

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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LIVING IN TUNE WITH NATURE:  
JAPAN'S CONNECTION TO WOOD

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THEME FOR **NOVEMBER:**  
**LIVING IN TUNE WITH  
NATURE: JAPAN'S  
CONNECTION  
TO WOOD**

**J**apan's love and respect for wood are evident in everything from its forests to the homes people live in, the places they worship in and the instruments they play. The country and its people are striving mightily to preserve the living legacy they inherited—such as the magnificent cedars on the remote island of Yakushima—and the buildings and traditional arts and crafts fashioned from it.

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**ON THE COVER**  
Living In Tune with Nature: Japan's Connection to Wood

# PRIME MINISTER ABE ATTENDS ASEM 12 SUMMIT MEETING



The Prime Minister attending a photograph session

ON October 18 and 19, 2018, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, attended the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting Summit Meeting (ASEM 12) held in Brussels, Belgium.

This Summit Meeting was hosted by the European Union (EU) and chaired by Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council. Discussions took place in a total of three sessions.

At the First Plenary Session, discussions were held on strengthening the World Trade Organization (WTO), enhancing the connectivity between Europe and Asia, sustainable growth, and other issues. At the Second Plenary Session, discussions were held on climate change, marine plastic pollution, women empowerment, and other issues.

At the working lunch-style Retreat Session, discussions were held on North Korea issues, maritime security, cyber security, terrorism, and international and political affairs, such as migration.

Prime Minister Abe attended every session. The Prime Minister made a speech as a lead speaker at the First Session and also made a contribution during the retreat.

At the First Session, Prime Minister Abe commented on the free trade system, quality infrastructure and the establishment of a sound material-cycle society.

(1) Regarding the free trade system, Prime Minister Abe stated that retaliation through trade-restrictive measures does not benefit any country, and that ASEM partners should engage in efforts to resolve excess capacity and remove market-distorting measures.

(2) Regarding quality infrastructure, Prime Minister Abe stated that strengthening connectivity is essential for the further development of Asia and Europe, and that quality infrastructure should thus become the international standard. The Prime Minister also noted that the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” advocated by Japan will contribute to strengthening Asia-Europe connectivity.

(3) Regarding the establishment of a sound material-cycle society, Prime Minister Abe stated that Japan will promote measures against climate change in a way that accelerates the virtuous cycle of environmental protection and economic growth. In addition, the Prime Minister stated that Japan will announce an initiative of effective measures for the entire world to address the issue of marine plastic litter.

At the Retreat Session, Prime Minister Abe made remarks regarding North Korea’s situation and maritime security.

(1) Regarding situation on North Korea, Prime Minister Abe stated

that the international community needs to work in solidarity in fully implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions towards the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Prime Minister Abe reiterated Japan’s determination to resolve the abduction issue at the earliest possible date.

(2) Regarding maritime security, Prime Minister Abe underscored that disputes should be settled peacefully in accordance with international law, without the use of force or coercion, and that unilateral changes in the status quo are unacceptable. Regarding the South China Sea, Prime Minister Abe expressed his expectations that the negotiations on a Code of Conduct (COC) will lead to a peaceful and open South China Sea.

(3) In addition to these two topics, at the Retreat Session, participants from various countries commented on urgent global and regional affairs, including Iran, the migration issue, counter-terrorism measures, and cyber security.

Lastly, President Tusk of the European Council compiled a Chair’s Statement.



The opening ceremony of the ASEM Summit (pool photo)

# LIVING IN TUNE WITH NATURE: JAPAN'S CONNECTION TO WOOD

The forests of Japan have been a low-profile source of the country's prosperity and a precious resource for its arts, crafts and lifestyles. The stories in this issue focus on ways the Japanese are reviving and preserving forest ecosystems in urban areas, the countryside and far-off isles, and introduce craftsmen who have devoted their lives to building musical instruments or shrines and temples. We also reveal how Japan's love of design has influenced Scandinavian furniture and culture, how the front porches of traditional Japanese homes fostered interactions in communities, and how reviving one forest is bringing golden eagles back from the brink of extinction here.



