MENOMONIE — As an industrial designer, one of Michael Rosen's dreams is to be able to walk into a store and see his products for sale.

That dream is close to becoming reality. Rosen, a UW-Stout senior from Eau Claire, recently was named one of four winners in the 26th annual Doug Mockett & Co. design competition. The Manhattan Beach, Calif., company makes furniture parts, components, accessories and hardware.

An art student with an industrial design concentration, Rosen designed the Torii Rack, a coat rack, for a class appropriately called "Design for Manufacture." The class was taught by assistant professor Noah Norton in spring 2011.

During the class Norton gave students two weeks to design contemporary coat and hat hangers and racks. After Rosen completed the assignment, he entered the Mockett competition and then pretty much forgot about it.

In December he received an email from Mockett saying he was one of four contest winners.

"It took me five to 10 minutes to realize what it was. I was in a state of shock," Rosen said.
He received an engraved trophy, $1,000 and will get royalties for the next 15 years.

Diego Wuethrich, a Mockett spokesperson and one of the contest judges, said Rosen's design was one of his favorites among 85 entries submitted from around the world.

"It fits into our product line, and we like the design. We can make it easily," Wuethrich said.

The Torii Rack will be patented and could be in production in as little as six months. The company is working with Rosen on a second prototype, Wuethrich said.

The rack consists of a 23-inch wood rail with four aluminum hooks; the assignment called for the product to use aluminum extrusion as a primary manufacturing process.

The Torii Rack stresses versatility. The hooks can slide along the rail. People who use it can "space the hangers evenly across or bunch them together on one side to create space for a heavy coat - however the job sees fit," according to the Mockett website.

Each hanger has two hooks, a large one for coats, hats or other garments. A smaller notched hook can hold keys or a scarf, for example. More hooks can be added.

"I wanted something sleek and modular," Rosen said, noting the name is derived from the Torii Gateway arch in Japan, which inspired the curved shape of his hooks. "The coat rack is a gateway to a house," he said.

Norton called Rosen's design "particularly well-suited for production due to its elegance and simplicity. His design closely followed production guidelines, and his attention to proportion and aesthetics make it easy to produce and desirable to have."

Norton added that Rosen has "really developed into a fine industrial designer. I am consistently impressed with the ideas that our students come up with for class projects. Having students, like Michael, present their products to manufacturers for production is a great thing to see. It shows the strength of our program and makes me proud to be a part of it."

Another industrial design student, Luis Santiago, has a product on the market. He created a line of Rainy Days fashion sunglasses that went into production last summer.

For the Torii Rack, Rosen estimates he worked 20 to 30 hours on the design, including computer sketches and 3-D modeling using software programs.
Rosen can hang his hat, literally and possibly figuratively, on the Torii Rack. With a design in production, he'll improve his chances of landing a job when he graduates in December. "Ever since elementary school I've been super-interested in art. Winning this competition is very encouraging," he said.