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THE GREAT INDOORS

ISSUE #64

SEP/OCT 2008

**THE GREEN
OFFICE
POWER PLANT
AND STATE OF
MIND**

**THE LIGHTNESS
OF NENDO
FROM CAR TO
CHOCOLATE**

**JASPER MORRISON
ON DESIGN
MISTAKES,
POLLUTION,
SHAME**

WORK & PLAY

MR SMILEY AND FRIENDS

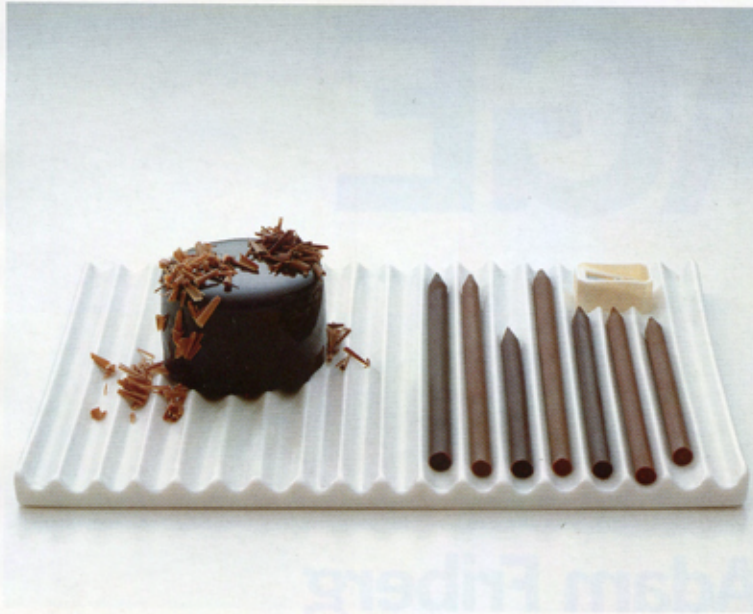
Tokyo outfit Nendo blends theatre,
technique, tradition and a tongue-
in-cheek tone in everything
from seats to stands and from
pencils to private houses.

Interior photos **Daici Ano**

Product and portrait photos **Masayuki Hayashi**

Yes, Nendo is a Japanese design agency. And yes, the agency's Japanese origins are evident in its work, which is quiet and simple, detailed and inventive. But there's more to Nendo. When it comes to materials, for example, Nendo chooses one and pushes it to extremes. This is visible in the company's new office in Tokyo (wood partitions); in a recently completed private residence, Moss House (moss-clad curlicues); and in displays for Kenzo fragrances (painted laser-cut steel). The design agency not only highlights a single material but, in most cases, an unusual material that's applied in a remarkable way. Fireworks House is another good example. Here we see what appears to be a brick house, but the 'masonry' is actually crafted out of Galvalume. Heading all this fun

is Oki Sato, who feels obliged to add a bit of drollery to every project. Moss House, for instance, has one room that seems rather bare and respectable in an almost dull sort of way. A closer look, however, reveals a reticent curlicue next to the upper left corner of a window. A clear reference to the mossy green decoration found in the rest of the house, this solitary wisp adds a special touch to an otherwise ordinary space. Sato's humour also emerges in the chocolate pencils that Nendo made for Japanese confectionery chef Tsujiguchi Hironobu. Nendo's work enhances locations worldwide. What follows are three projects described by writers who – having 'been there' and 'done that' – couldn't wait to share their experiences with our readers.



Chocolate Pencils for Hironobu



Asked to design a special delicacy for Tokyo-based confectionery chef Tsujiguchi Hironobu, Nendo created a box of assorted chocolates shaped like pencils.



Display for Kenzo



For Kenzo's shop-in-shop presentation, Nendo deconstructed the brand's logo and reassembled the pieces into random patterns, in the same way that birds gather twigs to build a nest.