# PROTECTING, GROWING AND UTILIZING JAPAN'S FORESTS

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**TAKAYOSHI YAMABE**

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*Japan's strong policy of afforestation and drive to conserve its forests while using them as a resource have given it the second-highest forest coverage rate among OECD member countries\*, and its forested land area has remained unchanged for fifty years.*

*Director-general Kouji Makimoto of the Forestry Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries discusses the current state of Japan's forests and the country's future forest policies.*

## **What makes Japanese forests different from those in other countries?**

Japan's forests cover about 25.05 million hectares and account for about two-thirds of its land area. Our forest ratio ranks second among OECD member countries. Moreover, Japan's forests are highly diverse thanks to the geographic characteristics of the Japanese archipelago, which extends north and south and encompasses various altitudes. There are subarctic forests in eastern Hokkaido, subtropical forests such as the mangroves of the

southern islands, and deciduous broadleaf trees and evergreen trees in the cool temperate forest areas as well as the warm temperate forest areas.

Approximately sixty percent of these are natural forests, while forty percent were grown through reforestation on felled areas. Trees planted after the Second World War have matured, and the growing stock—the volume of tree trunks constituting the forest—has almost tripled over the past fifty years. The national tree-planting campaign that began in 1950 and spread nationwide is probably a good



Kouji Makimoto, director-general of the Forestry Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries



measure of how vital forests are to the Japanese people.

In addition, I believe the presence of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress at the annual National Arbor Day celebration as well as having Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess at the annual National Tree Care Festival have been very influential. Thanks to the efforts of our many predecessors, Japan currently boasts rich forest resources.

Even in the field of forestry mechanization and productivity, improvement have become indispensable, so we are revising the Forest Act and taking other actions to promote ways to better consolidate forest management.

### **What concrete measures are being taken to optimize the use of Japan's rich forest resources?**

In 2010, Japan enacted the Act for Promotion of Use of Wood in Public Buildings, which established objectives including that, in principle, nationally owned low-rise buildings should be constructed of wood, and that other public buildings should use wood for their interiors. Thanks to this act, more local government facilities and schools are being built of wood. You can also find railway stations and commercial facilities that make use of wood.

This is largely thanks to the development of architectural technology, such as the pervasive use of a wooden material with excellent strength called cross-laminated timber. CLT is created from panels made of laminated wooden boards layered in such a way that the fiber direction of each board is at right angles to the one before. This has allowed for the construction of wooden medium-rise buildings.

In addition, the Forestry Agency is carrying out a campaign to showcase reasons to use wood and promotes the use of products and facilities made of wood in homes, workplaces and local communities.

Within this initiative, we are advancing educational initiatives for both children and adults to provide hands-on experiences with timber and wood products. The Agency hopes this will promote appreciation for using wood as a part of their lifestyle and culture. Many local governments and companies have participated in this motivating initiative.

### **How will Japan's forests be managed from now on?**

We believe it is essential to harvest and use trees as well as take advantage of the multiple functions of forests. For example, forests also prevent sediment disasters, help mitigate floods and secure water sources by storing water, preserve the global environment by absorbing carbon dioxide, maintain biodiversity and contribute to people's health and cultural activities.

In particular, the Agency has come up with "Japan's Forests with Breathtaking Views: Selections from Tourist Destinations in National Forests" a way to use forests as a tourist resource. We are working on measures to help visitors experience the nature and culture of the place through activities such as forest walks.

To make good use of all that forests offer requires appropriate management, such as growing large trees by thinning and weeding, which preserves the soil. The agency plans to take different approaches to the forests according to the functions and roles of each in categories. The natural forests—including those that have been selected as natural World Heritage Sites—are carefully preserved. Some of the manmade forests will be converted into mixed forests of coniferous and broadleaf trees, to cultivate biodiversity and recharge water sources, while other parts are destined to become logging resources and reforestation sites to pass our precious forest resources on to the next generation. We are hoping to take full advantage of the charms of Japanese forests by actively using them in various forms, from tourism to industrial products, while of course also managing them carefully. 

\* According to *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (second edition, published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 2016), Japan's forest coverage rate is 68.5 percent, second among OECD member countries after Finland. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries presents the same rate as approximately 67 percent, since they use a different definition of national land area.

# PEOPLE AND NATURE TRANSFORM A WASTELAND INTO A SPECIAL FOREST

A vast forest surrounds Meiji Jingu Shrine close by Tokyo's bustling Harajuku Station. It took a hundred years, the wisdom of people and power of nature to transform this former wasteland into a flourishing forest. Meiji Jingu representatives spoke about the superb plan for this transformation drawn up in the 1910s and their own measures.

