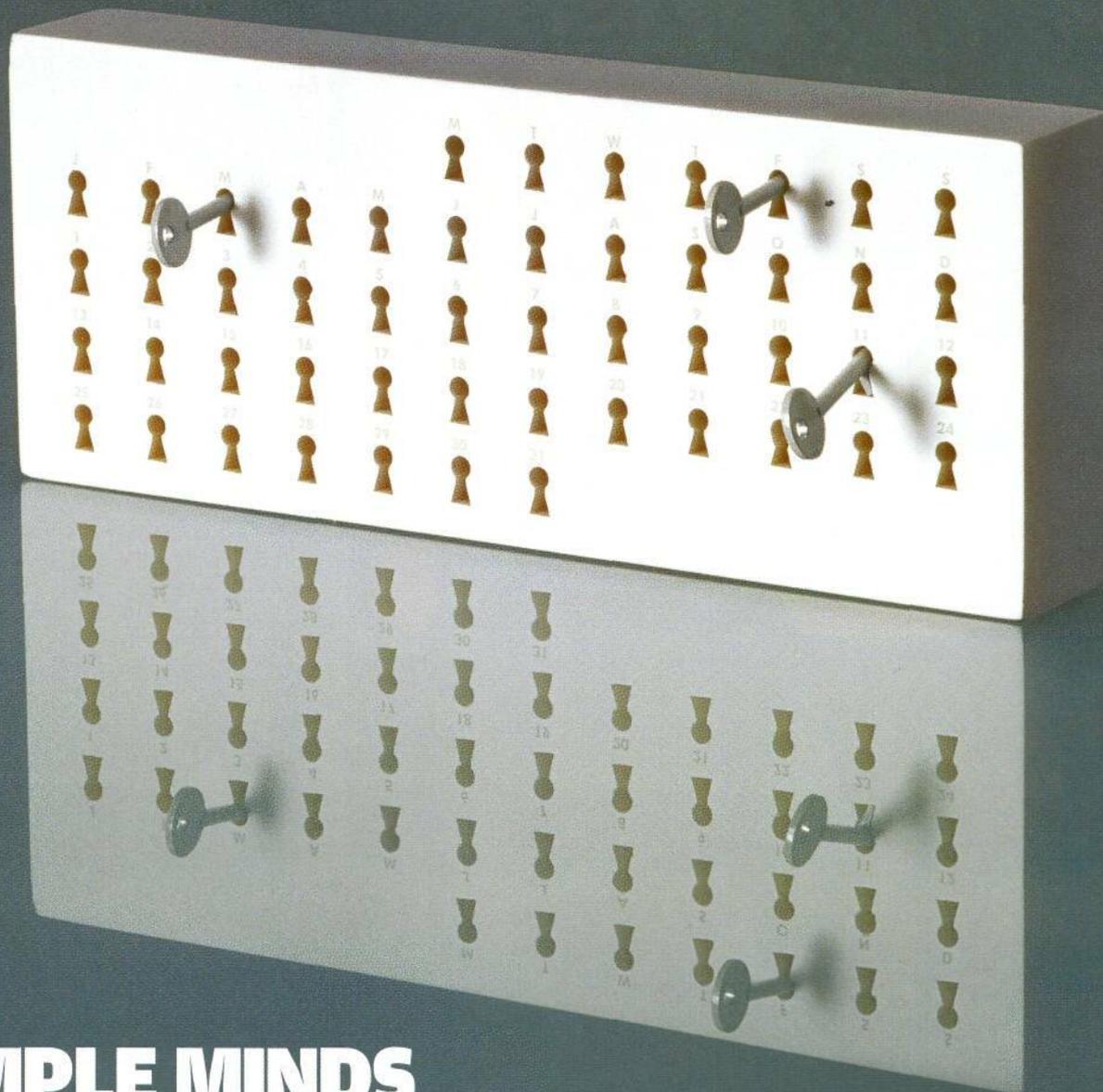


Newspaper*

KEY DATES
Nendo's 'Key-Calendar' - insert a key in a hole to indicate months, weeks and days



SIMPLE MINDS

The sextet behind Japanese firm Nendo are wowing audiences with their simple designs inspired by the world around them

The swift rise of Tokyo design group Nendo should hearten struggling students everywhere. Three years ago, the sextet graduated from university and went to Milan to look around Salone del Mobile, the city's prestigious annual furniture fair. Now, when they're not busy exhibiting their own work in Milan, they are crossing the globe, showing their designs everywhere from Shanghai to Stockholm.

