

Press release

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Lord Foster collaborates on The Wish List for London Design Festival

Watch a short film about the project

The Wish List is a collaborative project between some of the world's best-known design names and up-and-coming designers, brought together by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) and Benchmark Furniture. Terence Conran, co-founder of Benchmark, instigated the project when he wrote to his friends and asked, "What have you always wanted in your home, but have never been able to find?" The challenge was to produce each project in a single material: American hardwood.

Norie Matsumoto created the perfect set of tulipwood pencil sharpeners for Norman Foster, which responded to his wish for "a pencil sharpener for three sizes, capable of sitting on a desk and with a compartment to receive the shavings". Lord Foster has more than one desk, so the wish expanded into a family of pencil sharpeners, each for a different location. Lord Foster and Norie Matsumoto chose to design the pencil sharpeners in American tulipwood, which is often seen as a low-quality timber, abundant and inexpensive. But Lord Foster loved the variation in colour. "Of all the samples we examined," he says, "it was uniquely pale and the grain had an almost marble-like quality."

The cube, cylinder and sphere were cut from solid pieces of tulipwood, but the tetrahedron, at four inches, was wider than the thickest available stock. To compensate, Matsumoto cut triangular pieces from the wood and joined them together. "The angles and jointing were challenging. There were a lot of practical issues I had to solve," she says. Each sharpener has a tray to sit on that is large enough to hold a sizeable collection of pencils.

Paul Smith, Amanda Leveté, John Pawson, Alison Brooks, Zaha Hadid, Alex de Rijke, Allen Jones and Richard and Ab Rogers have all commissioned something for their personal collection. The project has been an opportunity for a talented group of emerging designers to work closely with their commissioners to develop the designs and construct them with the help of Benchmark's master craftsmen. The resulting ten objects, produced in a variety of American hardwoods, will be exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum during the 2014 London Design Festival.

Norman Foster:

"For as long as I can remember, the pencil and I have been inseparable companions – sketching and scribbling are integral to my way of life. There is something both humble and noble artefact of a pencil. Like the computer, it is only as creative as the person wielding it. Every traditional pencil needs a sharpener. The process of sharpening creates a mess of wood shavings and dust, so ideally the sharpener would incorporate a container to capture the mess. All the ones I know are small enough to slip in a pocket but not scaled to sit on a desk or generous enough to properly contain the waste. So in

For further information
please contact Katy Harris at
Foster + Partners,
T +44 (0)20 7738 0455
F +44 (0)20 7738 1107
E press@fosterandpartners.com

the spirit of Terence's mission I wanted to fill a need which is so far unanswered for me."

Notes to editors:

- The American Hardwood Export Council and Benchmark's 'The Wish List' will be on show at the V&A museum from the 13 September – 24 October 2014.
- Norie Matsumoto is a Japanese product designer based in the UK. Her background is in furniture design and making, and she developed her industrial design skills when studying at the Royal College of Art. Matsumoto received a Conran Foundation Award in 2012 and set up her London design studio in 2013.
- During the manufacturing process, all energy consumption was recorded and the environmental impact of each object assessed using data from AHEC's Life-cycle environmental assessment (LCA) research. The results present the cradle-to-grave impact of each product across six categories, including global warming potential (GWP), or carbon footprint.
- Photography is available from:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/foypuqk21obxy4z/AAA8B3_sucFDDXeJWhnIZ4WXa?dl=0 (Photography credit: Petr Krejčí)

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