NUM NUM FLATWARE

DESIGN AND PLANNING FIRM **NADAAA** TACKLED A PROBLEM THAT HUNGERED FOR A SOLUTION: CREATE A COLLECTION OF UTENSILS THAT LOOKS GOOD AND PERFORMS EVEN BETTER.

Photos by **Bruce Peterson**

R+D AWARD

Over the years, toothbrushes have evolved to have thicker, easier-to-grasp handles and pencils have gained slip-on grips for added depth and usability. Yet the handles of flatware have remained largely ignored and static in their design, says Nader Tehrani, principal of Boston-based NADAAA and professor and head of the Department of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's School of Architecture and Planning.

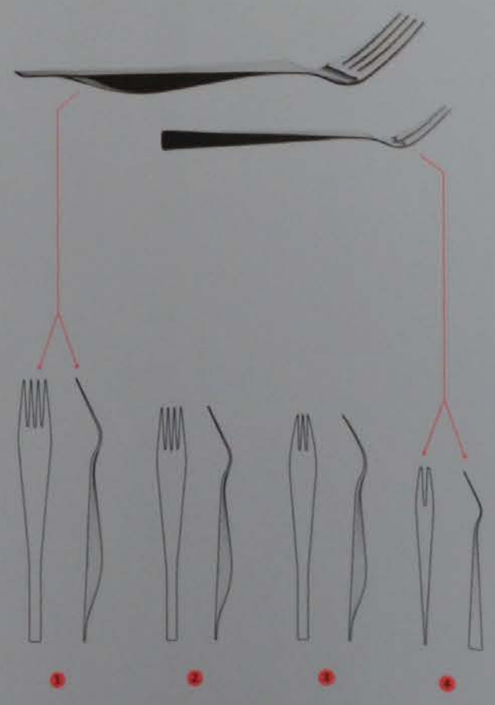
With its prototype Num Num Flatware, his firm set out to establish a more effective and comfortable relationship between hand and utensil. If successful, the fork, spoon, or knife would function as a natural extension of its user.

Tehrani, who began the research at his former practice, Office dA, discovered that the key to this relationship laid in the development of a thick wedge at the midpoint of each utensil's handle, where the thumb touches the index and middle fingers. "The design of this silverware began with a generic triangular cross section and evolved into various sections to conform to the hand in all scenarios of purpose and use," he says.

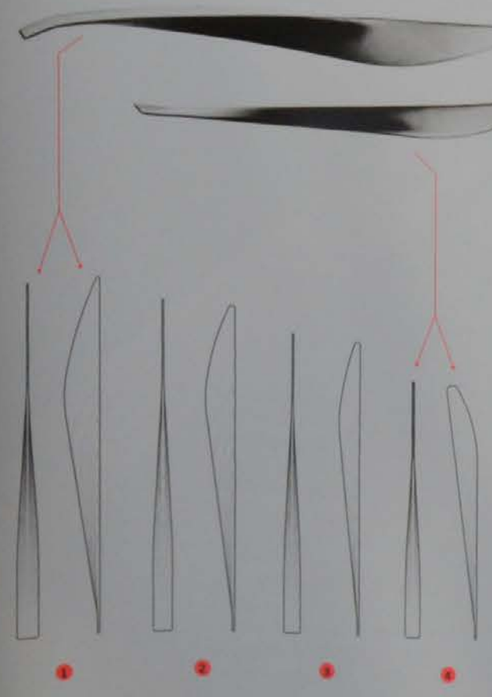
In developing the collection's stainless steel pieces, NADAAA also considered the multiple functions each utensil—fork, knife, and spoon—would perform, and designed a special grip to accommodate each motion. A knife, for example, alternately spreads, slices, and separates. Hence, four knives—steak, entrée, salad, and butter—were created, each with different section profiles and lengths.

Contrary to the conventional "barbell" profile of contemporary eating utensils, the final set of Num Num Flatware flares gently in the middle of the handle, like the keel of a yacht. Balance is maintained by reducing the mass of the utensil's head, which is pressed to a thin sheet. For juror Jing Liu, part of the research's "draw is the study of the center of gravity," she said.

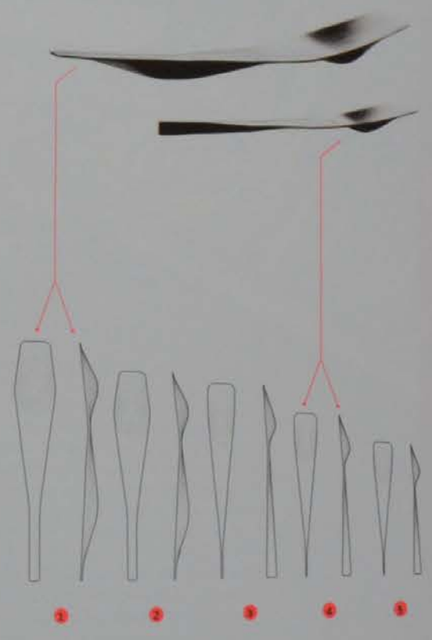
"It's just something you want to pick up and hold," juror Bill Zahner said as he examined the flatware's images in NADAAA's submission. Lacking a physical model to test, however, he wondered whether they would work as well as they looked. In the case of the dessert fork—whose three-pronged profile distinguishes itself from the escargot, entrée, and salad forks—the proof will have to come with the pudding.



1. Entrée
2. Salad
3. Dessert
4. Escargot



1. Steak
2. Entrée
3. Salad
4. Butter



1. Soup
2. Entrée
3. Tea
4. Coffee
5. Espresso