TAKAYOSHI YAMABE



**I**N Japan, diverse *kami* (divine spirits) have arisen from people's reverence for various natural phenomena, living creatures and individuals. Since ancient times, forests have been deeply tied to these spirits. The country's shrines honor those *kami*, and the groves surrounding them are known as *chinju no mori*, or sacred forests.

The 700,000-square-meter woodland that sprawls next to Harajuku Station is a sacred forest that encompasses Meiji Jingu, dedicated to Emperor Meiji and the Empress Shoken. The shrine was completed in 1920, and the trees enfolding it were planted around the same time.

According to Miki Fukutoku, chief of Meiji Jingu's public relations department, the site was

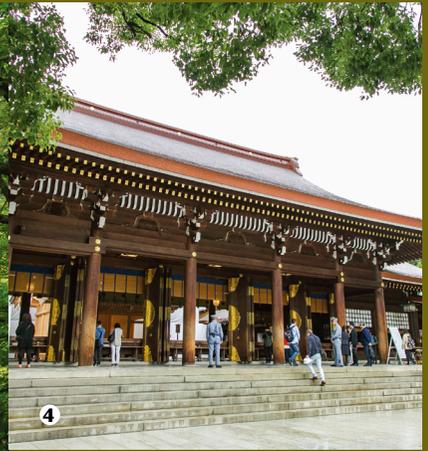
once mostly wasteland. When the shrine asked for donations of trees to plant there, 100,000 were shipped from all over Japan and neighboring countries, and 110,000 volunteers helped to plant them.

"The characteristics of Meiji Jingu's forest are that it consists mainly of evergreen broadleaf trees that match the local soil and climate, and that it was planned to become an 'eternal forest' developed over the course of a hundred years with the help of nature," Fukutoku says.

According to Fukutoku, the landscapers of the time mapped out their predictions of how the forest conditions would gradually change. "In the initial stage, the tall, mature pines would be prominent, followed by a

phase when the growth of other coniferous trees would catch on, and the presence of broadleaf trees would increase as they grew larger," she explains. "They envisioned that the forest would eventually become a mixed forest where broadleaf trees have relative dominance over others. In the meantime, no logging or additional tree plantings were carried out." She adds that the designers expected nature would transform the forest through processes in which trees that couldn't grow well in the local soil would be naturally culled and replaced by new broadleaf trees.

Meiji Jingu will celebrate its hundredth anniversary in 2020, and Fukutoku says the shrine's forest seems to be transitioning faster than initially forecast.



- 1 A twelve-meter-tall *torii* gate marks the entrance to the shrine
- 2 Starting in 1929, over 110,000 volunteers helped plant the 100,000 trees that grace the grounds
- 3 The lush green forest makes visitors forget they are in the middle of the city
- 4 Elegant and serene, Meiji Jingu attracts visitors from across Japan and the world

According to a comprehensive survey of the shrine's natural environment published in 2013, the number of tree species in the forest was 234, down from the 365 present when it was established. This implies that natural selection is occurring. With many trees growing beyond thirty meters in height, it has become a truly natural forest.

"The trees donated from various places also brought in living organisms and microorganisms from their original habitats, some of which died off," Fukutoku notes. "However, the survey showed that the forest hosts insects never seen before in Tokyo or Honshu."

There are twenty-eight species of seed plants here listed as

endangered in the Red Data Book of the Ministry of the Environment. The survey also confirmed the existence of a sabre wasp for the first time in Japan; the wasp was named after the shrine, *Jingu-usumaru-himebachi*.

"The forest has protected both *kami* and various living creatures," Fukutoku explains. "In recent years, an increasing number of people are walking through the forest's trails instead of just visiting the shrine."

However, she notes, the sacred forest and the shrine were originally meant to be one entity. "For example, from the shrine's main southern entrance, which is the broadest of all entrances and the closest to Harajuku Station, a gentle downhill continues as you pass through the first *torii*.

You cannot clearly see far ahead since trees from both sides of the forest cover the passage. At the bottom of the slope, a bridge spans the water flowing in from the garden pond on the left side, which resembles a valley. I think crossing this bridge gives an enhanced sense of entering a sacred place."

The forest guides visitors toward the shrine, and they can enjoy the varying landscape as the trees grow densely in some parts and sparsely in others. Starting with the trees gathered from all over the country, the Meiji Jingu forest raised by the joint effort of nature and people over the past century will continue to thrive for a long time, just as its original designers wished. 



