

Making of – the TOTO approach to design

TOTO's new design is intentionally approachable. NEOREST WX, the new toilet with integrated WASHLET, is the quintessential expression of TOTO's expertise. It stands for an innovative and integrated design.



Around 100 creative minds shape TOTO's design. For the first time, the Japanese sanitary expert's design team has provided insights into their internal design process with the new NEOREST WX. It reveals the high level of perfection, the relationship between design and technology, and how significant "design reviews" and "interdisciplinary teams" are to the company. And why "kaizen" – the constant striving for improvement – is a perfectly natural aspect of Japanese design culture.

Durability and continuity are two factors that impact TOTO designers' everyday work. Many of the 100 creative minds in the Design department have worked in this role for their entire professional lives, which is very typical for the labour market in Japan. They do switch product categories, though – from faucets to toilets or shower systems, for example. Each year, they work on up to 140 different design projects of various scopes for the international market. Developing more intricate products can take up to four years. The new NEOREST WX is the high point of this collection's design evolution. The first toilet in the NEOREST collection was introduced in 1993 – and this new model alone took two years to develop. NEOREST was and continues to be TOTO's premium brand. Over the years, the NEOREST toilets with integrated WASHLET in particular have become veritable design highlights. TOTO introduced the latest NEOREST model at ISH 2023: a wall-mounted version that hides the toilet's many features and functionalities from view.

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The “understated presence” of TOTO’s design

TOTO Ltd.’s Design department in Tokyo is the birthplace of all company designs distributed around the world. Design Director Yoku Hirotsu finds it important to make one thing clear: “The most important thing is to think about the people who use our products. The design should enhance people’s lives and their personal comfort each and every day.” This perspective is what inspired the “understated presence” philosophy in the Design department. Nearly every TOTO product follows this philosophy. To realise this, all designers have to meet three principles without compromise. For one, they need to develop a “user-friendly design” that supports the person’s body and spirit in their everyday life. The aesthetic elements of the product should also create “harmony” in the space. Finally, the design must have “true beauty”, which refers to its suitability for use and long-lasting aesthetic. The fact that all of these products involve a certain level of intimacy in their use poses another special challenge – each of them come into contact with exposed skin. For this reason, it’s especially important to feel comfortable while using them. Curved, flowing lines, for example, promote people’s well-being and a feeling of safety.

Blending technology and design

According to the Japanese understanding of design, the perfect design doesn’t exist. User needs change, and the technologies that can fulfil them are constantly evolving. Designers are always required to align these two quite different aspects. For example, we have access to technologies that measure health and user data. If we use these, toilets could also better support people’s lives in an aging society. Such technologies could help us reduce waiting times at public toilets or transform the ways in which we monitor our own health at home. TOTO prioritises collaboration between their internal Design and Engineering teams to promote the development of these kinds of innovation.

“It’s important that Design and Engineering experts be in constant communication. They should discuss and explore how people will live in future. Blending technology and design is what we strive to do at TOTO,” explains Yuji Yoshioka, the TOTO Design Director responsible for NEOREST WX. Teams from Marketing, Digital Technologies, Design Modelling, Computer Graphics and Prototype Modelling will work together depending on the phase within the design process. The results of the individual teams are evaluated and validated in the design review process. Interdisciplinary teams consisting of engineers, designers and marketing experts also collaborate on innovative projects that require the development of new technologies.

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Creating new user experiences – TOTO's main focus

This is the case when devising comfort and hygiene technologies and integrating them into the product. According to Yuko Hirotsu, it's essential to find the right shape and materials during the design process. Both factors impact the user's impression – and finding the ideal solution is a top priority at TOTO. The goal is to further intensify the sense of comfort, hygiene and peace of mind, creating an experience that leaves people fully and completely satisfied. The seamless, streamlined design typical of the TOTO brand embodies these product experiences and is found in many washbasins, faucets and bathtubs sold by the Japanese company. TOTO WASHLET is more challenging to design and produce in this aesthetic due to the use of both ceramic and plastic materials. The new NEOREST WX can be described as having a perfectly seamless, organic and flowing design. It requires technological expertise to piece together the different ceramic and plastic materials together in a seamless way. TOTO, the Japanese developer of WASHLET, has the unique know-how to do this effectively. In this sense, Yuji Yoshioka also mentions how important the aspect of "editing" is to the design of NEOREST WX. Designers used the latest sensor-based technology for raising and lowering the lid – making it no longer necessary to incorporate any type of window in the lid for the sensor. With its practically perfect design, elaborate development and exclusive materials, TOTO designed the WX model especially for the luxury segment. The composition of the ceramic is another noteworthy aspect: Developed and manufactured by TOTO, the base material contains a composite that essentially keeps the shape and dimensions of the product from changing during the firing process. Yuko Hirotsu and Yuji Yoshioka are convinced that it would have been impossible to create NEOREST WX without this innovative technology. "The challenge posed by new materials and processing methods has produced a unique, integral design that is also beautifully smooth and seamless," explains Yuji Yoshioka.

Sources of inspiration and opening up to the global market

TOTO's design hasn't always followed this integral approach. The year 2015 marked a turning point in terms of the company's design. Intensive research involving customer interviews and findings that trend scouts brought from major industry events, like Milan's Salone del Mobile, revealed a new direction. "The global market, especially the European market, with their long-established competitors, suggested a change in priorities: It was time to develop gentler, softer shapes; a sensitive and approachable design more in line with global interior design trends," summarises Design Director Yuko Hirotsu. "At this time, we started incorporating more emotional concepts and took a fresh look at our entire collection. In 2015, we took a fundamentally different approach to open up to the

global market. We defined additional processes in which designers, engineers, the Sales departments in various countries and management share ideas – implementing procedures in which everyone could evaluate draft designs and communicate directly.”

