

A Winning NOTE

Kazakhstan's tenge has won several awards for best currency design

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MANY countries claim that their currency is appealing, but Kazakhstan has awards to back it up. In the two decades since the country introduced its own currency, the Kazakhstani tenge has won four first places and one runner-up in contests for the world's prettiest banknotes.

Kazakhstan declared its independence in December 1991, the last of the former Soviet republics to do so. But it did not create its own currency until two years later. It was still using the ruble in July 1993 when Russia abruptly issued a new national currency and old Soviet banknotes flooded Kazakhstan, driving up prices and creating shortages of products. To regain control of its economy, Kazakhstan issued its own currency in November 1993, at a rate of 500 rubles to the tenge.

Vertical appeal

The look of the national currency changed several times after 1993, and in 2006 the National Bank of Kazakhstan launched a new series that also became recognized as one of the most secure in the world. Designed by Mendybay Alin, the central bank's senior designer, the series was intended to

reflect the young country's growing self-confidence, a link between its past and future. The vertical orientation of the notes was dictated by the inclusion of the Bayterek tower in the new capital city of Astana. "Bayterek" comes from a Kazakhstani legend and means "tree of life." The notes in the Bayterek series also include an open palm to show the country's openness to the world, Alin says.

The T 10,000 note from the 2006 series started the winning streak when it was named best new banknote by the International Association of Currency Affairs (IACA) in 2007. Four years later the International Bank Note Society (IBNS) named the T 10,000 commemorative note—issued to celebrate 20 years of Kazakhstani independence—banknote of the year. In 2012, the new T 5,000 note won best in show, and again in 2013 the tenge took the top IBNS award, for a commemorative T 1,000 note.

The commemorative T 1,000 banknote stands out for its rich, warm-color hues and an elegant image of General Kul Tigin of the Second Turkic Kaganate, or empire, on the vertical front. On the horizontal back, a drawing of Turkic warriors on horseback is set against a monument with Turkic writing at Kul Tigin's memorial complex.



Front of winning commemorative T 1,000 note.



Reverse of the winning and runner-up tenge notes.



Front of the winning notes: T 10,000 (2006), T 10,000 (2011), T 5,000 (2012), and runner-up T 20,000 (2015).

In 2015, Kazakhstan's T 20,000 note had to settle for runner-up behind New Zealand's \$5 polymer note (see "The Future Is Plastic," in the June 2016 *F&D*).

Kazakhstan's current series of banknotes carries a common theme. The front includes a gilded figure of the mythical bird *Samruk* atop Astana's Kazakh Eli monument, meant to depict the country's desire to develop and prosper. Each

note features doves, a universal symbol of peace, on the front; various depictions of national landmarks appear on the back. All notes carry images of the state flag and emblem and are printed in Kazakh and Russian.

Safety first

Not only are the Kazakhstani banknotes attractive, they are more secure than most.

A T 5,000 note issued in 2008 to commemorate the currency's 15th anniversary was the first to use color-shifting ink. The ink, developed by the Swiss firm SICPA Holding SA, is embedded as a flying eagle printed over a contrasting image of the sun. Microtext provides added security. Printed across an open palm, it reads *Қазақстан* (Kazakhstan) and bears a facsimile of the signature of Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been president since independence.

Kazakhstan's T 20,000 note was the first banknote in the world printed on composite paper, which is stronger and more secure than standard note paper. It is produced by Landqart AG of Switzerland and was also used for the Swiss 50 franc note issued in 2016. ■



Other distinctive tenge notes.

Nicole Braynen-Kimani is on the staff of F&D.