# Community Building in the Forest of the Golden Eagles

A powerful golden eagle in flight

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**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

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*Located north of Minakami Town in Gunma Prefecture, the Akaya Forest is a national forest of about ten thousand hectares that is home to many types of precious wildlife. The AKAYA Project is taking action to restore and preserve the health of the forest and its inhabitants.*

**T**HE AKAYA Project is made up of three groups—the Akaya Project Regional Council (formed by local residents), the Forestry Agency's Kanto Regional Forest Office, and The Nature Conservation Society of Japan. “The forest of Akaya is 1.6 times larger than the area contained within the Yamanote Line that encompasses central Tokyo,” explains one project member, Hirotaka Matsui. “The AKAYA Project aims to reconstruct the ecosystem while creating a sustainable community. There are seven working groups, such as mammal monitoring and mountain stream restoration, working to obtain scientific data about environmental changes.”

The highlight of this project is the drive to protect the golden eagles that live there, which are listed as an endangered species—there are only around two hundred breeding pairs and five hundred individual birds. In the past it was possible to spot these massive birds spreading their two-meter-wide wings and soaring through the skies of Japan, but this may soon no longer be the case. The hypothesis is that the increase of manmade forests led to their endangerment.

“From the 1960s to 1980s, the country's forest expansion project created many manmade forests throughout Japan, planting trees close together,” says another member of the AKAYA Project, Seiichi



Dense manmade forests are not the ideal environment for golden eagles



Careful logging practices make it easier for the eagles to hunt



Experts and volunteers carefully monitor the area to promote biodiversity



The Akaya Forest is right above the Tone River, an important water source for both local towns and Tokyo

Dejima. “Later, when wood was being sourced from outside of Japan, these manmade forests continued to expand uncontrolled, which made it difficult for the golden eagle to find its prey from above.”

There is one pair of golden eagles living in the forest of Akaya. To help and protect them, project members cut about two hectares of manmade forest in September 2015. As the natural forest returned, it became easier for the golden eagles to hunt. After this first logging experiment, one chick was spotted flying out of the golden eagles’ nest in June 2016—the first in seven years. By November 2017, members of the project even saw a golden eagle hunting. It appears that the rate of the birds being spotted has increased significantly. “We can’t say clear-cutting the manmade forest is directly connected to this result, but it is definitely a positive result,” Dejima states. He also mentions that they are striving to make hunting easier for the birds.

The children of Minakami are the ones who most frequently spot the golden eagles in the forest. To make these young future environmentalists proud of their hometown, the projects creates opportunities for them to observe the golden eagles alongside local adults and learn more about them from The Nature Conservation Society of Japan, which has been

monitoring the status of the raptors for around thirty years.

