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DESIGNERS *of* THE YEAR

MARTHA STURDY HONORARY CHAIR



HOME MAKER Niels Bendtsen in his Gastown institution, Inform Interiors. FACING PAGE Bendtsen's Tokyo chair reflects an interest in Japanese and Scandinavian design.



OUR Iconoclast

In a disposable world, a Vancouver furniture designer creates pieces that are meant to last.

THERE'S A REASSURING QUALITY—endurance, solidity—to all the pieces from Vancouver éminence grise Niels Bendtsen. To stand among his effortlessly buoyant sectional seating, his clever foam and wood chairs, his bracingly spare modular shelving, is to give oneself over to a coherent intelligence. Judges Ross Taylor, Brent Comber and Maddy Kelly applauded Bendtsen's problem-solving and innovation; but what his clientele sees is a seamless collection that's able to consider nature—the bend of a length of wood, say, or the allegedly unbreakable force of gravity—and mould it to

the needs of efficiency and comfort.

Bendtsen, 68, moved to Vancouver from Copenhagen in 1951. He apprenticed with his cabinetmaker father, then opened the first of a series of interiors outlets—Danet (1963, in West Vancouver), then Inform Interiors (1984)—that have evolved over the decades into his current outpost, the 30,000-square-foot Omer Arbel-designed space on Water Street, where his Bensen line is featured. He's also found success with the much-discussed Ribbon chair (1975), now in the New York Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection, and the Aura stool

(1985), 10,000 of which populate Starbucks cafés throughout North America.

Underpinning the business is a commitment to sustainability not through reclaimed materials, but through that reach for permanence.

His designs, including recent additions like the well-proportioned Tokyo chair for Poliform, are almost shocking in their economy. Vancouver has had a crush on modernist furniture Bendtsen's whole life; as seen in our reverence for nature, there's an abiding love, here, for all that is clean, careful and conscientious. *wf*

BY JOHN BURNS // PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS HAYLETT