-demand was the wave of the future for animation in Ireland, but the hard part of production was still raising money.

“In the next few years, there'll be a lot more opportunities with VOD channels as people move

to on-demand,” she said. “Hopefully, they'll have more and more money to commission and buy content like Netflix has started to.

“Now the Irish economy has picked up, here's hoping that more funding will be made available to help companies grow and develop their ideas. In the last seven years or so, budgets for funding were constantly slashed.”

Moe Honan, of Galway-based Moetion Films, said that the industry is growing, but in the future it must be able to respond to market needs.

“Animation is not solely animation. It demands a wide, diverse set of skills and subsets of skills to make a creative business work: artistic, technical and business. And it needs continuous development and re-investment,” she said.

She said that support and training for the industry were also necessary so that it could continue to provide top-class service to international partners and nurture Irish talent.

Animated film *Two by Two* (below) was produced by Galway-based Moetion Films



national and international business. For example, he said that Glanbia's new in-house design team won't be creating packages for the products Glanbia puts on the supermarket shelves, but informing the basis of the very food Glanbia is creating.

“Design isn't just a piece of styling, the cherry on top,” said Milton. “It's a fundamental part of business development. All the progressive international companies have chief design officers who sit alongside their chief executives.

“Twenty years ago, marketing was a black art; design is now at that stage; we have to get the message across how essential it is to integrate design into companies,” Milton said. “Everyone talks about Ireland becoming known for innovation, well, design is a key component of that innovation.”

Yet when we think about Irish design, we traditionally think about weaving and craft-work – at a push, architecture and animation.

Designers across all sectors are hoping the government initiative, Irish Design 2015, is changing that. Through the Year of Irish Design, Ireland is promoting its high-value designs which combine workmanship, tradition, skill and heritage, but is also for the first time attempting to realise the worth of the entire design industry to the future economy. Irish design companies who are front-end selling lucrative but sometimes intangible skills are now being recognised as key drivers of our economic growth.

UL's de Eyto said the ID2015 initiative is working – that people are really beginning to question the identity of a national design industry and trying to communicate our point of difference on an international stage.

To date, few of Ireland's homegrown design consultancy firms have had an international presence. Of those that do, Bray-based Design Partners is the most well known. Its staff of over 30 product designers, graphic designers and engineers compete respectably at international level.

The business was begun in the mid-80s by directors Brian Stephens and David Morgan after they were introduced to each other by Enterprise Ireland.

Today, the company has just completed a €1.3 million expansion of its premises in Bray, and will be hiring more employees within the year.

Stephens said the main elements of Design Partners' business are patented medical devices, smart connected devices for industrial solutions, and business to business products. The company has also done exploratory design work for Apple, and worked on the Nest, an intelligent home monitor created by ex-Apple employees.

On Saturday, the firm picked up two prestigious international design awards at the

## Memory inspires design duo

Designers Peter Sheehan and Cathal Loughnane are part of a new breed of Irish designer-craftspeople. Their designs are on show during Liminal, the flagship exhibition for ID2015 which is showcasing Irish design talent around the world. Its aim is to grow Ireland's reputation abroad as a source of innovative design products and services. Sheehan and Loughnane are the makers of the History Chair and a memory device called the Ibi.

“When I was asked to become involved in the flagship exhibition for the Year of Design, it was a pressure situation,” said Sheehan. It was January and the first exhibit was taking place in April. “But [I thought] how could you not get involved in the biggest thing to happen in design in 25 years?”

It was to be an exhibition of collaborations and Sheehan had an insurance policy – he and Loughnane of the design firm, Design Partners, already had a collaborative piece called the History Chair, which was exhibition ready. They would show this piece, but also begin a completely new collaboration for Liminal.

The pair have created a bespoke object from natural materials sourced in Ireland, such as wood turned in Wexford, Shannon limestone and homespun linen. Inside, they have placed electronics which allow viewers to record a sound which evokes a particular memory. “Emotions are what drives our engagement with objects, and one of the senses which create emotions – but which is often neglected – is sound,” said Sheehan.

They called the memory box, Ibi – the Latin word for ‘there’.

The first sound the designers placed in Ibi was that of curlews on the Shannon estuary. “That was a memory I had from myself, going out on the estuary on a boat as a small boy,” said Sheehan.

