

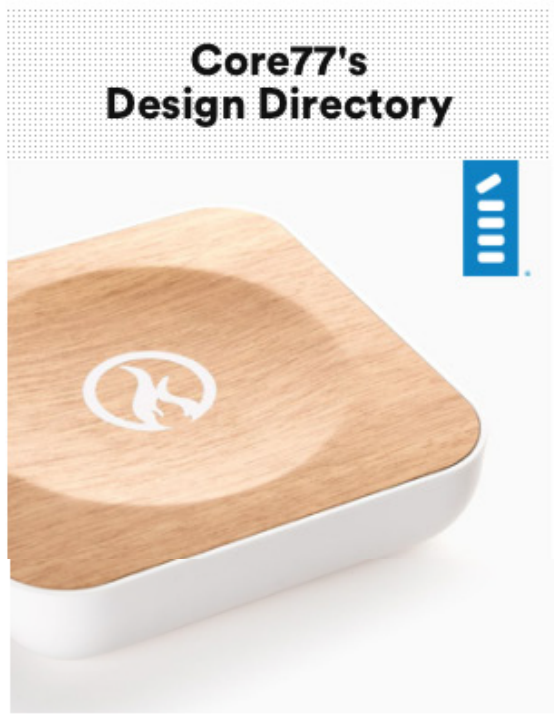
Expanding the Notion of Cycling Infrastructure

People's Architecture Office creates a pedal-powered pop-up pavilion for Preston
BY [RAY HU](#) - FEB 05, 2016

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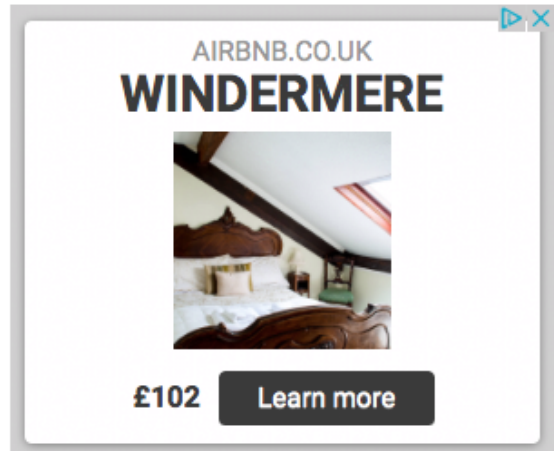
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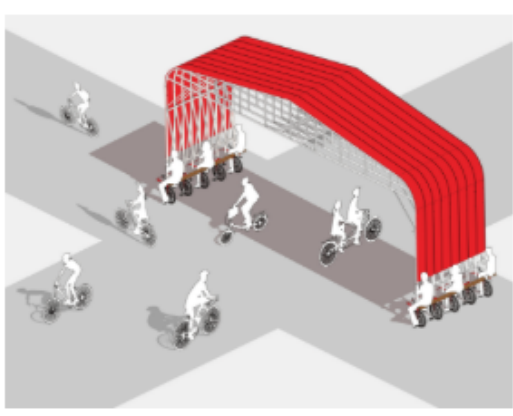
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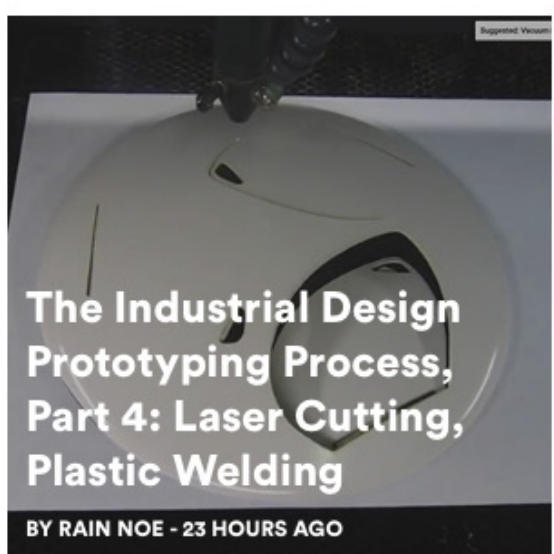
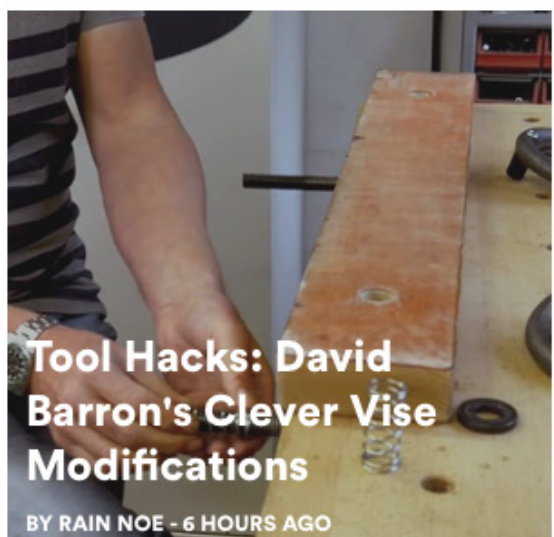
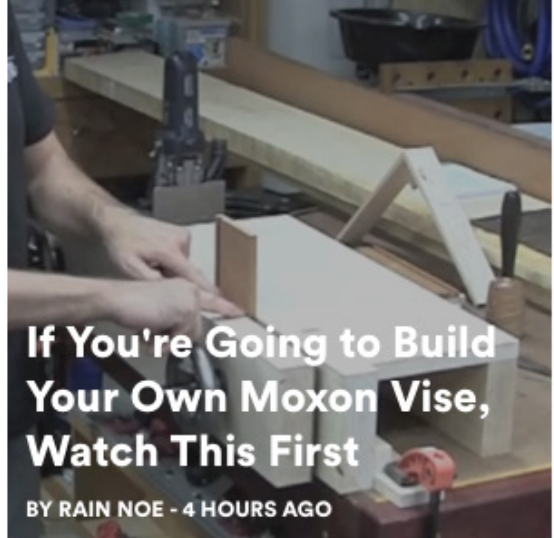
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Cycling has long been hailed as a kind of all-purpose urban panacea, an all-purpose solution for congestion and the first-and-last-mile—getting people to and from a transportation hub. Now, Beijing's [People's Architecture Office](#) has designed a bike — by a slight stretch of the imagination — into a destination in itself. Billed as “architecture for events and architecture as event,” [the People's Canopy](#) is a kind of pedal-powered pop-up pavilion: The expandable two-story canopy is set on unicyclic “feet,” such that it functions as its own transportation system, a simple and elegant form of mobile placemaking.



