

# Made in Japan /// Step Step



WORDS NAOMI POLLOCK  
PHOTO KAZUHIRO OKUMURA

**F**or many people living in Japan, nothing says “I’m home” like exchanging outdoor shoes for indoor slippers. This deeply rooted custom originated in traditional houses, where a level change separated the living spaces from the earthen-floored entrance, drawing a clear line between clean and dirty, inside and out. Though architectural and shoe styles have evolved significantly over time, this simple action has not.

An elegant wooden stool with a matching shoe-horn, Step Step makes it easy to switch footwear, even if there are laces to be tied or zippers to be pulled. It’s the fruit of a collaboration between product designer Motomi Kawakami and Nissin Furniture

Crafters, an established wooden furniture maker in Hida-Takayama, Gifu Prefecture. To help promote this local industry, the Tokyo-based designer was asked to create something suited to his own lifestyle. As he habitually favors oxfords over slip-ons, Kawakami answered with a stool especially for shoe changing.

Step Step’s circular seat rests on four legs, with a slot at the back that holds the shoehorn. Made of richly grained walnut, beech or oak with a natural finish, the stool’s components come in an easy-to-ship flat box and fit together quickly with just a few twists of the wrist. When needed, the shoehorn is well within reach, but the rest of the time it’s free to bob from side to side—like a waving hand, ready to give its owners a good send-off.

*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*