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## When is a Chair not a Chair?

THOUGH TODAY HE'S ONE OF THE WORLD'S most celebrated designers, in his childhood, Oki Sato says, "I was a typical Japanese kid who loved reading manga books. My mother was angry—she didn't like this—so I hid in my bed." Oki Sato—whose firm name is (and who is thus generally called) Nendo—spent part of the last year creating an homage to manga in the form of fifty polished stainless-steel chairs.

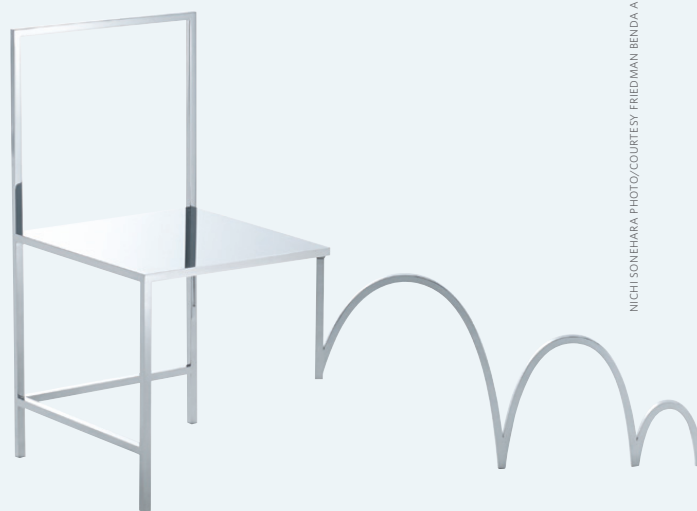
"It's like a haiku," he says, "a very small story but one that expresses time and history and emotions." The chairs taunt and tease, slump and slope, wink and nod. "I wanted people to start looking at chairs and begin making them into their own story," Oki Sato said during an interview in Milan.

Each highly polished chair (for the finish, Nendo turned to the company that made the memorably shiny cases for the first iPod) is different, each graphic, linear, and evocative—and often funny. "If it gets too serious, it's not correct," he says. "But the construction, that's another matter. The construction of them is serious."

The collection (each of the fifty chairs is unique) made its debut, in a courtyard of the Basilica di San Simpliciano in Milan during April's Salone del Mobile. Next stop, Friedman Benda in New York. *Nendo: 50 Manga Chairs* will be on view in the Chelsea gallery from September 8 to October 29. It is Friedman Benda's third exhibition with Nendo.

Though the chairs are indeed a bow to Japanese popular culture—really to kid culture—Oki Sato's intent was not that. "I really try not to think too much about the Japanese-ness of them," he says. "Yet my design process is drawn from very ordinary stories of everyday life, simple stories." [nendo.jp/en](http://nendo.jp/en) [friedmanbenda.com](http://friedmanbenda.com)

— Beth Dunlop



NICHI SONEHARA PHOTO/COURTESY FRIEDMAN BENDA AND OKI SATO, NENDO INC.