The roles of the group are clearly mapped out - four focus on design, and the other two »



SIX DEGREES OF INSPIRATION
 Left, the Nendo sextet, from left, Takahiro Matsumura, Tel Okada, Oki Sato, Taka Ishikawa, Akihiro Ito and Yoshitaka Ito
 Below, the 'Yuki' screen, made from plywood snowflakes

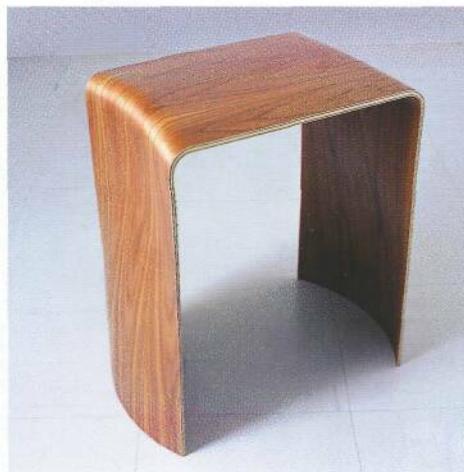


deal with the business side of things. Oki Sato, Nendo's head designer, met all but one of the team when he was studying architecture at university in Tokyo, and he recalls them seeing the work of Japanese designers on that first visit to Milan. 'We realised there was this huge market for design, and we knew we wanted to return the following year as exhibitors,' he says. At Tokyo Designers Block later that year, and still without a product to their name, Nendo had press packs printed, showed a prototype for a pendant light, and won an award for top installation of the year.

Sato's parents gave the fledgling company its big break when they commissioned their son to build a new house for the family. Tucked into a cramped Tokyo street, 'Drawer-House' works on a simple concept: all the functional parts of the interior are moveable. Beds, kitchen, shelves and stairs can all be pulled out like drawers or pushed back into the wall. Even the bath can be rolled onto a terrace for an alfresco dip. In a city where space is limited, the flexibility of the house works perfectly, and it has won plaudits all round.

Nendo draws ideas from the surroundings, whether it's from nature or the city street. The team have created bath mats that look like manhole covers, a screen made of plywood snowflakes, and a light that emits both light and the sound of falling rain. 'We want our designs to feel instinctive, unconscious even,' says Sato. For the Tokyo art gallery Closet, they hung the artworks from hangers, encouraging visitors to browse as they would in a fashion store.

Nendo approaches each project as a problem to be solved. When the six were asked to design a French



WIND POWER
 The 'Wind' stool, in ultra-thin plywood, uses minimal elements to give maximum structural performance

restaurant in Tokyo with a minimal budget, they wrapped the building in a sheet of white canvas and used the leftover fabric for matchboxes. At night the restaurant, called Canvas, glows like a lantern.

Nendo means 'clay' in Japanese and, as the name suggests, the team adapts according to the project, switching between digital and analogue, graphics and architecture. They're currently working on ideas for a mobile phone, digital camera and CD player.

'We're working with electronics companies who already have 100 in-house designers,' says Sato. 'They want us to do something different. We don't approach the design from a technical angle. We're always asking the engineers, "Is this possible?"' They're also thinking up new concepts for a chain of *conbini*, the ubiquitous Japanese convenience stores. 'We're thinking of ways to make them more a part of the city, maybe with cafes or libraries.'

Nendo's energetic globetrotting paid off recently when Swedish furniture company Swedese spotted its work at a design fair. The first collaboration with Swedese is 'Wind', a wisp of a stool made from the thinnest of plywoods. Making it was a technical challenge, but the designers were determined the end result would be as slender as possible.

Nendo is so prolific, it can be hard to keep up, but the team have always understood the benefit of good publicity and recently printed an impressive catalogue of their work to date. Sato insists that juggling so many projects is no problem. 'It's easy,' he says. 'We just have a very simple way of thinking and designing.' ✨
www.nendo.jp