NUM NUM NUM FLATWARE
DESIGN AND PLANNING FIRM NADAAA TACKLED A PROBLEM THAT HUNGERED FOR A SOLUTION: CREATE A COLLECTION OF UTENSILS THAT LOOKS GOOD AND PERFORMS EVEN BETTER.

Photos by Bruce Peterson
Over the years, toothbrushes have evolved to have thicker, easier-to-grasp handles and pencils have gained slip-on grips for added depth and usability. Yet the handles of flatware have remained largely ignored and static in their design, says Nader Tehrani, principal of Boston-based NADAAA and professor and head of the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's School of Architecture and Planning.

With its prototype Num Num Flatware, his firm set out to establish a more effective and comfortable relationship between hand and utensil. If successful, the fork, spoon, or knife would function as a natural extension of its user.

Tehrani, who began the research at his former practice, Office dA, discovered that the key to this relationship lay in the development of a thick wedge at the midpoint of each utensil’s handle, where the thumb touches the index and middle fingers. “The design of this silverware began with a generic triangular cross section and evolved into various sections to conform to the hand in all scenarios of purpose and use,” he says.

In developing the collection’s stainless steel pieces, NADAAA also considered the multiple functions each utensil—fork, knife, and spoon—would perform, and designed a special grip to accommodate each motion. A knife, for example, alternately spreads, slices, and separates. Hence, four knives—steak, entrée, salad, and butter—were created, each with different section profiles and lengths.

Contrary to the conventional “barbell” profile of contemporary eating utensils, the final set of Num Num Flatware flares gently in the middle of the handle, like the keel of a yacht. Balance is maintained by reducing the mass of the utensil’s head, which is pressed to a thin sheet. For juror Jing Liu, part of the research’s “draw is the study of the center of gravity,” she said.

“It’s just something you want to pick up and hold,” juror Bill Zahner said as he examined the flatware’s images in NADAAA’s submission. Lacking a physical model to test, however, he wondered whether they would work as well as they looked. In the case of the dessert fork—whose three-pronged profile distinguishes itself from the escargot, entrée, and salad forks—the proof will have to come with the pudding.
1. Steak
2. Entrée
3. Salad
4. Butter

1. Soup
2. Entrée
3. Tea
4. Coffee
5. Espresso
Making Grant and Urban Planning Research Through Taubman College of Architecture Funding

Providence, R.I.—Alex Belykh

Galvanique, Electroform Consultant Assoc. AIA, John Guinn

Nathan Doud, Research and Design Team des Beaux-Arts de Valenciennes

Beaucé (associate professor, École Supérieure Jean Louis Farges (principal, Akoaki), Patrick and Urban Planning, University of Michigan),

Primary Investigators Ann Arbor, Mich.


Project Claire Sheridan, Michael Senkow, Andrew Thompson, Richard Tursky, Jono Sturt, Robert Yuen, Eifie Frieldander


Special Thanks Jonathan Puff, Abigail Murray, and the Carnegie Museum of Art | Hall of Architecture; USG Corp.

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Morphfaux PAGE 98

Project Morphfaux


Primary Investigators Steven Mankouche, Joshua Bard, Matthew Schulte

Project Team Claire Sheridan, Michael Senkow, Andrew Thompson, Richard Tursky, Jono Sturt, Robert Yuen, Eifie Frieldander


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Electroform(alism) PAGE 106

Project Electroform(alism)


Primary Investigators Anya Sirotu (assistant professor, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan), Jean Louis Farges (principal, Akoaki), Patrick Beaucé (associate professor, École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Valenciennes)

Research and Design Team Nathan Doud, Assoc. AIA, John Guinn

Electroform Consultant Galvanique, Providence, R.I.—Alex Belykh

Funding Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning Research Through Making Grant

EcoMod PAGE 108

Project EcoMod South: High Performance Affordable Housing

Client Southside Outreach, South Boston, Va.—Earl Howerton, Earlene Powell; People Inc., Abingdon, Va.—Mike Rush, Michael Weaver

Primary Investigators University of Virginia, School of Architecture, School of Engineering and Applied Science

Project Team John Quale (associate professor and EcoMod project director); Michael Britt, AIA (project manager); Elizabeth Rivard, Assoc. AIA, Erik de los Reyes (research assistants: architecture); Beth Bailey (research assistant: landscape architecture); Barbara Gehruhn (Passive House consultant); Paxton Marshall (engineering director); Nancy Takahashi (landscape architecture adviser); Eric Field (digital simulation adviser); Galen Staengl (engineering (mechanical design); Phil Parrish (associate vice president for research)

Prototype Design Team The EcoMod South design is based in part on EcoMod4, a modular home completed in 2009 for Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville; the design and construction team included more than 70 architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, planning, and commerce students.

Off-Site Construction Cardinal Homes, Wylliesburg, Va.—Bret Berneche (president)

On-Site Construction Allen Stevens Construction (site in South Boston, Va.); People Inc., C.W. Denton Construction (site in Abingdon, Va.)

Funding Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission of Virginia

Wireless Sensor Network PAGE 112

Project Wireless Sensor Network

Design Firm KieranTimberlake, Philadelphia

Project Team Roderick Bates, Richard Clark, Peter Curry, Eric Eisele, Billie Faircloth, AIA, Stephen Kieran, FAIA, Taylor Medlin, Alex Roscoe, James Timberlake, FAIA, Ryan Welch

Green Roof Vegetation Study PAGE 112

Project Green Roof Vegetation Study

Design Firm KieranTimberlake, Philadelphia

Project Team Roderick Bates, Stephanie Carlisle, Billie Faircloth, AIA, Stephen Kieran, FAIA, Taylor Medlin, Assoc. AIA, Max Piana, James Timberlake, FAIA, Ryan Welch

Innovative Mosaic PAGE 118

Project Innovative Mosaic

Design Firm Artaic, Boston

Primary Investigator Paul Reiss (co-founder and creative director)

Research and Design Team Ted Acworth (founder and CEO), Blake Goodwin (director of operations)

AEC-Apps PAGE 120

Project AEC-Apps (aec-apps.com)

Design Firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York; Case Design, New York

Project Leaders Nicholas Holt, AIA (director, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill); David Fano (partner, Case Design)

Project Team Skidmore, Owings & Merrill—Jason Chen, Robert Yori, Assoc. AIA, Robert Mencarini, AIA, Nick Scalco; Case Design—Mike McDearmon, Angel Ceballos, Jose Capelan, Diego Saprriza, Jorge Sierra

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Design Firms NADAAA, Boston; Office dA, Boston

Principal in Charge Nader Tehrani

Project Coordinators Brandon Clifford, Parke MacDowell

Project Team Catie Newell, Monica Ponce de Leon, AIA

Fabricator NADAAA (R+D prototyping); GPI Prototype and Manufacturing Services (metal prototyping)

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