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# Breaking the Mould

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The late-2020 launch exhibition of Tajimi Custom Tiles — a bespoke tile brand by Japanese ceramic tile manufacturer X'S Corporation — in Tokyo was a surprising affair. Curvaceous, oversized tiled seating and objects by British furniture designer Max Lamb stood alongside monumental configurations of breeze block-like ceramics designed by Korea's Kwangho Lee, their forms defying preconceptions of the architectural material.

'The idea of working with Max and Kwangho wasn't to offer their artworks as products,' says the brand's creative director David Glaettli, who is also the creative mind behind Japanese furniture brand Karimoku New Standard and contemporary craft platform Sumida Contemporary. 'It was to use their objects to inspire others to design their own tiles and draw attention to what Tajimi's tile makers are capable of.'

Tajimi Custom Tiles is Glaettli Design Direction's first architectural material project, though Swiss-born Glaettli is no stranger to the ceramic industry. It was his design direction of the 2016/ Arita porcelain brand that caught the attention of X'S Corporation founder Masashi Kasai and led to an invite to visit Tajimi, in central Japan's Gifu Prefecture.

Thanks to its clay-rich soil, Tajimi has a centuries-old pottery industry and now produces 90 per cent of Japan's tiles. 'I expected to see major factories mass-producing tiles,' Glaettli recalls of his visit. 'But what I found particularly inspiring were the few smaller establishments using alternative production methods and traditional Japanese glazing.' These techniques, such as extrusion, injection moulding and both dry and wet pressing, result in tiles in varying

shades and textures. 'They're really beautiful and unique products in an industry that tends to focus on uniformity,' he says.

Lower upfront costs of artisanal moulds, compared to those needed for mass production, also make the factories ideal for bespoke and smaller orders. To showcase the creative potential of such craft, Glaettli invited Lamb and Lee, both of whom use artisanal production methods, to Tajimi to design their own tiles and realise them in collaboration with local manufacturers.

'When I saw Max's sketches, I actually thought it couldn't be done,' Glaettli says of Lamb's modular, curved tiles. 'But the Ohata Yogyo factory proved perfect for the job. They use injection moulding into plaster moulds — the same process used for tableware — which could create the unusual three-dimensional designs.'

Lee, on the other hand, was fascinated by the extrusion technique used by ceramic brand Keramos Art, which involves squeezing clay through tubes. 'I imagined how that could create a looped weave pattern, a signature of my artwork, that could then be stacked to create huge "woven" pieces,' he explains. 'Keramos Art is also a family business, where the craftsman's mother and son are both artists, and that makes their work even more beautiful and powerful.'

Tajimi Custom Tiles offers architects and interior designers a catalogue of pre-existing tile designs from both artisanal and major manufacturers, with options to customise them or develop original ones. Glaettli adds that the project has been taken even further with the February launch of Mino Soil, an independent platform offering the results of Tajimi's collaborations with Lamb, Lee and a range of upcoming designers.

Bespoke Japanese tile brand Tajimi Custom Tiles launched with an exhibition that paired ceramic artisans from the town of Tajimi with overseas designers Max Lamb and Kwangho Lee. With his curvaceous furniture pieces, British designer Lamb showed new possibilities for the traditional material