The People's Canopy was commissioned by [In Certain Places](#) — an ongoing program of urban interventions and events — for the [Lancashire Encounter](#), an arts festival in the city of Preston, UK in September of last year. As ICP curators Charles Quick and Elaine Speight and PAO principal James Shen explain in the [expository video](#), it is a connective space in several ways, not only as a civic gesture of activating an urban space but a kind of cultural exchange, transposing the vernacular canopies of Southern China to a rainy locale on the other side of the world.



Shen also shared some additional insights about the event, production and future of the People's Canopy:

On one hand, the cycling aspect is a matter of practicality, as it does make it very convenient to move the canopies across large distances for use at various sites. On the other hand, it makes a spectacle out of this communal activity. For eight people to cycle together and navigate the canopies through the city requires real teamwork. At a length of 10m and 4.5m in height the double decker bus size of the vehicles and the parade-like aspect of the cycling makes moving the canopies around an urban event. And when parked and expanded, the canopies take on a different role and become backdrops for events.

Cyclists on bicycles flanked the canopies as they were being cycled and there were people cycling and skateboarding under the canopies when they were expanded. The project certainly promotes cycling in the city, but it is also a celebration of public occupation of space: The canopies transform roads for pedestrian use, allowing cities to experiment with multifunctional uses of space. Simply providing covering does a lot to promote public activity, especially in a rainy city like Preston.

A dozen canopies were designed and manufactured in China then shipped to Preston in two shipping containers where they were then assembled. So far they have been moved between at least four locations in the city, including the University of Central Lancashire and the center of Preston. The canopies were physically cycled between each of these locations by volunteers.



The People's Canopies were put in storage in Preston after last year's event and will continue to be used in Preston for years to come. Since the festival, another set of People's Canopies was installed in Hong Kong for the Urbanism/Architecture Biennale. They are there until March and are currently being used to host a variety of events. Those who have taken a seat in the People's Canopy include filmmaker Christopher Doyle and Mr. Mobile Architecture Peter Cook, who immediately incorporated the project into his keynote talk at the biennale.

We've also received a request from an organization in Kolkata India who want to use the People's Canopies for a food festival there. I imagine we'll be getting more interest from people as we start to promote the project. And these are mass-produced, prefabricated, modular structures. I would consider the People's Canopy to be product design on an architecture scale. But with canopies weighing up to one ton each, the need for street closures, and structural and wind-load certification, it's not such a simple thing for People's Canopies to roll into a city near you. Because they are architectural in size, they come with a range of health and safety concerns.

Bonus: A brilliant clip of [the People's Canopy in Hong Kong](#), and a [time-lapse video of the construction process](#).

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