



ART

Designer Oki Sato of Nendo Blurs Line Between Furniture and Art

The prolific designer brought his gimlet eye to this year's Milan Design Week

BY SARAH HUCAL · @SARAHHUCAL · APR 19, 2016, 12:31P



Nendo's 50 Manga Chairs installation in Milan for Friedman Benda *Photo via Nendo*

You might say [Oki Sato](#), the founder of design studio [Nendo](#), has a one-track mind. "I like to be focused on designing and don't have hobbies," he says matter-of-factly. "When I eat something, it's good or bad or middle, and I wear the same clothes," he adds. Despite launching products with over a dozen brands in Milan this year, Sato doesn't get a kick out of flashy launch parties. "I like to be alone and designing," he says.

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This singular focus is likely what has allowed the Toronto-born Tokyo transplant his success. After debuting his first collection "Streterior" in 2003 at Salone, Sato's career took off. He now spends his time between studios in Milan and Tokyo, racking up titles like Designer of the Year at [Maison et Objet](#) Paris in 2015, among others.

To say that Sato is prolific is an understatement: At last year's Salone, the studio showcased over 100 products it produced in a year, filling a vast space in Museo della Permanente.



Light and shadow on Sato's 50 Manga chairs *Photo via [Nendo](#)*

Sato initially studied architecture in Tokyo, but took up design after attending Salone for the first time over a decade ago. "I noticed that design was more open," he says. "I felt the energy and was excited about it." This year, however, Sato aimed to bring the energy level down a notch (or several) with the peaceful debut of 50 Manga chairs for New York City gallery [Friedman Benda](#).

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Housed in a courtyard of the San Simpliciano Basilica—complete with ambient music—the exhibition was a welcome respite from the hubbub of the Milanese streets. The exhibition is an ode to his manga-crazed youth, and each chair, whether imbued with the outline of a speech bubble or teardrops, is intended to tell part of a story.

"I'm trying to express movement or feelings or motion and to bring that into furniture," explains the designer (New Yorkers will have a chance to see them in all their manga glory at Friedman Benda in September).



Sato's Tangle tables. *Photo via [Nendo](#)*

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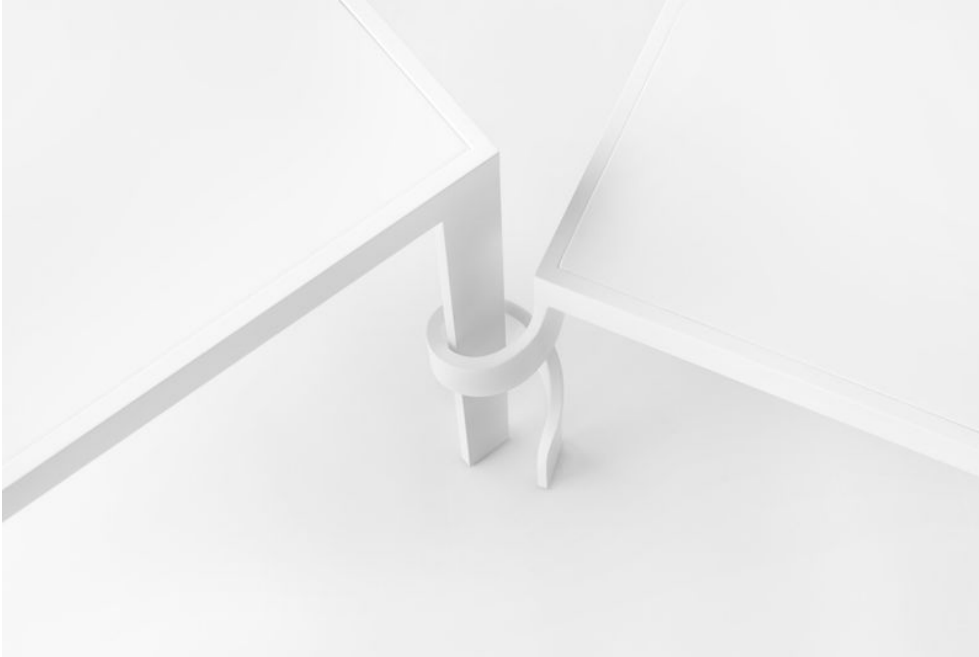


Photo via [Nendo](#)

Playfulness is an element apparent in many of Nendo's designs, which, while simple and elegant, often come with a dash of humor. The recently launched [Tangle side tables](#), intertwined like a pair of young lovers holding hands, or the Sway tables for Marsotto Edizioni, which appear to be on the verge of toppling over, are case in point.

When it comes to future plans, Nendo will have its first U.S. showing since 2011 in May, an interactive exhibition for the Collective Design fair in New York. The firm also plans to delve further into the architecture realm: They debut their latest project, a Bangkok department store next month.

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