Fireworks House



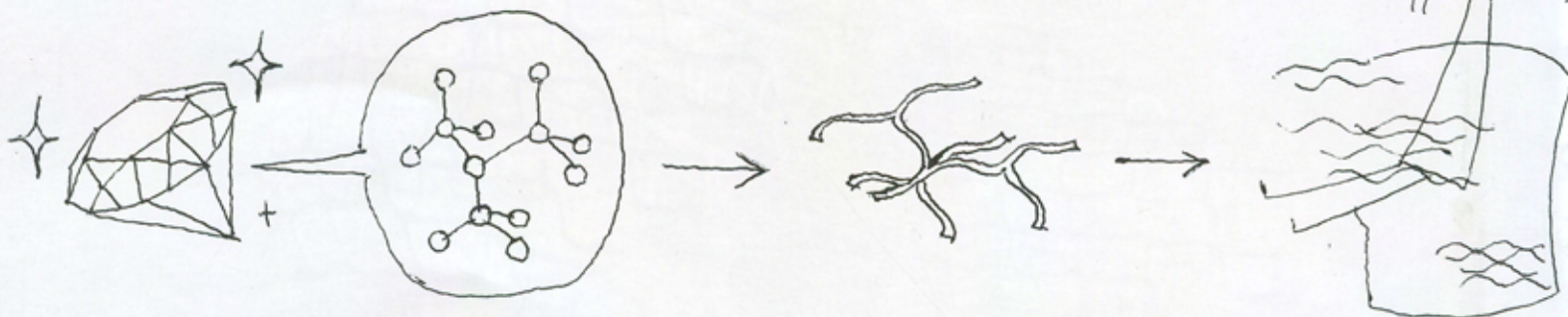
Nendo designed the Fireworks House to allow the client's elderly mother to remain safely indoors while watching the annual fireworks display each December.



Oki Sato, the cheerful face behind Nendo, holds up the Diamond Chair he made for a Lexus presentation.

Theatre

Presentation for Lexus



Sketch showing the evolution from the structure of diamond to that of the Diamond Chair.