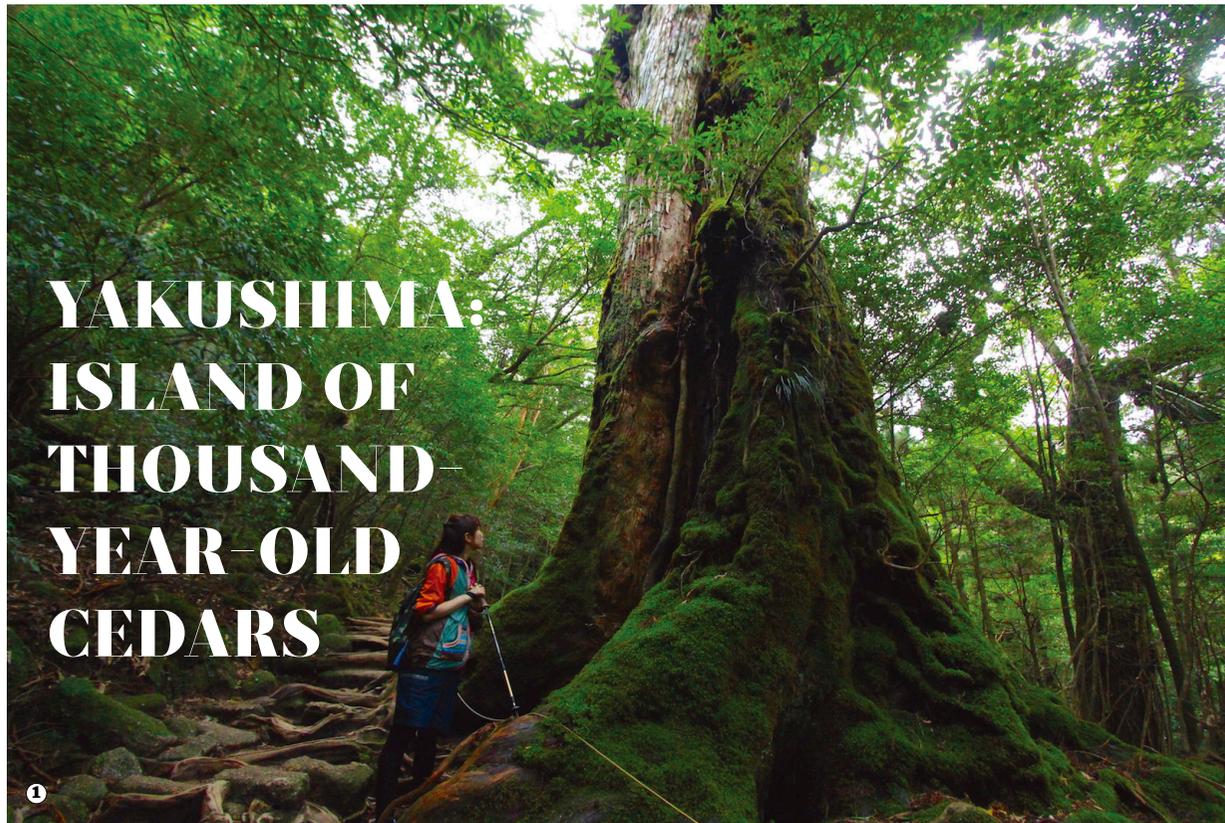
Dejima is pleased to see that golden eagle statues have been placed in tourist spots and that the bird is now considered the symbol of Minakami. And thanks to the AKAYA movement, a local workshop that once produced blue and red castanets started creating wooden castanets using Akaya’s special trees.

“The trees are a precious natural resource, and we should use them wisely. If people know where the wood is sourced from and how doing so helps protect the golden eagles, perhaps they will view this as added value and stop relying on imported wood,” Dejima says hopefully.

It will likely take a century to clear the manmade forest and restore the natural one. Unfortunately, those who are involved in the golden eagle protection project will not see it. Dejima laughs. “It’s a bit of a far-off dream. These are just the first steps, and it is a project with many uncertainties.”

Still, seeing a young golden eagle soaring after seven years brings a sense of hope for the future. With the dream of spreading this project beyond Akaya throughout Japan, the AKAYA Project will continue to protect the wonderful natural environment and make a community that children can be proud of. **7**

# YAKUSHIMA: ISLAND OF THOUSAND- YEAR-OLD CEDARS



*The normal lifespan for a cedar tree is reportedly a little more than five hundred years, but Yakushima's Yakusugi have flourished for over ten centuries, and the islanders have revered these cedar giants as sacred since ancient times. Registered as a Natural World Heritage Site in 1993, the remote island is a popular destination for tourists.*

## TOMOKO NAGATA

YAKUSHIMA lies sixty kilometers south of Cape Sata, the southernmost point on Kyushu. Forest covers ninety percent of the island, and Kyushu's tallest peak, Miyanouradake (1,936 meters) is part of a mountain range nicknamed the "Alps of the Sea." Yakushima's climate ranges from subtropical to subarctic, and is home to a diverse array of plant life. Winter caps the mountaintops with snow while tropical fish swim in its coastal waters.

Yakusugi cedars are over a thousand years old, and primarily grow in the virgin forests between altitudes of 500 to 1,600 meters. A cedar tree normally lives for about five centuries; oddly, the reason these cedars live so long is the harsh environment they face. When Yakushima rose above the sea fourteen million years ago, its granite surface offered little sustenance. The altitude where



The Jomonsugi cedar is 19 meters tall and 3000 years old

- 1 Yakushima is a World Heritage Site, home to many ancient cedar trees
- 2 Yakushima is a natural paradise
- 3 To preserve the natural environment, locals take part in trash cleanups and other initiatives

© Yakushima Tourism Association

Yakusugi are found in an environment exposed to the influence of ocean currents, wind and typhoons. In this unforgiving environment of nutrient-poor soil, the cedars built up the sap that makes them resistant to rot and extends their lifespan, gradually becoming giants.

