

Wallpaper*

Nendo's collaborations with Kyoto artisans go on view in New York

'Nendo sees Kyoto' is on view at Friedman Benda (until 15 October 2022), showcasing the design studio's collaboration with six artisans specialized in ancient Japanese crafts

By Pei-Ru Keh
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Photography: Daniel Kukla

The [Japanese design](#) studio [Nendo](#) might be best known for its contemporary and forward-thinking creative undertakings, but amongst its most recent projects this year is a collaboration with some of Kyoto's most venerable master craftspeople and ateliers.

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Appropriately titled 'Nendo sees Kyoto', an exhibition at New York's Friedman Benda (until 15 October 2022) showcases the pioneering design studio's collaboration with six artisans, each specialised in an ancient Japanese craft tradition, to create new works of art. The fruits of this project were first presented across World Heritage Sites in Kyoto at the beginning of 2022, and made their American debut this September.

Nendo experiments with Kyoto craft



Photography: Daniel Kukla

Nendo's effort to meld Japan's creative past with its present is a beautiful tribute to the country's rich history of traditional techniques and use of materials. The project's collaborators include a 16th-generation expert in making ironware kettles used in the traditional tea ceremony, an atelier that has produced paper lanterns in Kyoto since the middle of the Edo period (1603-1868), makers of lacquered wooden tea caddies – one of ten families serving the three remaining schools of Japanese tea in Kyoto – and a 12th-generation traditional gardener and landscape designer whose atelier has serviced Kyoto's landscapes for almost 250 years. Each craftsman collaborated with Nendo, utilising modern techniques such as 3D-printing, laser-cutting and other design and construction methods, to create new, highly individualised pieces of work.

‘At the beginning of the project, I did not have a clear vision of the outcome,’ says Nendo’s founder Oki Sato. ‘It was a process of repeating research, visiting and observing workshops, and discovering ideas through countless dialogues with the craftspeople. With some collaborators, we could see the direction naturally through conversations as if we were brainstorming, whereas with others, we couldn’t seem to click no matter how many times we present our proposals. There is no doubt that both were fascinating experiences.’



Photography: Daniel Kukla

‘The project did not start from the beginning with a set number of collaborators,’ he adds. ‘We were introduced to other workshops and craftspeople in the process of talking with one craftsman, and the number of collaborators gradually increased. We were also able to meet the *iemoto* [grand master] of the Urasenke School, and from there we were able to make contact with a group of craftsmen known as the ‘Ten Craftsmen of the Senke School’. This was also important for creating a diversity of materials and techniques [featured], including woodworking, pottery, stone, lacquer, metal, and Japanese paper.’

The result is a provocative and inspiring body of work. Onishi Seiwemon's iron pieces have been 3D-printed using titanium powder to create a U-shaped vessel that can be either used as a sake pitcher or a vase, for example. Kojima Shouten's traditional washi paper and bamboo lanterns have been reimagined in ten new shapes and forms, showcasing their strength and suppleness in one poetic gesture. Miyazaki Furniture, a woodworking atelier founded in 1856, has produced a duo of wooden screens in the Sashimono tradition (without the use of glue or joinery tools) that articulate one of Nendo's most recognisable visual signatures, while the Ogawa Jihei gardeners have sought to bring the garden indoors by installing drawers within 3D-printed boulders to transform a traditionally decorative garden feature into a functional object. In Sato's view, this project was especially challenging to realise.



Photography: Daniel Kukla

'In terms of techniques and processes, I think "Ishidansu" faced the most challenges,' he says of the project. 'It was realised by putting together different materials with cutting-edge technology and manufacturing, where each process was fraught with tension. Perhaps the most surprising thing was the fact that woodworkers even purchased and used precision drills dedicated for dental technicians to finish the surfaces with the highest precision.'



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