



*Photographer: Thomas Graham*







▶▶▶▶take it further and then see if someone else might like it too. It's a long process and you have to get to know a manufacturer very well and then you have to work out who's going to go out and sell it!

'Another area that I find really fascinating, and we are developing, is where we work with SMEs – and Arup works with a lot of SMEs – who have got a new process or a new material or a new bi-product material that they don't quite know what to do with (and it's all sustainably sourced and is the bi-product of another process) but they've realised that there is potential here, they then want to make it into something. We will work with them to look at how they can use it and sell it in a product. Paper mulch, for example, is a bi-product that might well go into a fertiliser, but if you squash it together with high-pressure it can be used to create boards and screens. We call this 'material up the value chain'.

'It can be high-risk working in this way, but it's also very exciting. It's about adding on to what Arup can offer.'

We ask Rebecca about the two furniture products she has, to date, been instrumental in developing with Arup. 'The first was the Bench F system for Kinnarps,' Rebecca reminds us, 'which was borne out of an internal need for Arup to have a central framework with a furniture company. Because we were going to be ordering so many, we felt that we should properly look at the brief for our employees and make sure it suits our employees, our FM people and our brand. We went through that process and I helped formulate the brief for what the desking system might be for Arup, we had a look at five different suppliers to see how they sit with the Arup brand and philosophy – so obviously, we looked for local, sustainable products within a certain price band – and had a look at whether any products could fit our brief. It was felt that none of them did

completely fill that brief, so we decided to look at it ourselves. That's when manufacturers say 'Noooo! You think you know what you want, but you don't!' We soon realised we weren't being too stupid in some of the design features we wanted and incorporated that into a new product within a line of furniture that Kinnarps has.

'Everything about the design is to support linear desking, but with individually adjustable height tops. It's a simple design really, and Kinnarps felt that it was applicable to wider market because there isn't really a comparable product out there. It was a good partnership, which has evolved.

'The second furniture project came about when Nowy Styl approached us. Three or four years ago they bought the mould for a stadium seat. That was their first foray into the stadium seating market, although they already did venue seating. They needed a fresher, cheaper design, so they came to Arup – our sports division is one of the top two sports architectural divisions in the world – and wanted us to design the new seat for them. We produced a cost-effective gravity-tip seat for them, made from PA or PP, depending on the market it will be used in, with the idea being that we made the most out of the footprint by taking out the number of components – there are no bolts and it is installed for the first time on-site – and it even has a soft close.'

Speaking of soft closes, we thank Rebecca for her time and let her return to the world of product design.

As we walk, Rebecca tells us a little about her freelance product designing career (does this girl ever stop designing?), which started with a stop-smoking inhalator developed for a friend who was trying to quit the clutches of the evil leaf. Now that is design making a difference ●