The idea is that people can go to a website and select off-the-peg sound memories or upload their own audio

and have it embedded in their Ibi. “And then, every once and a while, when you want to hear the sound, you roll the cylinder and it gives you a bit of a lift,” Sheehan said.

What do we need to do in Ireland to support really strong design work? According to Sheehan, “there needs to be a long-term game supported by government and entrepreneurs to build a degree of infrastructure to manufacture certain categories of products, to maximise their potential.

“Our History Chair is being produced by a solo craftsman in Monahan. The next step would be batch produced in the dozens by three or four workmen, and then the next step would be of the type of production already being undertaken in Britain – companies of 20 to 100 people who can produce something not far off mass production,” Sheehan said. He believes Ireland is ten years away from that, but it's achievable.

“The hope is that the Year of Design will be the catalyst for the creative people to go out and do their thing. I'm going to practice what I preach. The proof of the success of the initiative for me is whether I'm in Stockholm or Milan next year showing some new pieces,” he said.

“That's where the future is. ID2015 has served that purpose being that first rung in the ladder. The next rungs need to be built by the creative people themselves.”



Cathal Loughnane and Peter Sheehan and their History Chair (inset)



# that's the reality of Irish design today, their work is about innovation, not styling

# OF BUSINESS



Adam de Eyto in the Design & Manufacturing Technology Studio at the University of Limerick Eamon Ward

Industrial Designers Society of America Awards in Seattle, and way back when Bono needed a pair of glasses to kit out his alter ego, The Fly, Design Partners got the gig.

Design, Stephens said, is the synthesis of marketing ambition with scientific excellence and an understanding of what the consumer wants, and applying all of that where it is commercially relevant.

"If you are going to make products in future, they are going to be more intelligent and intuitive and usable by people," he said.

"They are going to evolve as their use changes, so businesses are going to need a complicated multidisciplinary research group of which design will be an important part. Forging a strong link between the senior people in a company and their design staff, there's a big responsibility and an opportunity there."

Stephens believes the new generation of entrepreneurs in Ireland are already grasping this opportunity, and as such will be key drivers of our economy in the future. "They have a very good scientific grounding, know their marketing and their business model well. They know the ability of good design to generate wealth, and how to apply design to business," he said.

According to Stephens, the biggest success of the year of Irish Design will be to foster collaboration between the engineering, software, marketing, management and design disciplines in Ireland and internationally.

"Everyone needs to collaborate better and quicker," he said. "We have the tools now to do it. Technology moves quickly and so does the competition, so we need to be fast and light in utilising our creative connections around the world."

For Marcel Twohig of new design con-

sultancy Notion in Dublin, being small and agile has brought success for his business since he formed it with design partner Ian Molton in 2013.

Amid smaller contracts from Irish firms, a lucrative international contract from Panasonic has given the consultancy time and cash to develop its own products, such as watches, chairs and lamps.

"We're probably not that businessy, but designers are fundamentally entrepreneurial," Twohig said. "After our work with Panasonic we had the choice to pay ourselves a bonus or hire more staff and take on more work, or take some time out to develop our own things. We chose the latter. We were able to both survive the recession and do what we want, which is the most important thing for us – the freedom to explore has been more important recently than profit or growth."

"We don't see the bigger companies coming in and opening up their own R&D facilities as a threat. You change and evolve and find income in other places. At the end of the day if you are valuable to a client, you're valuable to them," Twohig said.

Since the end of the manufacturing industry in Ireland, many in the industry feel the future of Irish design is to be found in the intersections between disciplines, designing here for manufacturing abroad.

Noel Joyce's Maglus Stylus for the iPad might have been made in China, but it was designed in Tullamore, said Marc O'Riain, president of the Institute of Designers in Ireland. "This is a product, but much of the design work being undertaken in Ireland today is actually more virtual."

O'Riain welcomes the connections between design disciplines and business made through ID2015, although he acknowledges the initiative is coming 50 years too late (a government-backed 'year of design' was first recommended in the 1962 'Scandinavian Report' which saw the establishment of Kilkenny Design and the Crafts Council).

Through the website, IDI-design.com, O'Riain is now creating a directory of accredited Irish designers as a resource tool for businesses, both at home and abroad.