The Japanese way of thinking guides the design

An important Japanese approach always stands out: The focus is always on the other person, not oneself. This mindset flows into the development and design. “We have an unspoken understanding to explore ways in which we can better appeal to other people’s feelings with our design,” explains Yuko Hirotsu. She is aware that some Europeans find the automatic toilet lid to be a funny gimmick. In Japan, however, this automated feature is seen as a form of respect to the user. Anything that could potentially negatively impact the user should be avoided – like touching someone else’s toilet seat lid with their hand, for example. This typically Japanese understanding and attitude towards life – the keen sense for other people’s well-being – informs the development of all TOTO products. It resonates throughout TOTO collections, inspiring people all over the world.

Düsseldorf, August 2023

1 Round, flowing shapes promote a feeling of security and well-being during use, the creative minds at TOTO know. These insights are incorporated into the design. Photo. TOTO

2 To develop innovations, TOTO places particular emphasis on collaboration between its internal design and engineering teams. It is important that design and engineering experts are in constant exchange and discuss, for example, how users will live in the future. Photo. TOTO

3 According to the Japanese understanding of design, there is no such thing as perfect design. The needs of users change, and the technologies that can help meet them are constantly evolving. Designers are constantly challenged to reconcile the two. Photo. TOTO

4 Depending on the stage of the design process, teams from marketing, digital engineering, design modeling, computer graphics or prototype modeling collaborate at TOTO. Photo. TOTO

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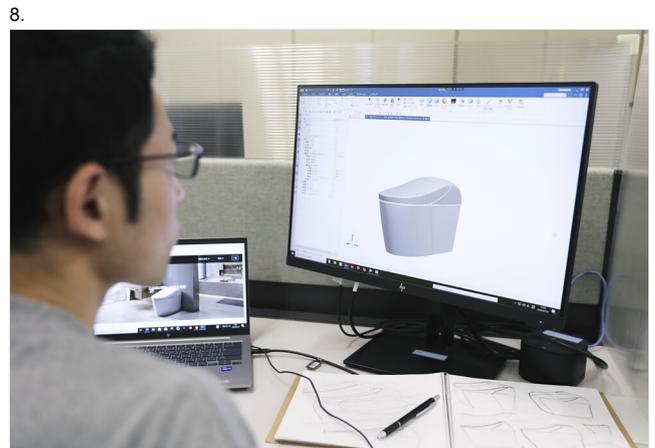


5 Products are created in the context of interior design. Internationally focused sanitaryware expert TOTO conducts extensive research on current trends and styles around the world. Photo: TOTO

6 TOTO's young, dynamic design and development team, with specialists from a wide range of fields including marketing, digital technology, design modeling, computer graphics or prototype modeling. Photo: TOTO

7 In TOTO's design department, the term "Restrained Presence" was created to characterize all products and their special effect in the room - from bathtubs and WASHLET to washbasins and faucets. Photo: TOTO

8 TOTO has outstanding expertise in joining the various materials of ceramic and plastic - as here in a WASHLET - without joints and allowing a coherent form to emerge. Photo: TOTO



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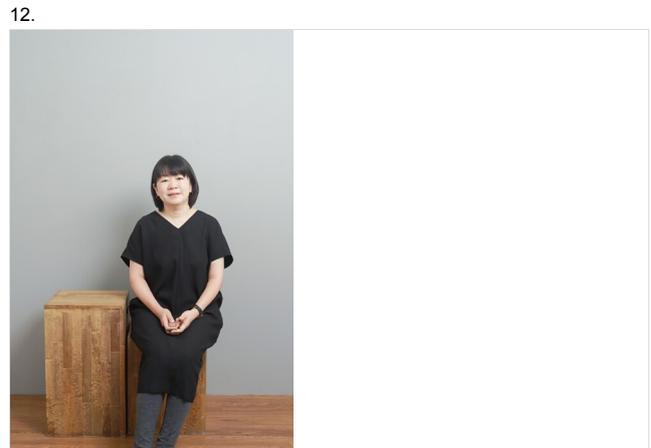
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9 Operating elements should function in a simple and self-explanatory way. The complex technology contained in a WASHLET, for example, can be easily controlled via a remote control, and the symbols and signs are internationally understandable. Photo: TOTO

10 Research into international design and furnishing trends is extremely relevant to product development at TOTO. Photo: TOTO

11 In the development of new products, TOTO also uses 3D glasses for computer-aided, enhanced perception. Photo: TOTO

12 Yuko Hirotsu heads the Design Division at TOTO Ltd in Tokyo.



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About TOTO Europe

TOTO, one of the world's leading sanitary ware companies, has an unwavering focus on people and their well-being. Established in Kitakyushu, Japan in 1917, TOTO has been developing, producing and marketing its comprehensive high-end bathroom concepts for the European market since 2009. The company aims to create a new attitude towards life through regeneration, comfort and hygiene, integrating technologies into their product designs in a smart, nearly invisible way. Japan's leading manufacturer in the sector, TOTO offers a comprehensive range of products including ceramic sanitary ware, faucets and accessories. The company can now look back on over 40 years of developing and manufacturing WASHLET and has sold over 60 million units worldwide to date. TOTO supports the development of a fully emission-free society and is very committed to sustainability: By joining the RE100 initiative, TOTO Group will convert all of its facilities to power from sustainable energy sources by the year 2040. The company also received certification from the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBT) to reduce greenhouse gases in line with the Paris Agreement, and to systematically cut CO₂ emissions further on this basis. TOTO employs 36,000 people world-wide.

Read more about TOTO online: gb.toto.com

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