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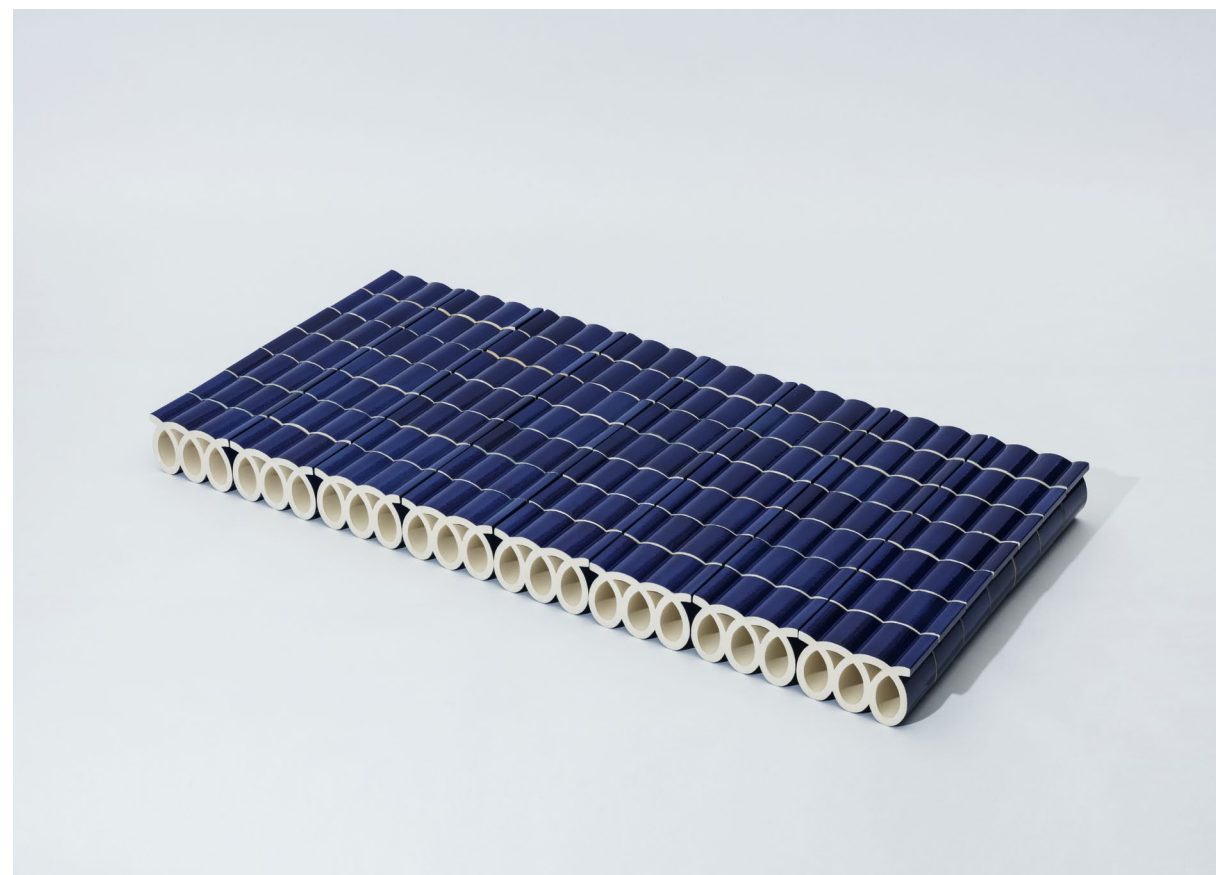
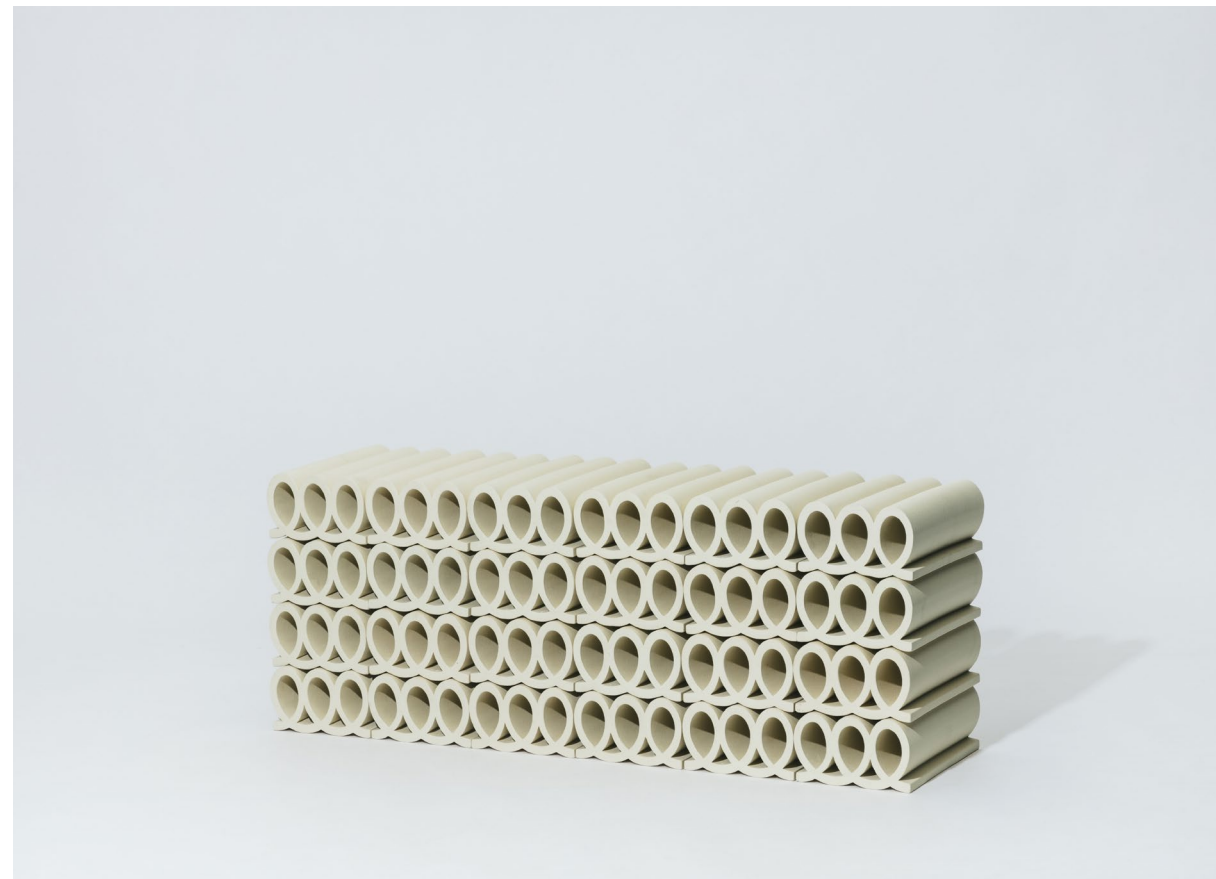
Tajimi has been a pottery hub for centuries, and while it serves as a base for large-scale producers, it's also home to smaller factories that use alternative production methods and traditional glazing

Bottom

Lamb's and Lee's exhibition of experimental objects — large-scale, three-dimensional tiles and minimal, looping structures respectively — coincided with Designart Tokyo 2020 to maximise exposure







Korean designer Lee worked with Keramos Art, fascinated by the factory's extrusion technique that he related to his motif of knitting or weaving. Lee created a module in the form of a looped line that could be be extruded to different lengths and stacked horizontally or vertically to form objects like walls or benches