Placid music *and* agitated attendants scurrying helter-skelter. Serene surroundings *and* a harried host. Eco-friendly *and* fast-as-lightning cars. The hardness of diamonds *and* the elasticity of stretchy fabrics. A brief summary of the superfluity of contrasts that merged in Milan earlier this year, where Japanese carmaker Lexus presented its latest innovation in a setting designed by Nendo.

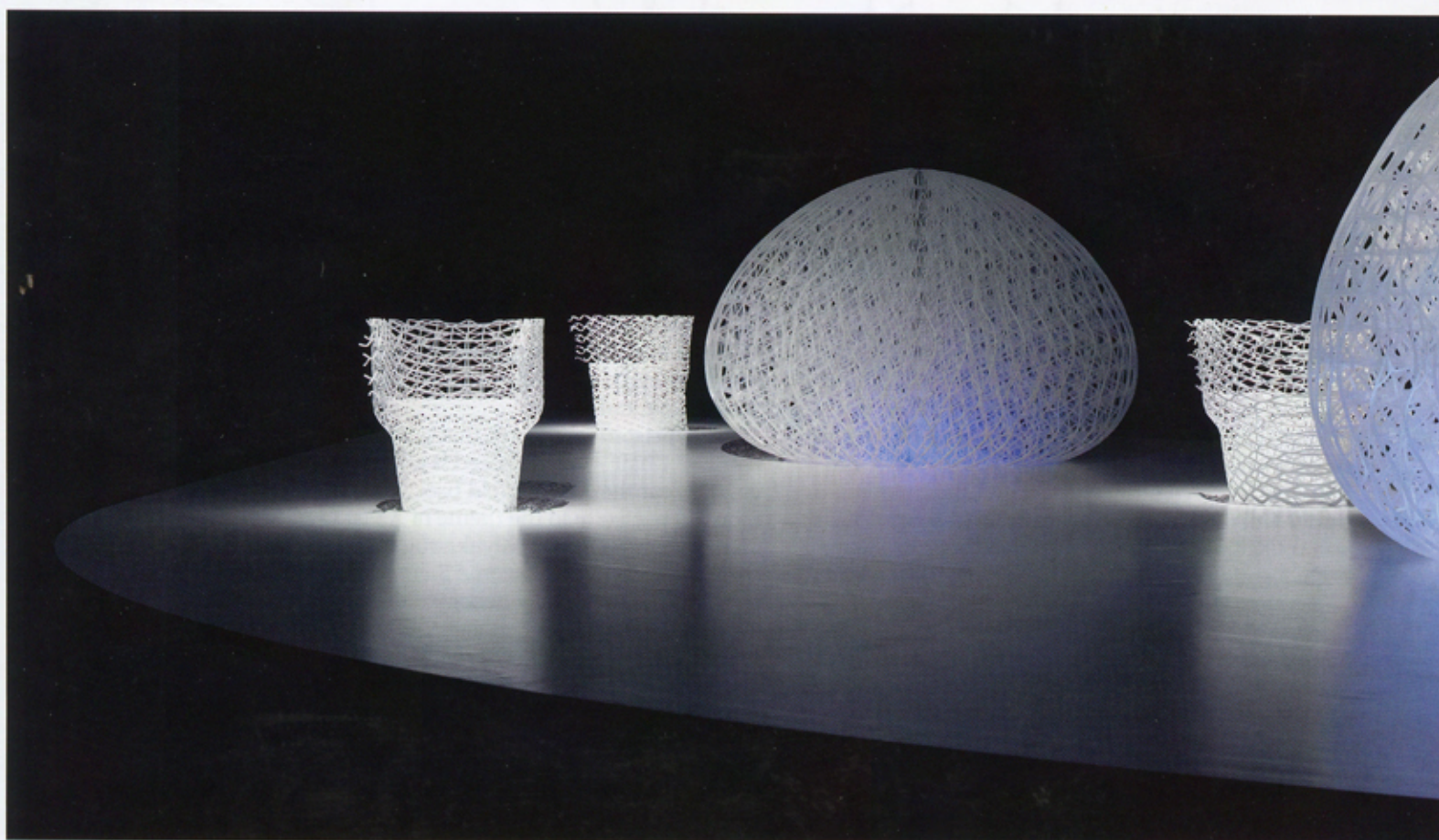
I had to blink before realizing that the bubbles were expanding and contracting, although with agonizing slowness

