

Time to ring changes for the iconic red phone box

See your work on display alongside established artists and designers, thanks to Times+

If you find yourself wandering through Old St Pancras churchyard in London, you might come across a rather splendid mausoleum, the shape of which is weirdly familiar. It'll bother you. What on earth does it remind you of? Then later, when you're back at home and tucked up in front of the telly with a glass of something bigger than it should be, it'll hit you. That's it! The late Sir John Soane, RA, the great neo-classical English architect responsible for the Bank of England and the Dulwich Picture Gallery, resides now and for all eternity under a stone cupola that looks exactly like a red telephone box.

Of course, technically the phone box looks exactly like the cupola of Sir John Soane's tomb, for that was the original inspiration that struck the box's designer, the architect Giles Gilbert Scott. And yet so iconic has the design for the traditional red phone box



become that it has entirely superseded its eminent parent in the modern psyche. It's known all over the world; tourists take photographs of each other in front of examples when they visit London. A red phone box stands outside the British Embassy in Washington DC, another is in use at the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology. The village of Glendaruel, Argyll, boasts one containing a handy defibrillator machine. The colonial influence has spread them as far as Antigua, Malta and Cyprus (painted a rather more appropriate olive green). In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry and



Designs for the BT ArtBox competition by Ben Shine and, below left, Giles Deacon

box which has long served as the entrance to a jazz club in Havana.

K2, as the original design became known, was the winning entry in a competition organised in 1924 by the Royal Fine Art Commission, to replace the GPO's thoroughly unpopular K1 (a flimsy-looking thing that looked more like a fairground ticket kiosk).

Sadly, the prevalence of mobile phones has made these icons of British design a novelty rather than a norm. Now, however, another competition is giving *Times* readers the chance to redesign the red box in their own way and have the progress of their winning project followed by the newspaper.

In June, *The Times* and BT will launch the capital's biggest public art project, using the famous red phone box as a canvas, in celebration of ChildLine's 25th anniversary — and you could be a part of it. Artists including the 2002 Turner prize winner Keith Tyson, sculptor David Mach, fashion designers Giles Deacon and Zandra Rhodes and milliner Philip Treacy will transform life-size, fibreglass replicas of the classic telephone box into colourful artworks to be placed across London in the run up to the Olympics. After the exhibition, all the ArtBoxes will go under the hammer at a VIP charity auction in July with the aim of raising up to £1 million for ChildLine.

A lucky Times+ member has the chance to join the illustrious ranks of the artists already signed up to the show and work alongside an artist or designer to create his or her own BT ArtBox design, to be made and displayed in London. (If you're not a Times+ member, you can sign up at www.timespacks.com).

For everything you need to design your entry, images of the other entries and the chance to vote for the winner, visit www.mytimesplus.co.uk. The deadline for submissions is April 27, and the winner of the competition, judged by the *Times* arts team, will be notified by May 3. So get out there and get inspired, though graveyard visits are not compulsory.

Nancy Durrant

The BT Artbox exhibition will run from June 18 to July 16, www.btartbox.com