Another concern for the design industry in Ireland is the quality of our design education. UL's de Eyto said an underfunded public education system is putting the design industry at a disadvantage.

"We don't match some of the high profile US colleges or the Scandinavian colleges largely because of the public education system."

"The top design college is in Pasadena in California; those students are paying \$20,000 per semester to study there. Our public system can't compete against the facilities they can provide."

Design Partner's Stephens said undergraduate industrial design education in Ireland has fallen behind other European universities, due to the way higher education is structured.

"A long time ago, design education was based on facilitating a small number of students on the basis of talent and interest. Now we have a bigger number of students, and this has led to confusion on how best to train creatives," he said.



Love & Robots' Emer, Aoibheann and Kate O'Daly and their cape, Plumage (below)

## The power of personalisation

BY LILY KILLEEN

What's in a name? For interactive design brand Love and Robots, its monicker represents the future of how we do business. The company's name exhibits the interactivity between the design and technology industries – a merging of disciplines that the design industry believes is becoming more important for business in Ireland and worldwide.

Established by sisters Emer, Kate and Aoibheann O'Daly, Love represents the creative aspect of the company, and Robots represents the machines behind the physical products they produce.

The company uses 3D printing to allow customers to co-create accessories for their home and wardrobe. According to Emer, customers customise the company's products online, in real time in their browsers. The online product range includes jewellery, bowties, phone covers and coasters.

"With digital printing, everything is made through a digital file. We put that file online so that you can play with products before they are manufactured. The customised file is then created and the product is made on demand for the customer and shipped out," Emer said.

In traditional commerce, brands mass produce a design of their choosing and ship them around the world in the hope that the product sells – the customer plays a passive role in the process. They take what they are given.

"In the future, the customer will have a lot more power," said Emer. The power of personalisation has not escaped the bigger brands, with

multinational sportswear firm Nike allowing customers to personalise products on its website through its Nike ID service.

"With digital manufacturing you can do all of that before things are manufactured and you can do it at scale. In a few years' time it will be strange if you can't personalise products that you buy online," Emer said.

She believes the government-backed ID2015 is having a positive impact on the industry as a whole.

"I wish it was a five- or ten-year initiative, rather than just one year," Emer said. "It's no longer only bottom up, it is top down, someone is driving [the design industry] at the top level and that makes a difference."



Stephens pointed to the postgraduate degree in medical devices design run by NCAD and Trinity College in Dublin as an example of industrial design education at its best. Milton of ID2015 said that design education needs to happen at the earliest stages of the curriculum, if Ireland wants to succeed in its aim to become innovation driven.

At the top end of education, he said, we should look to emulate universities such as Stanford and Harvard, which have incorporated modules in

design thinking modules into their MBA curriculum. "We need to invest in the sector and in design education, to make sure to embed a new creative mindset in the Irish economy and Irish businesses."

"The Year of Irish Design is really about trying to make opportunities. To create situations where businesses – either new businesses or traditional industries – can innovate through design."

## Irish to strut their stuff in New York

BY FIONA NESS

It's never been so hot to be a hoodie. Irish designer Lucy Nagle's traditional cashmere take on the contemporary hoodie shape is a consistent bestseller in her concessions in luxury department store Brown Thomas. Nagle is now bringing her covetable luxury fashion items to New York Fashion Week, as one of ten emerging talents chosen to represent Ireland on September 10, at the Inaugural Ireland Fashion Showcase.

As part of a push to commercialise and internationalise Irish fashion, it is hoped the event will be a key opportunity to increase the profile of Irish fashion designers and grow their businesses in an international market.

Nagle is the only knitwear designer of the bunch, which includes print queen Helen Steele and leather specialist Una



The Fashion Unfold group, which will be part of London Fashion Week; inset: model Sarah Morrissey wears a dress by designer Jennifer Rothwell which will feature in New York Pawel Nowak

Burke. But if New York is expecting chunky Aran jumpers and celtic symbols from Nagle, it will be enlightened, not disappointed. "We can change people's traditional opinion of Irish fashion by having more Irish contemporary designers reach international success," Nagle said.

Buyers from across the United States will attend the event, which will see designers showing ten looks each

from their spring/summer 16 collection. Does taking part in one of the highest profile designer showcases make her a little bit, well, scared? "If we really want to get the Irish brand out there, America is the best place to start," she said.

