

The future of design?

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Pre-reading task: New ideas

Use two or more of these words to make six new design inventions. Then skim-read the article to check your answers.

| | | | | | |
|----------|--------|------------|-----------|---------------|----------|
| magnetic | | sticky | | solar-powered | |
| | clock | | camera | | tidier |
| robotic | | wastepaper | | transparent | |
| | garden | | furniture | | web |
| glowing | | mirrors | | cable | bin |
| | vague | | memos | | bathroom |

- _____
- _____ - _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2 Keywords: Synonyms

Skim the article again to find words that mean (almost) the same as:

- 1) *allowed / given/ come true* _____
- 2) *boring / unexciting* _____
- 3) *rule / idea* _____
- 4) *original* _____
- 5) *factory-made in large numbers* _____
- 6) *plan / project* _____
- 7) *fail* _____
- 8) *payment* _____
- 9) *inexact / indeterminate* _____
- 10) *view / see* _____

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Ian Sample, science correspondent

November 24, 2007

A Japanese innovator wants to change the face of shopping and replace mass-produced goods with people-power ideas

- 1 If Kohei Nishiyama's wishes are granted, he will be financially independent by the age of 40, living as an inventor and being woken each morning by his robot dog. But the 37-year-old Tokyo-based designer and founder of Elephant Design has a more ambitious dream, one he hopes will change the face of British shopping.
- 2 He wants to empty the shelves of dreary, mass-marketed and mass-produced objects and replace them with products that we - the people - have helped to develop. Nishiyama calls his idea Design to Order and the principle is simple. Anyone with a unique idea, for anything from a robotic web camera to a magnetic bathroom mirror, posts an image and description on his website. There, people can log on to suggest alterations and improvements to the design. If enough people then vote for the product, he makes a deal with a manufacturer and the product is made.
- 3 "There are so many mass-produced products making it on to the shelves because that's how large companies do things. Our idea is to give people what they want by involving anyone of any age or nationality who has a good idea, early on in the process," says Nishiyama. "There are a lot of people who have great ideas but they're not working in the business. Our society is an under-utilised talent."
- 4 The scheme has been running in Japan for a few years, and has taken off among fellow designers who use it to float their ideas instead of committing to something that may flop. The company has recently set up a test site with retailer Muji to help develop products for its stores. One idea, for transparent sticky memos, was suggested by a 21-year-old student and will be marketed next month. She stands to get royalties from every pack sold.
- 5 Earlier this year, Nishiyama appointed London-based designers The Division as its first British consultancy to feed into the project, ahead of a formal UK launch next year. The company has submitted three designs to Nishiyama's test site at www.cuusoo.jp/muji, including a clock that is vague about the time, a set of solar-powered, glowing garden furniture, and a wastepaper bin that tidies ugly cables around work desks.
- 6 David Tonge, founder of The Division, said: "Our thinking with the clock was that mostly these are at work to measure people's efficiency and people are watched clocking in and clocking out. We wanted something more relaxed for the home, so the hour hand is on the outside, and like a sundial it's fairly vague. But in the centre, it displays minutes in a digital form so you can use it if you're doing something like cooking pasta for 13 minutes."
- 7 The idea for the garden furniture came after Tonge was fed-up with the over-designed options he found in shops, while the cable tidier is a standard paper bin fitted with a powerblock and cable storage compartments.
- 8 As of yesterday, Tonge's clock had received 39 votes, the cable tidier 22 votes and the garden furniture nine. The leading product on the site, with 235 votes, is a bathroom mirror that doubles as a whiteboard. The designers pitch it at the busy professional, who can write appointments and thoughts on it, attach memos like fridge magnets, and glimpse them as they brush their teeth in the morning. Any item that achieves 1,000 votes is put forward for manufacture.
- 9 For now the test site is free to designers, but Nishiyama says he will take ideas from other people, if there are at least ten of them who

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support an idea. His company will even produce images for the site if needed.

- 10 “Because it’s a new thing and it’s experimental, a lot of people are posting ideas and, it has to be said, some of them are utterly rubbish,” says Tonge. “But it can be surprising. There are definitely regular people out there, who are not designers, who have some good, interesting ideas, and some of those may well end up on the shelves.”

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. Kohei Nishiyama is a...
 - a) ... financially independent, 40-year old, Tokyo-based inventor.
 - b) ... 37-year old, London-based inventor.
 - c) ... 37-year old, Tokyo-based inventor
2. Kohei Nishiyama wants to....
 - a) ... retire by the time he’s 40.
 - b) ... change the face of shopping.
 - c) ... set up a web design company in London.
3. People who suggest successful designs can....
 - a) ... earn money for every item sold.
 - b) ... get a job with the company.
 - c) ... vote for other designs.
4. Who can currently post ideas on the site?
 - a) Japanese designers.
 - b) Japanese and British designers.
 - c) Anyone.
5. Currently, the most popular idea is....
 - a) ... the robotic dog.
 - b) ... the vague clock.
 - c) ... the bathroom mirror that doubles as a whiteboard.

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4 Vocabulary: Collocations

Match the words on the left and the right to make collocations from the article. Then look back over the article to see how they were used.

| | |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| grant | improvements |
| float | votes |
| post | a product |
| make | ideas |
| found | a wish |
| suggest | a comment / an image / an idea |
| develop | a deal |
| receive | a company |

5 Discussion

Which statement about the article do you most agree with?

- a) This is a great opportunity for new designers to get themselves and their products known.
- b) Kohei Nishiyama has found an easy way to make money using other people's ideas and hard work.

6 A new invention: Group work

What single item would make your life easier – either at work or at home? Think of something that would help you in your everyday life.

What would your invention do? E.g. polish your shoes, put on your make up, clean the snow off your garden path.

Make notes and present your ideas to the class.

6 Webquest

Go to the website in the article www.cuusoo.jp/muji.

Click on the pictures and see if you can guess what the designs are (the website is in Japanese).