Four times in a row Lexus has asked Japanese designers to translate the unique features of its automobiles into a presentation like the one in Milan. And because Lexus poured such an unexpected combination of elements into its new LF-Xh model, Nendo's Oki Sato poured a similar mix of contrasts into his exhibition design. 'I found it interesting to unite the structure of the hardest material in the world (diamond) with something entirely different (elasticity),' says Sato.

After enlarging the structure of a diamond, Sato transformed the result into the Diamond Chair, made from white nylon, and several white-polypropylene Diamond Bubbles. I had to blink three times before realizing that the bubbles were actually expanding and contracting, albeit with agonizing slowness. It wasn't lack of sleep on my part. It was what Nendo had intended.

The black environment that enveloped me at the beginning of the presentation was only a preview of what was to come. After all, the focus of Nendo's design was the latest Lexus, which I discovered at the back of the space illuminated in a brilliant white light. Still working with the structure of the precious gem, Sato installed black Diamond Pillars in this area, suspending them at random from the ceiling. Thanks to a special mechanism, the columns moved gently up and down. Modestly positioned at the rear, an almost bashful LF-Xh made its debut, though by then I'd nearly forgotten about the star of the show. Nendo's work for Lexus was both spare and stunning, adding yet another surprising contrast to the impressive event.

Words **Merel Kokhuis**

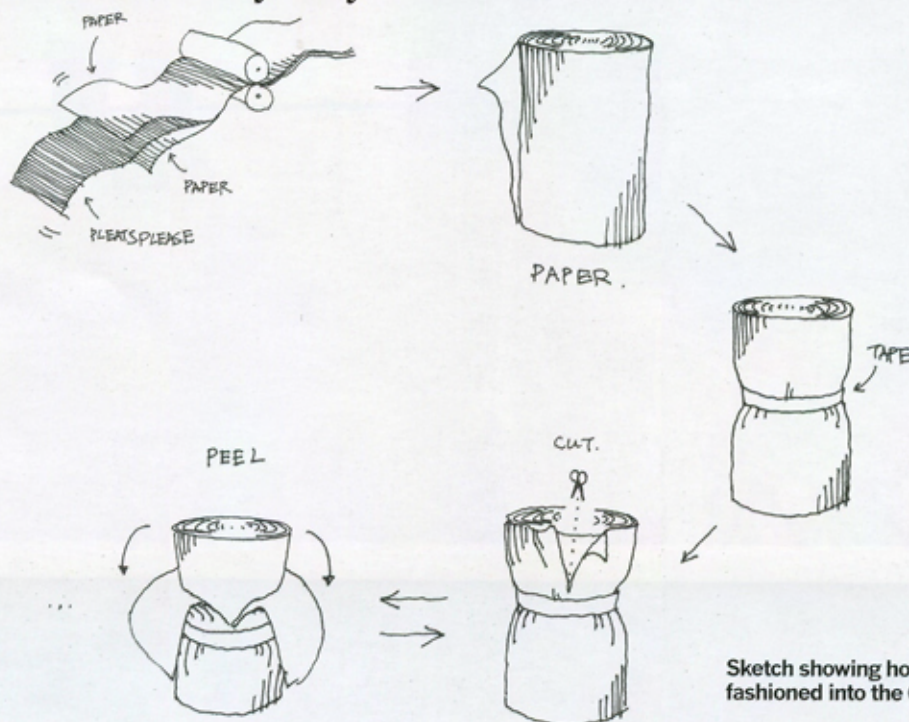


↑ Intriguing Elegance, the rear area of the Lexus presentation, displayed a prototype of the LF-Xh along with Nendo's polypropylene Diamond Pillars, another animated feature equipped with a 'breathing' mechanism.

↑ Visitors entering Incisive Simplicity, the introduction to the Lexus presentation in Milan, saw nylon Diamond Chairs and polypropylene Diamond Bubbles that slowly expanded and contracted like living lungs.

Technique

Cabbage Chair for Issey Miyake



Sketch showing how rolls of paper are fashioned into the Cabbage Chairs.

In an era in which recycling is high on the list of eco-necessities, fashion designer Issey Miyake rues the amount of waste left over from the manufacture of his Pleats Please fabric. As curator of XXIst Century Man, an exhibition held at Tokyo's 21_21 Design Sight gallery, Miyake asked Nendo to contribute a functional paper chair to the show. 'I couldn't imagine making a chair from paper,' says Nendo's Oki Sato, recalling the telephone request for what seemed to be an impossible object. 'I saw no link at all between the material and the function, until I walked into Miyake's office and spotted rolls and rolls of wastepaper.' Miyake expectations were high: Nendo's chair was to be the next in a series of paper chairs – including Tokujin Yoshioka's Honeypop, Frank Gehry's Little Beaver and Shigeru Ban's Paper Tube – all of which are displayed in the fashion designer's office.

'I couldn't imagine making a chair from paper' Oki Sato

The manufacture of Pleats Please requires two sheets of paper that sandwich and protect the fabric as it's pleated in a process involving high pressure and high temperatures. What rolls off the assembly line

is a usable textile, plus twice the amount of pleated white paper. 'It's not only pleated,' says Sato. 'It's also impregnated with resin, which keeps the paper from tearing during production and makes it stiff enough to hold its shape.' Envisioning a corncob stripped of its husk, Sato went to work. 'We didn't actually design anything. The product was there. We just cut and peeled.'

The 'primitive' process that goes into Nendo's Cabbage Chair – 'all you need is a pair of scissors; you just cut the roll and fold back the layers' – corresponded perfectly to the theme of XXIst Century Man, a show in which Miyake suggested that life in the 21st century will become increasingly more primitive as technology becomes less and less of a necessity. Because the Cabbage Chair requires no special finish, no nails or screws, and no internal framework, it embodies Miyake's idea of the future. It's possible to ship the chair, in the form of a roll, straight from the factory to the customer. Although its manufacture is extremely eco-friendly, Sato doesn't see the Cabbage Chair as the forerunner of a new collection of green designs. 'What we wanted was to show that waste can be made into furniture and, at the same time, to offer people a small, happy surprise – like all our designs.'

