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Team Austria Wins Solar Decathlon 2013



Austrian students from the Vienna University of Technology edged out the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) and 17 other collegiate teams on October 12, 2013, in Irvine, California, to win the 2013 Solar Decathlon. It was the closest finish to the sustainable house design competition since it began 11 years ago.

By only 4.35 points out of a possible 1,000, Team Austria beat UNLV. Czech Technical University placed third, just 2.43 points behind UNLV.

Early leader Stanford dropped to fifth place, USC finished tenth, and a combined team from

the Southern California Institute of Architecture and Caltech ended fourteenth.

Team Austria's thesis posited wood as a sustainable building material and used exterior screens and curtains to create layers of shade and privacy. Their Vienna-built design is an indoor-outdoor beauty that seems tailor made for Santa Monica or the Hollywood Hills.

The UNLV house won the market appeal contest of the decathlon and is a pragmatic vision of desert modern, partially wrapped in rusted steel screens with the pixelated pattern of a mesquite tree. Among the furnishings are a dining table that students built with metal and

wood reclaimed from a Bureau of Land Management scrap yard.

The Czech team, who wrapped their house in a striking yet simple shade canopy of bare wood framing, were buoyed by their win in architecture judging as well as in engineering, two of the ten subcategories included in the competition.

This is the first year the Solar Decathlon has been held away from the National Mall in Washington. Past winners have been the University of Colorado (2002 and 2005) Technische Universität Darmstadt of Germany (2007 and 2009) and the University of Maryland (2011). ■