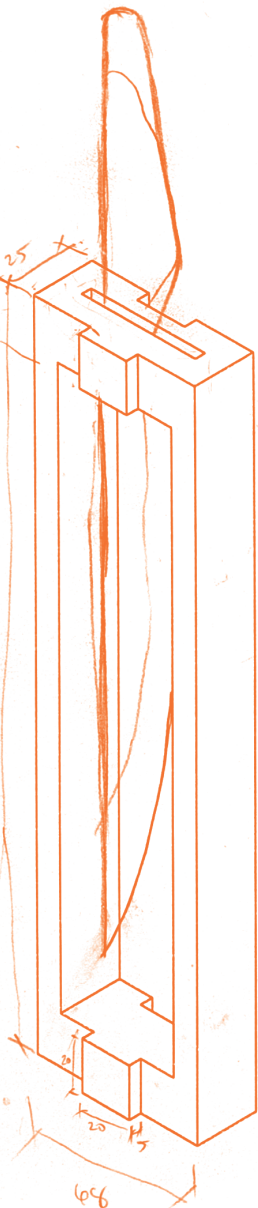


# John Quan

45  
48  
31  
24  
23

23mm = space between blades; (horizontal)  
8mm = space between blades (vertical)  
4mm = thickness of slots.



*Woven Structure*, 2007, laminated European beech veneer, 470 x 470 x 470 Photograph: Grant Hancock



*Woven Structure*, 2007, under construction Photograph: John Quan



*Knife block*, 2007, mahogany, magnets, 270 x 72 (d), width variable Photograph: John Quan

*Knife block*, 2007, working drawing



“Very simple forms, done elegantly. That’s what I’m drawn to”

John Quan’s practice to date has reflected a determination to become a distinctive and successful product designer. His range of designs includes: light fittings, utensil storage (such as the *Knife block*), and domestic and lifestyle furniture. These designs are characterized by a preference for natural timber finishes and minimal form. He reflects on the fact that he was an industrial design graduate, and as such has a ‘very strong product’ focus and seeks ‘to produce designs which are suitable for mass manufacture.’ The fact that he has also studied fashion design the artist sees as an advantage, a way to broadening his design vocabulary and allowing him to use a wider range of techniques and materials in his designs. He also considers that working with fabric has taught him the importance of comfort and usability in everyday design items to the point of becoming ‘an extension of the user.’ His working philosophy can

be summarized as a belief that ‘good design is something that people should be able to live with day-to-day.’

## Inspiration

‘I am very immersed in experimentation and find myself drawn to the notion of ‘formal play’, where I try to explore different possibilities in a more structured manner. It is through this creative process that one is able to arrive at innovative solutions and forms, even if they don’t present themselves immediately.’

The artist is attracted to the aesthetic of light structures. He explains that it ‘goes back to my whole theory of simplicity and paring away. I like to have the minimal amount.’ In this he admits to being drawn to a very Asian aesthetic, particularly the elegance of Japanese design. He also draws inspiration from the Modernist movement and a complexity of contemporary designers and iconic styles. He is conscious for example of laminated timber based-solutions in the modern design era through the work of such innovative designers as Alvar Aalto (1898 – 1976) and Marcel Breur (1902 – 1981). However in terms of influences he sees the need to maintain a sense of distance from the design world and its conventions.

## Visualisation

Planning for the production of pieces often involves both free-hand sketching

and computer-aided illustration as well as models (as for *Woven Structure*). In aiming to ‘make beautiful objects’ he works instinctively when assessing proportions and backs his judgment on how the object will look in its final form. He places high importance on play and experimentation and is prepared to abandon projects if they ‘don’t seem right for me at the time.’

## Process

Quan likes the warmth but not the ‘clunkiness’ of timber. Working with laminated timber allows the artist to work with the material on his terms and he continues to explore its structural and aesthetic possibilities. *Woven Structure* involved making a shaped block over which strips of laminated timber were bent by hand to create the curved units used to create the work.

## Realisation

‘Drawing inspiration from origami and woven textiles, I have tried to create a lightweight structure with the airiness of fabric and the natural warmth of timber. As an experiment in form, this piece could be scaled up to serve as a small table or scaled down to become a stool.’

The *Knife block* is a demonstration of the artist’s pragmatic attitude; an object which expresses his love of simple but elegant forms but at the same time, designed for everyday use. Each unit is inset with rare earth magnets, which allow the pieces to lock securely into place and be easily pulled apart for cleaning and then reassembled.