

JAPAN'S NEW HIGH-PROFILE CULTURAL OUTPOSTS

AO YAMAMINAMI

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has opened JAPAN HOUSE in Sao Paulo, Los Angeles and London to showcase Japanese art, technology and traditional and pop culture. Their aim is to nurture a deeper understanding and appreciation of Japan's many appealing features, as well as policies and challenges.

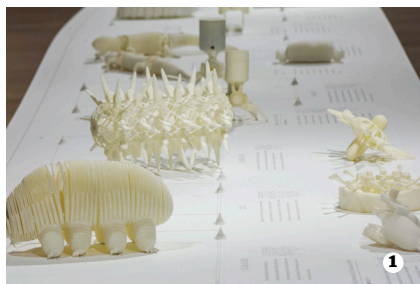
THE primary idea behind the government's new JAPAN HOUSE project is to share Japan's knowledge, culture and innovation as a global future resource. Through the thrill of discovering more about Japan, they hope to spur development of world culture and society as a whole. It also aims to ensure that more people and nations understand and appreciate Japan, and to spark relationships and exchanges between them.

"By providing opportunities to encounter the deep spirituality and aesthetics of Japanese culture, and introducing Japan's take on various issues," says officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Strategic Communication Hub, "we hope that JAPAN HOUSE visitors get to know Japan in their various contexts, and that more and more people abroad will feel closer and more connected with Japan and the Japanese people."

JAPAN HOUSE hubs opened in Sao Paulo in April 2017 and in London in June this year, while the one in Los Angeles had a

limited advance opening in December 2017 and is scheduled to open fully this summer. Entry is free, and the various spaces—such as exhibition galleries, seminar rooms, libraries, halls, restaurants and shops—offer multiple types of insights into Japan, including the chance to buy Japanese books, ceramics and *furoshiki* (traditional wrapping cloths) as well as sample Japanese food. These spaces capitalize on the expertise of specialists in each field, and are designed to bring local people closer to Japan and appeal to local preferences by carefully catering to their needs.

The exhibitions held include a traveling exhibition selected by the Japanese public and an exclusive exhibition planned by the secretariat of each of the three hubs. Traveling exhibitions entries are solicited from the public, with the understanding that the exhibits will travel between the three cities, and the winning entries are selected by a panel of expert judges. Up through May Sao Paulo's JAPAN HOUSE hosted the "Prototyping in Tokyo" exhibition by Shunji



Yamanaka, a design engineer and professor at the University of Tokyo's Institute of Industrial Science.

That exhibition's highlight is a fusion of Japanese craftsmanship and prototyping using state-of-the-art technology. "We make it possible for everyone to follow the production process by showing how prototyping is done—which is usually unseen—in a display format reminiscent of a picture scroll," Professor Yamanaka explains. "We display a lot of prototypes made with a 3D printer. Touching these can give you a deeper sense of the harmony between Japan's advanced technology and its refined aesthetic sense."

The Los Angeles hub will host Professor Yamanaka's exhibition in August, followed by London in January next year. "From the thoughtful expressions of visitors in Sao Paulo, I realized there was major interest in Japan's advanced technology and design," Yamanaka recalls. "Sao Paulo has many fine art museums but not many exhibits that combine technology and art, so they may have seen it as something unusual."

"Although overseas information comes in via the Internet, there are lots of things you won't know about until you actually visit," Yamanaka adds. "When you want to share with others it is very meaningful to create a place where people can actually see and touch things. I hope that JAPAN HOUSE will help convey all the fascinating aspects Japan has to offer and be a place for new encounters."

Both the traveling exhibition and unique exhibition run for two to three months, so JAPAN HOUSE is worth visiting more than once. Indeed, in just a year the Sao Paulo hub has brought in about 770,000 visitors—almost six times more than originally expected. According to the local secretariat, visitors regularly say they've made new discoveries about Japan. 🇯🇵

- 1 Prototypes made using a 3D printer for the "Prototyping in Tokyo" exhibition
- 2 The manufacturing process displays are set up to resemble picture scrolls
- 3 Shunji Yamanaka posing with some of his prototypes
- 4 Visitors actually get to handle the "Prototyping in Tokyo" exhibits
- 5 Entrance of JAPAN HOUSE Los Angeles Gallery and Shop
- 6 The facade of JAPAN HOUSE London

