

CUBES X EDL

Words *Narelle Yabuka* Photography *Justin Loh*

EDL's innovative *FENIX NTM*® range of ultra matt nanotech surfaces has grown and developed, and so have the possibilities for design. Made in Italy, the new *FENIX NTM Compact* is a 10mm-thick structured, double-sided panel with the award-winning surface qualities of *FENIX NTM* and a consistent colour from edge to core. It's already revolutionising the work of kitchen and furniture makers worldwide. EDL invited three of Singapore's leading creative practices to imagine how this high-performance new material could be used beyond the surface in functional objects. They dreamed big, then brought their ideas into physical reality.



Above, left: Architect Ko Shiou Hee and designer Fiorella Amedai in the K2LD studio with study models for the interlocking concept. Material samples and leftover model-making materials were used to test the stability of various interlocking configurations. Above, right: A veneered panel and a loop of supple leather are paired with *FENIX NTM Compact* in a play of textures. Opposite: *Niminy-piminy* by K2LD Architects. Frameworks of *FENIX NTM Compact* in 'Nero Ingo' underpin both prototype objects. A disc of the material in 'Castoro Ottowa' introduces an alternate geometry to the smaller object.
 Note: When determining a supporting sub frame for *FENIX NTM Compact*, it is important to take account of the load bearing requirements.

Furniture or sculpture? The objects created by Ko Shiou Hee, Managing Director of K2LD Architects, are both. The genesis of the concept came about some 25 years ago, when Ko was an architecture student in the USA. He took an independent study class in sculpture, and designed a table with interlocking panels of MDF. The structure was such that it could be flipped on its side and take on the character of a sculpture. The project, which recalled the planar experimentation of Bauhaus artworks, has remained in his mind ever since.

When he was introduced to *FENIX NTM Compact*, Ko was immediately drawn to the possibility of experimenting further with interlocking planes that are simultaneously surface and structure. *FENIX NTM Compact* embodies the unique combination of being slim yet hardy, and Ko chose to experiment with how he could make an unconventional use of the rigidity of the panels.

He and K2LD designer Fiorella Amedai began pairing *FENIX NTM Compact* with sample chips and materials left over from model making in the K2LD studio – such as slate and plywood samples – to test asymmetrical configurations for interlocking, freestanding forms. “I didn’t want to use the material just as a surface,” says Ko.

“I wanted to prove a point – that you can support anything with a minimum of three legs.”

Working with panels of *FENIX NTM Compact* and large-format pre-finished wood-veneered panel, Ko designed two tables – titled *Niminy-piminy* – that can double as shelves. Or are they sculptures? The differing sizes of the two objects indicate the scalability of the interlocking concept. Spines composed of two layers of *FENIX NTM Compact* establish the stability required for the dual use and enhance the structural strength of each object.

Ko enhanced the soft feel of *FENIX NTM Compact* with the textured veneered panel, and played it off against supple leather. The removable leather newspaper pouch is in fact a reference to a previous installation created by Ko for EDL; *The Hive* was an inhabitable sculpture composed of looped ‘petals’ of *FENIX NTM*. It was debuted at Singapore Indesign in 2015. “The material inspired us because of its mattness. When you touch it, there’s a sensual feel. That’s what inspired *The Hive*,” Ko explains.

“When we began this project,” he says, “we thought we might create something completely new, but the interlocking concept has so much possibility.” We have no doubt he’ll keep experimenting.





Above, left: The play of the curves and the reflection of light off the mirrored surface distort the reading of the object. Above, right: Designers Priscilla Lui and Timo Wong, founders of Studio Juju, in their studio. In addition to drawings, they developed models of the dresser prototype at various scales to test its shape. Opposite: *Jetson* by Studio Juju. The dresser prototype incorporates *FENIX NTM Compact* in 'Grigio Londra', polished stainless steel, and steel bar powdercoated in a high-contrast yellow that brings a pop of colour and highlights the curve.

"I see a very intimate quality in this material," says designer Priscilla Lui, co-founder of Studio Juju. "It encourages you to touch it because it's so matt and soft. So we wanted to design something that has a very personal resonance."

The idea of creating a dresser using *FENIX NTM Compact* quickly came to Lui and her partner Timo Wong. Specifically, this would be a dresser that appeals to both genders. "Both women and men do some form of grooming," says Lui, "so this shouldn't be a gendered object."

