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Cover Image
DATA hook, USB flash drive, 2011.09

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unexpected point of view

Established & Sons HQ, London, 2011.10

In 2002, having just completed his studies at the prestigious Waseda University of Tokyo, Oki Sato opened his design office, which he chose to call 'Nendo', a Japanese word for plasticine. Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2012, the office's modus operandi is clearly defined: a capacity to examine problems from unexpected points of view and offer startling solutions. Nendo's original sprit of adaptability has remained unchanged, accompanied by a mix of fun and pleasure. Sato undoubtedly loves his work and believes that being a designer is a means of bringing joy to the lives of those who buy his products. Nendo's philosophy can be summed up in a single graphic sign: "!", the exclamation mark.
In fact, Oki Sato – a Canadian born Japanese – bases his philosophy precisely on the recognition of each of the particular moments that make up our everyday lives: 'there are so many "!" moments in our lives, but the fact is that we don't recognise them right away. And even when we do recognise them, we unconsciously tend to reset our minds and forget what we have seen'.
Sato believes that these small "!" moments are of fundamental importance to defining the quality of the everyday, and in the end our lives in general.

Moments so interesting they can be compared to golden nuggets, rigorously pursued by this Japanese designer, working like a gold hunter wading knee-deep in the river of time.
'This is why we want to reconstitute our everyday lives, collecting these "!" moments and modelling them into something easy for everyone to understand'. What we wish more than anything is to offer these "!" moments to everyone who encounters something designed by 'Nendo', but it is important that this occurs in an intuitive manner. This is Nendo's mission.
Judging from the quantity of work produced, and the brilliant ideas realised, it is easy to understand how Sato – only 35 years of age – has become the head of two offices – in Tokyo and Milan – with a staff of more than 20 people, a very respectful number for a design office.
Notwithstanding his young age, Sato already boasts a significant number of built works. Four houses in Tokyo and its surroundings reveal a capacity to confront a wide range of scales, including the architectural. In the Uehi! House, built in 2005 for a married couple who are Italian language instructors, Nendo 'cut windows into the walls between rooms so that occupants can always call "uehi!" ("hey!" in Italian)>

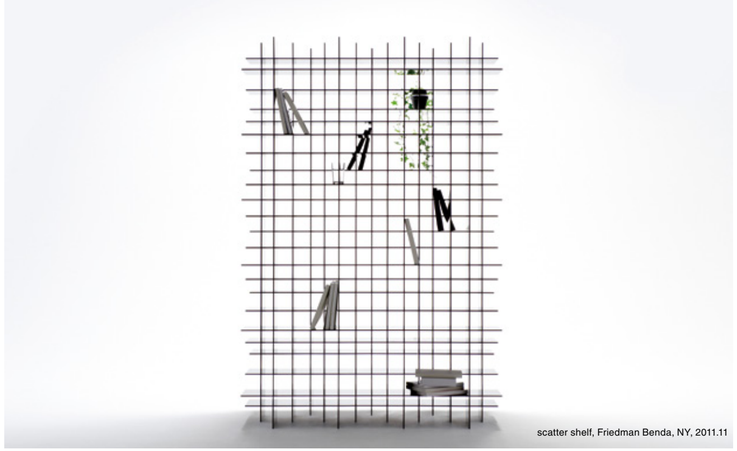
uehi! house, Tokyo, Private House, 2005.12

transparent lamp, lamp, 2011.04

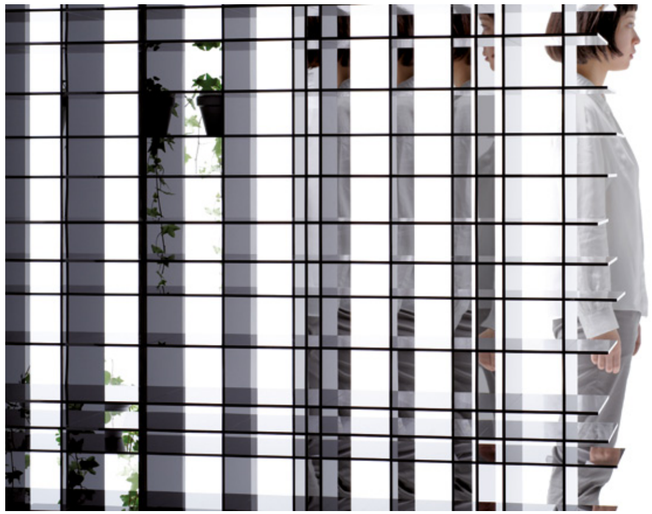
hanabi, lamp, 2006.04

to each other, just as though they were in the back streets of Naples'.
The exhibition design curated for Established & Sons at the London Design Festival was inspired by the typical fog of London, reproducing this effect using 25,000 sheets of trace paper. 1% is another interesting project, an experiment halfway between craft and industrial design. A link on the office's website connects to a page that offers a number of design products for sale. The products on sale are all realised in a limited series of 100 examples: acquiring one it is possible to experience the joy of owning 1% of something.
In a recent interview Sato described his work by comparing it to that of a narrator, interested in the history concealed behind each object or work of architecture. Sato privileges an approach devoid of a priori stylistic imprints, recounting continually different stories as part of an accurate research into the potentialities of materials. Hanabi, for example, is a light fixture inspired by Japanese fireworks, and the concept of ephemeral beauty they represent. Shaped like flowers and realised in form memory material, they react to the heat produced by the lamp and open like a 'four o'clock flower'.
Sato also associates teaching with professional practice: this allows him to be in continuous contact with that priceless stimulus that only young students can offer. At a time when the market and its rules of production and commerce have not yet become obstacles to the creative process.
In 2005, as a great fan of Italy and aware of the importance of the industrial district of Lombardy, Sato decided to open his European base in Milan, a truly strategic capital for global design. The choice has proven a particularly wise one, given the quantity of commissions he has received from such clients as Camper in Spain, Driade, Guzzini, Kartell and Tod's in Italy, Cartier, Hermes and Veuve Clicquot in France, Puma, Swarovski and Thonet in Germany and Austria. Clients for whom he has designed boutiques, objects or simply provided ideas.
Lightness and minimalism are some of the characteristic traits of this young Japanese designer who affirms 'I want to make things appear, by making them disappear'. Thus Sato's work is not marked by the 'formal anorexia' that is often used to describe recent Nipponese work, but an approach to design attentive to a physical presence that uses creativity and technical know-how to create functional and memorable objects.

Liotta+Belfiore



scatter shelf, Friedman Benda, NY, 2011.11



International KOGEI Triennale, Kanazawa, 2010.05-06

DATA hook, USB flash drive, 2011.09

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