Richie Duncan’s “eureka” moment struck when he was camping under the stars one night. Having learned to build “zomes”—geometric structures replicating the repeated patterns seen in nature—while travelling in Chile, the architectural and structural engineer was experimenting with unique designs. “There I was,” he says, “laying on the uneven ground, gazing up at the constellations, and I thought: ‘Instead of making a grounded foundation, why not hang the zome from above instead?’ And thus was born the world’s first and only hanging zome!”

Over the next few years, Richie refined and developed his design. In 2013, drawing from the Japanese word for a “tree spirit”—kodama—he founded Kodama Zomes, a small, independent design and build firm, based in Oregon. Materials are sustainable and ethically sourced, with three percent of profits donated to sustainable forestry management.

What makes a Kodama Zome unique is its motion. “Unlike a typical swing or hammock, zomes glide smoothly in any direction,” explains Richie, “unrestricted by multiple ropes or attachment points. This creates a multi-directional pendulum motion. The closest metaphor is swinging a pail of water with your arm. Just as the water doesn’t spill out, so all the fluids in your body—your blood, your lymphatic system, and so on—become centered and synchronized in a zome.”

He says this has benefits for both physical and mental health. “This fluid equilibrium is known to reduce stress and tension, promote circulation and calm the nervous system. Several scientific research studies have confirmed that a swinging motion has positive effects on conditions such as stress, sleeplessness, and anxiety.” Kodama is now working with doctors and scientists on studies that explore the therapeutic effects of zomes.

A Kodama Zome retails at around $5,000 for a standard model, and customized models can be made to order. Kodama also sells accessories—fabrics, foams, cushions, and covers—and tripod from which to hang the zomes, if needed. All zomes are handmade and can be hung either indoors or outdoors. The standard model weighs 110 lbs, ships as a flat pack, and can be assembled in one hour with no tools required. It can hold up to 600 lbs of weight—that’s 3 or 4 adults—although they’ve been tested to withstand several times that.

The firm is currently expanding into Australia and Europe. Richie says his customer base is divided into two groups—the commercial and the residential. “The resort and hospitality sector is a growing market, with zomes purchased for clubs, bars, rooftop patios, poolside, and beaches,” he says. “We’ve just finished multiple installations at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas in addition to other resorts in the US and abroad. At homes and residences, adults use them to unwind after a long day, and children love to play, read, or do their homework in them. Zomes are a unique and treasured place to relax, hang-out, or stargaze.”

Kodama’s reputation is growing, and the company has just got an honorable mention in the Architizer 2017 Best of Outdoor Furniture Awards. Future developments are under wraps, but it is understood that they will further the connection between innovative design, nature, and modern amenities. “We’re blurring the line between the furniture in the living room and the living room itself,” says Richie. He admits to being a little obsessed with zomes. “What I love is the simplicity of design and efficient use of materials,” he says. “It’s a beautiful process of bringing duality together—left brain and right brain, creative and structural—I have never settled for the commonplace.”