A similar event, titled Unfold: Irish Designers Collective, will take place at London Fashion Week later in the month. Nagle said that while the

fashion showcase is being supported by ID2015, the hope is that Irish fashion designers will continue to undertake group showings at international fashion weeks, as more Irish designers become recognised around the globe. Nagle is expected to show her winter 2016 collection in New York next year.



'Expectations exceeded': Karen Hennessy of ID2015

## Irish year of design – the story so far

BY LILY KILLEEN

The first eight months of 2015 have been busy for anyone involved in the creative sector in Ireland. The government-backed initiative, ID2015, was established at the beginning of the year with an aim to raise awareness nationally and internationally of the creative talent being produced in Ireland.

Half way through the year, how is the initiative faring? According to Karen Hennessy, chief executive of ID2015, all projections for the year are being exceeded.

"At the six month stage we have brought over 160 new designers out internationally and showcased over 300 nationally," said Hennessy. "We also projected that 200 new design-led businesses would be established during the year, and 350 new designers or companies have already registered at this stage, between the Institute of Designers, the Design and Craft Council of Ireland, the Royal Institute of Architects Ireland – so you are seeing momentum."

Hennessy points to 115 new products that have been developed through collaborations throughout the year. One example is the pairing of furniture manufacturer Thomas Montgomery with Perch; a design brand that focuses on 'applied human movement'. Together, they came up with a range of new office furniture called Float that garnered significant interest at the recent Milan Design Week.

According to Hennessy, the first problem for the Irish design industry is underestimating the reach of the sector. "When I'm talking about design I'm talking architecture, medical devices, engineering, craft, fashion, organisational design, food design, graphic design, animation, film, model making, set design and furniture, among others. It is very broad."

From an international perspective, the aim of ID2015 is to raise the visibility of Irish design, but Hennessy said the overriding objective is to increase exports, sales and our global competitiveness in the sector.

The initiative is a collaboration between the Design and Craft Council of Ireland, the Department of Jobs, Innovation and Enterprise, Fáilte Ireland, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and the Department of Education.

"Throughout the year we are going to have held 350 national events and 50 international. Some of those are core events of the Year of Irish Design, and over 200 are events run by designers across the country," Hennessy said. These events include trade missions, involvement in fashion weeks, design weeks and architectural biennials in cities such as Milan, London, New York and Eindhoven, to showcase Irish talent and develop international relationships and opportunities.

To date, the initiative has performed well, and Hennessy is confidently on target to meet the projected results. However, 2015 was only ever a catalyst for Ireland's journey in design. "In order for this to really have a legacy we need to keep driving it, we need to have a strategy, we need to have investment in the sector and we need to continue," Hennessy said.

This sentiment is echoed by designers on the ground. Fashion designer Una Burke has established a successful career in London, having moved there after graduating from Limerick College of Art and Design, and setting up her own label in 2010. "I can see that there are still a lot of designers moving over to London. Are they moving over to be trained and then move back [to Ireland]? Or are they moving away to be claimed by others? That is what's happening, and it's sad," Burke said.

"If we are being recognised at an international level why are we not being supported at a local level? Maybe [ID2015] will be a kick in the ass for the government. Maybe it takes someone else saying 'it's great what you are doing there', for them to go 'oh yes it is really good'."

Supports do exist for Irish designers looking to establish themselves at home, but according to Hennessy, "they aren't always easy to find". ID2015 is offering a number of new supports for the design sector, most notably the Enterprise Ireland Competitive Start-up Fund for design-led companies, worth €250,000.

An overriding aim of ID2015 has been to get companies from all walks of life to commit to design thinking, Hennessy said. Its importance is echoed by Emer O'Daly of digital design firm Love and Robots. "So many start-ups now have a designer as a co-founder – like Airbnb and Etsy – whereas before design was an afterthought. Apple was the first to [approach its business from a design perspective] and look how well that paid off."

For the remainder of 2015, Hennessy said, the focus is on 'education through to enterprise' programmes, steering design graduates into sustainable jobs here in Ireland.

"As a nation we are very good at design. It's in our DNA," Hennessy said. "It's time it became a part of our global identity."