“Yakushima’s mountain recesses were a place of faith for the people. Naturally the great trees that stood on the mountains of the gods were also considered sacred,” says Junichi Hidaka, secretary of the Yakushima Tourism Association. The island dwellers revered the Yakusugi and protected them.

According to Hidaka, with forest expertise gained through forty-five years as a volunteer guide and mountain rescue team member, a cut stump in the forest makes you sense the passage of centuries and shows that cedars were once harvested long ago. Old records indicate that building materials for Hokoji Temple in Kyoto—built on behalf of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and completed in 1595—were procured from Yakushima. The records note that his vassal, Lord Shimazu of Satsuma Province, went to the island to survey it and took control of it. A Confucian scholar from Yakushima who served Lord Shimazu, Tomarijochiku, suggested using cedar planks to pay the land tax. He also taught the islanders how to recognize the sacred trees so they wouldn’t overharvest them, and to plant a new seedling after cutting one down.

When the Meiji Period (1868-1912) began, Yakushima’s forests became national property. People had once carried the wood down the mountain on their backs; now a small train transported it. In the 1960s, large-scale logging accelerated with the wave of high economic growth.

At the same time, protecting the Yakusugi became a priority. The virgin forest was designated a natural monument in 1924, a special natural monument in 1954, and was made a national park in 1964. The island’s Yakushima Environmental Protection Group, formed in 1972, later led to all logging being prohibited.



Yakushima became Japan’s first natural World Heritage Site in 1993, and 2018 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of that event. The island subsequently received significant attention, and the number of visitors on the Jomon-Sugi mountain hike exploded, causing worries of environmental degradation. But Hidaka notes this also had some positive effects. “The island’s young people stopped saying ‘I’m from Kyushu,’ and now say ‘I’m from Yakushima’ with pride.

“The reason so many trees are scarred with grooves is that they were tested by wind and rain for so long,” he continues. “These trees with clefts survived because they were not considered worth harvesting. Now these Yakusugi are gaining attention as ‘heroes of the forest.’ They teach us how to live in the environment we find ourselves in. When I talk about this while guiding tours, guests often shed tears.”

Many Natural World Heritage Sites have never been touched, but the Yakushima islanders harvested just enough trees for their needs and planted new ones in their place. Those trees planted during the Edo Period (1603-1867) are now considered young cedars—under a thousand years old—and the islanders will continue to protect them as they grow into future Yakusugi. 🌲

# A LIFE DEDICATED TO WOOD AND COMMUNITY

Master carpenter Mitsuo Ogawa at his workshop in Tochigi Prefecture

## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*Mitsuo Ogawa is a renowned master carpenter who has been the head craftsman on projects for numerous shrines and temples. He is the sole apprentice of Tsunekazu Nishioka, the descendant of master carpenters who oversaw the construction of Nara's Horyuji Temple. Ogawa shares his thoughts about the high degree of technical skill and craftsmanship that miyadaiku—Japan's time-honored shrine and temple carpenters—must possess.*



Detailed plans for one of Ogawa's projects

ONE definitive point of difference between the construction of shrines and temples and normal housing is the use of massive trees that sometimes reach dozens of meters in height. “You can whittle down smaller trees, but with big trees any odd pattern in the grain will be readily apparent. Being a *miyadaiku* (shrine carpenter) is all about drawing out those odd patterns and working with them,” master carpenter Mitsuo Ogawa points out. “But the grain in trees only goes in one direction, whereas odd patterns in people are much more complicated.”

Ogawa, who has over fifty years of shrine carpentry experience, instructs the next generation of *miyadaiku* at his training school, Ikaruga Kosha, and so has spent many years dealing with both wood and people.

Originally from Tochigi Prefecture, Ogawa decided to become a shrine carpenter during a high school trip as he stared up at the five-story pagoda of Nara's Horyuji Temple. After



To teach the importance of teamwork, Ogawa's apprentices live, work and eat with him

learning that the pagoda had been standing for thirteen centuries, he was awed by how trees so huge were hauled up that long ago, and became obsessed with the idea of creating something like that himself.

However, when he told his father—a bank employee—about his ambitions, the latter was firmly opposed, saying: “It’s like swimming upstream, it’s a hard life, and you’ll never be able to relax and have time to yourself.” Ogawa ran away from home, and his parents disinherited him. He sought out Tsunekazu Nishioka, the descendant of master craftsmen who oversaw construction at Horyuji Temple. Nishioka rejected him at first, but finally accepted Ogawa as an apprentice after he went through training in the construction of household Buddhist altars in Nagano.

