Danish Design Students Create Sustainable Waste Bins to Solve Public Trash Problems

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Four years ago, Heida Nolsøe and Marie Berggreen (pictured above) were on a product-design course at the Technical University of Denmark. The brief for their first-semester project was to devise a solution for waste management in Copenhagen.

"At the time, the Distortion festival was close to closing because they just couldn't handle the crazy amount of trash," explains Berggreen, who's Danish. "So we thought, 'How can we make a waste bin that you can easily put up so people can get rid of their trash and don't have to walk long distances to find bins?'" It had to be lightweight, she adds. Festivals traditionally use large metal or plastic trash containers, which can be moved only by truck.

What they came up with was the DropBucket. "It's a simple and sustainable trash can made of recycled cardboard," says Nolsøe, who's from the Faroe Islands. "It can be put up in less than a second and, after you've used it, you can just throw it out with the trash inside."

The DropBucket betrays its Scandinavian roots: as well as being water resistant, it has a low center of gravity, making it stable in windy conditions. The largest model holds 30 gallons (114 litres). It has since been used at over 200 events in Denmark, as well as by municipalities, schools, and offices.

Clients include architects' firms, the Danish military – which has DropBuckets at some of its barracks – and the Danish financial newspaper Berlingske Media. Overseas clients include, amusingly, TetraPak in Sweden and DropBox in the Netherlands. "People just love the product," Berggreen says. "It's not just a trash can, it's a product that people like."

And the accolades have duly followed. In 2015 the pair won the prestigious Red Dot Design Award: Best of the Best, in a field that included Apple, Adidas, and Bosch. So far this year they've snapped up a Green Product Award for sustainable solutions.