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DESIGNER Q&A

Designers Oki Sato (of Nendo) and Luca Nichetto have collaborated across a 5,000-mile divide to produce a new range of furniture — and anyone expecting a purely artistic exercise will be disappointed, as the seven pieces err towards the contract market. **onoffice** caught up with the pair at Corso Bonaparte for the launch

NENDO=NICHETTO

How did you two end up working together?

Sato: We met at the Japanese furniture fair last year and then again at the Stockholm furniture fair [Nichetto is based in Stockholm]. We talked about showing our pieces together in Milan, but decided it would be more of a challenge to work together. But by then it was already after Christmas...

So you only had four months?

Sato: [laughs] I know. Then I thought of a game based on five-line Japanese poetry, *Tanka*, where one person writes the first three and the other does the ending. So we would exchange ideas and sketches over email like that.

Things could have gone in completely different directions...

Sato: That's what made it exciting! Some ideas came from Luca, and some from myself. For example, with the sofa, I was thinking about having it not in a single piece, but instead having different small volumes like a group of islands. I handed that sketch to Luca, who grew up in on an

island [Venice], where all the smaller islands are connected by these beautiful bridges, reflected in the water. And that's how he started working on the legs that connect it all together.

Nichetto: You can see we've done three islands here, but you can do more or less — however many you want.

Were the results as you expected?

Sato: I expected that the results of the collaboration would end up somewhere between design and art. But we noticed that the sofa could work for contract spaces like lounges and lobbies, and home use as well. A lot of companies were asking if they could make the prototypes for them. Casamania are making the sofa; actually they wanted it in their booth at the fair, but that was not the idea.

What about the Cork stool?

Sato: This idea was finished in five minutes. We were doing a photoshoot in Stockholm and the cameraman asked us to pretend to do some sketches together. So Luca started doing a sketch of a pot with two handles. I

thought it was really nice, but thought maybe we could have a handle in the middle, like a lid of a pot, which would be more convenient. Or we could have a handle like a suitcase — at the moment it is quite heavy.

Nichetto: I think we will stay with cork, but it needs to be emptier to make it lighter.

So the entire design process was a bit back to front?

Sato: Yes, usually we receive a brief and then start thinking about ideas, but this was the opposite. We thought of ideas and we ended up with really nice companies approaching us.

Nichetto: I think sometimes the designer needs to be a little more free, and freedom for me is not like being an artist. Freedom is to do something like this where you enjoy the work. To do something that's not simply what the market wants.

Everything here has a curvy form. Was that accidental?

Sato: [Laughs] No, we wanted to make a collection that was relaxed and friendly.