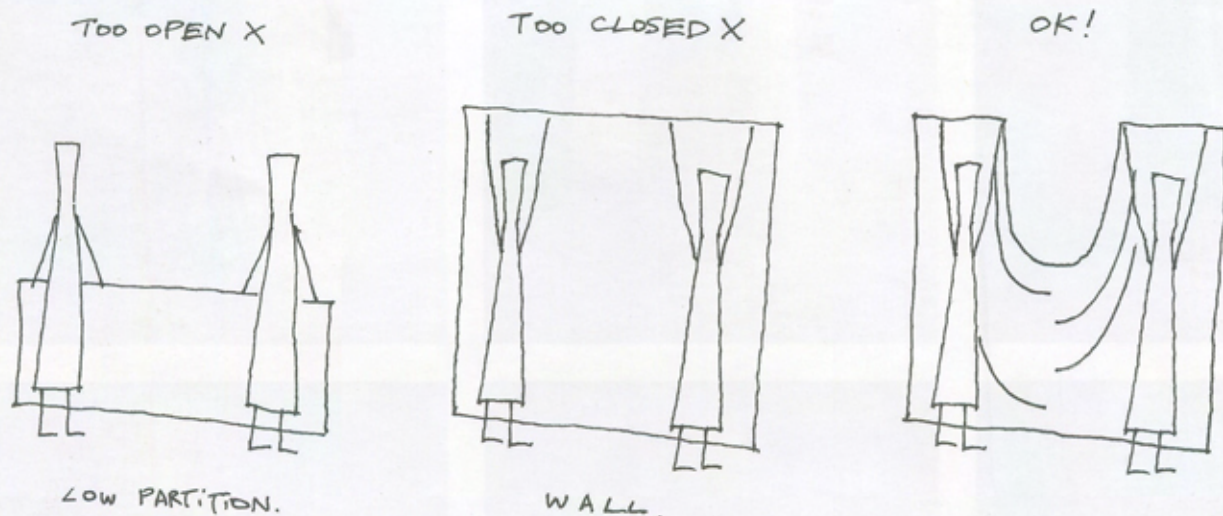
Words **Cathelijne Nuijsink**

Rolls of wastepaper in Issey Miyake's office led to Nendo's design of the Cabbage Chair, a simple object that requires only the roll itself, a scissors and hours of patience.



Tradition

Office for Nendo



Sketch illustrating the benefits of the space dividers in Nendo's office.

'Our reason for moving was that the roof in our last office leaked terribly,' confesses Oki Sato. Ever smiling, Nendo's head designer has a gift for putting people at ease, injecting humour into the most serious of conversations.

Until recently, Nendo operated out of a tiny building surrounded by trees and constructed in Japan's post-war modernist style. According to Oki, the design agency rented three separate rooms scattered throughout the building, and over the six years of its occupancy, the staff became increasingly aware of the inconveniences of this layout. In something of a departure for the company, the newly designed workplace gathers all office functions into a single space. Flanking the entrance are a sizable meeting room and an area divided into zones for various activities and functions: model-making, product and interior design, management and storage. Six parallel wooden partitions feature cutouts resembling inverted archways. 'In terms of architecture, most people would probably associate them with arches, but what occurred to us were loosely gathered curtains,' explains Oki.

The Japanese word for clay is *nendo*, and in designing the new office Oki worked with the idea of clay in two colours kneaded together. His aim was a workplace with blurred boundaries in which individual zones would not be rigorously separated. The result is a series of spaces that are more enclosed than they would be in an open-plan office yet still avoid a sense of total seclusion. Staff can chat and pass files through the archways.

Having to step over the low curves of a partition to move from one section to another might seem impractical, as it obstructs a smooth flow through the space. However, subtle physical demarcations, such as wooden sills or changes in level, are not unusual in a Japanese context. Teahouses, for example, traditionally feature low *nijiri-guchi* doorways that require visitors to stoop to enter. Sato was inspired by these structural elements, whose main purpose is to suggest functional divisions; stepping over a low barrier can also create a change of mood.

The blurred boundaries in the workplace mean that zones are not rigorously separated

'Looking over the office from the entrance,' he says, 'you have the strange impression of riding the waves, as plants, shelving and people move in and out of view.' This playful yet stylish look exemplifies the Nendo aesthetic, which has been a constant aspect of the company's work since 2003, the year marking the design of Drawer House, as well as my first encounter with Nendo.

Words **Masaaki Takahashi**



Highlighting Nendo's new office in Tokyo are partitions that may look like inverted arches, but what the designers had in mind were 'wooden curtains' largely intended to offer seated employees a bit of privacy.

Tongue in Cheek

Moss House

The mossy green curlicues that mark Nendo's renovation of a private residence in Tokyo gave the design its name: Moss House.

