

Made in Japan /// Paper Wood

Plywood—that inexpensive composite of laminated layers—often plays a supporting, behind-the-scenes role in construction projects. But to Drill Design, this lowly material is full of aesthetic potential. Determined to bring out its best, the Tokyo-based product designers interspersed the timber sheets with tinted card stock, turning conventional plywood into eye-pleasing Paper Wood. While plain wood grain still defines the new material's flat faces, a rainbow of colored stripes brightens its sawn ends. Praised for its beauty as well as its brawn, Drill Design's creation is a cheerful riff on an industry standard.

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PHOTO KAZUHIRO OKUMURA

The development of Paper Wood began with an investigation of ways to integrate different materials with plywood's stratified structure. Though acrylic and plastic sheets were interesting additions, they weren't economical. While layers of Hokkaido white birch and other specialty woods beautified plywood's appearance, they were also too pricey. But recycled paper hit the mark. Cost efficient and easy to manipulate—varying the width and color combinations of the paper stripes enables countless possibilities—paper offered exciting visual results. And because both materials are made of wood, the two seemed to have a natural affinity.

Manufactured in Hokkaido by plywood specialist Takizawa Veneer, Paper Wood panels come in large sheets that are well suited to the specifications of contractors and architects. But their good looks and smooth surfaces make the boards equally appropriate for interior finishes and furnishings. To showcase the new material's versatility and inspire other designers to use it, Drill Design has created a broad array of everyday goods, including chairs, baskets, toys and even a hobbyhorse. Each item is characterized by simple lines and sturdy assembly, poked with holes or made from strips that maximize the cut edges—because that's where Paper Wood shows its true colors.

Tokyo-based American architect Naomi Pollock writes on Japanese design for the Financial Times, Wallpaper and Architectural Record. Her books include Modern Japanese House and Made in Japan: 100 New Products