The design of *Jetson* developed into a confluence of rounded shapes, deviating from the rectilinear and planar formats in which panel materials are often used. "Taking away the straight lines took away the volume and weight," explains Wong. "It also created a visual lightness. That helps to encourage the experience we wanted." Adds Lui, "We wanted something that was a bit softer."

But inspiration also came from another source. Lui and Wong recently visited the USA and had the opportunity to view many of the suspended works of sculptor Alexander Calder. Recalls Wong, "Calder was so sensitive about using weights to balance his mobiles, but also about creating shapes that always turn and overlap in your

view. When we developed the design for the dresser, we had the feeling that there should be fluidity – that the various parts should lightly touch each other."

As such, the dresser is supported by a framework of curving steel at its base. Explains Lui, "We wanted a structure that looks lightweight. We drew a hyperbolic curve, which brings some tension to the whole form. It gently touches the vertical surface, then it curves away again." And inherent in the final form is a delightful trick of the eye – the impression that the mirrored vertical surface is actually curved.

The asymmetrical format was adopted to enhance the soft shape. Says Lui, "The softness of the form creates a very personable quality. It enhances the quality of touch, of mattness, and of the intimacy of the material. It piques your senses and makes you feel like you want to touch it more."

Says Wong, "Our furniture-design process involves a constant distillation of essential physical elements. *FENIX NTM Compact* appears as an untainted delicate surface, but it is also technically durable and strong. With these qualities combined, we can achieve simplicity in both design and construction."





Above, left: Designers Naoko Takenouchi and Marc Webb in their studio. Samples of bullnose-edged *FENIX NTM Compact* were a key part of the inspiration for their table prototypes. Above, right: Softness is consistently emphasised by the rounded shapes, edges and corners of this kit of parts. Opposite: *Paper Leaf* by Takenouchi Webb. The planes that compose each table prototype consist of a pairing of *FENIX NTM Compact* in 'Bianco Male' and plywood finished with ash veneer in a leaf-like pattern.

For interior designers Naoko Takenouchi and Marc Webb (who is a UK-registered architect), work and home are never far apart. The partners in marriage and practice (who established their studio Takenouchi Webb in 2006) work closely every day, and their inspiration for this project came from some people very close to home: their children.

“For a long time, we’ve wanted to have a low table that has a versatile function for our living room,” explains Takenouchi. “Sometimes we want nothing in the space so the children can just play. But other times we want to have a big, low table where they can sit, have dinner, and do drawings. And after they go to sleep, we can start drawing.”

Contemplating the unique characteristics of *FENIX NTM Compact*, they decided to test an idea for a pair of dual-sided, slot-together tables, titled *Paper Leaf*, which can be fully dismantled and put to one side of the living room when they’re not needed.

“The surface quality of the *FENIX NTM Compact* material is very paper like, very soft,” says Takenouchi. “And another thing that intrigued us is how you can shape the edge with a CNC machine.” A rounded bullnose edge became a conceptual starting point, and from there the designers developed two tables with ‘natural’ curvature – not quite oval, and not quite circular. “One evening we began experimenting with large sheets of paper. We used my body as a compass to draw the curves,” explains Takenouchi.

Keen to ensure the strength and stability of the tables, Takenouchi Webb paired *FENIX NTM Compact* with plywood – a material that could just as easily be finished with a rounded edge. “Paper and timber; I think the materials naturally go together,” says Takenouchi. Ash veneer was applied to the ply side of the table tops in such a way that the wood grains appear like the veins of a leaf.

Off-white *FENIX NTM Compact* was selected for its visual association with paper. “It’s moisture resistant, anti-fingerprint, hygienic and easy to wipe clean – perfect for children!” says Takenouchi. And even better, thanks to the state-of-the-art nanotechnologies used in its production, superficial micro-scratches on the surface of *FENIX NTM Compact* can be thermally healed.

The double-layered surface created the flexibility to alter the look of the tables with ease. And for Webb, the slot-together format takes him back to his own childhood. “Did you ever have those coloured plastic discs that you slotted together to build things?” he asks. “We wanted these tables to have that playful character.”

FENIX NTM Compact is available for supply only, or supply and installation. Please contact EDL for more details.