As a live-in apprentice in the Nishioka household, Ogawa spent his days studying master craftsmanship and woodworking, and his nights sharpening the metal tools they worked with. After

learning how to create blueprints and design plans, he worked as the junior craftsman on the reconstruction of Horinji Temple’s three-story pagoda and Yakushiji Temple’s West Pagoda and main temple. “I was with master Nishioka for twenty-seven years, but he never taught me anything directly. Only once, about three months after I’d become his pupil, he told me, ‘For something like this, you shave it down,’ and shaved it himself, handing me one practically transparent wood shaving. I placed it on my windowpane, and whether I was awake or asleep I thought about wood and temples constantly, and kept working on my skills.”

Ogawa firmly believes that technique can’t be taught in books, only learned through practical experience, and that by living with other carpenters and sharing meals with them your way of thinking and behavior will become that of a carpenter. Even after founding Ikaruga Kosha and

becoming a master craftsman with apprentices of his own, he still has trainees live and eat with him in his home to pass on his techniques.

“Through communal living, you come to understand and sympathize with those you’re living with,” he says. “If those feelings aren’t there between each person, it’s impossible to work together on a large-scale temple reconstruction project.” He’s trained more than a hundred carpenters, working with them on shrine and temple building projects for a variety of sects and in a multitude of styles all over Japan.

Becoming a master craftsman isn’t possible unless you deeply understand both wood and people. Thirteen centuries ago when there were no sawmills and people could only cut trees down and work with them as they were, how did the ancients build Horyuji Temple?

“Horyuji Temple is made of *hinoki* cypress,” Ogawa states. “If it were cedar, it would have lasted about nine hundred years. But *hinoki* cuts clean, and is at its strongest two centuries after being cut down. That’s why Horyuji has stood for 1300 years. I believe there was a master craftsman back then who knew the properties of *hinoki* and had the intelligence and leadership abilities to use a huge number of people to carry the trees up.”

Continued deforestation means they are running out of the large trees suitable for shrine and temple reconstruction. But Ogawa, often called an artisan, states quietly and with the confidence of experience that “for the next generation to succeed, we can start growing both the wood and the people right now.”

# THE MERITS OF TRADITIONAL JAPANESE HOUSES: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE ENGAWA



TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*The features and structure of traditional wooden Japanese houses are deeply tied to Japan's climate, lifestyle and society. Professor Nobuaki Furuya, an architect at Waseda University School of Creative Science and Engineering, shares his thoughts about the influence of wood on people's lives and the role of the engawa, the wooden porches often seen on traditional houses.*

“OLD Japanese houses are made of wood because Japan is a country filled with forests, and wood is a very familiar material,” states Professor Nobuaki Furuya, a member of the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Waseda University. “Around the world, people make homes of readily available building materials, such as sun-dried bricks, stone, wood, bamboo and even ice. Houses built with local materials blend in naturally with the climate and culture of the place.” Furuya speaks from the perspective of a professional who’s won many awards, including the Japan Art Academy Prize, the Architectural Institute of Japan Prize for Design, the Yoshioka Award and the JIA Young Architect Award.

“Having experienced disasters such as wars and earthquakes, modern Japanese houses tended

to avoid using wood,” Furuya adds. “However, along with improved architectural technologies—especially in terms of fire and earthquake resistance—there is a growing trend to reevaluate wood and reintegrate it into familiar spaces.”

According to Furuya the *engawa*—a wooden porch that pokes out under thatched roofs distinctive to traditional Japanese houses—is more than just a passageway. It is a buffer zone between wooden rain shutters facing the external environment and sliding paper doors enclosing the interior. Open the shutters and you can feel the wind outside while staying under the roof.

“Sitting on the *engawa* also makes you visible from the outside, enabling a casual mode of communication, such as having a neighbor greet you across the garden without having to come



- 1 The beautiful Hayashi Residence in Kochi Prefecture, which features a broad *engawa*
- 2 Children can use these wooden blocks as chairs or toys for imaginative play
- 3 Furuya's own home prominently features wood
- 4 Professor Nobuaki Furuya of Waseda University's Faculty of Science and Engineering

through the house's front entrance," Furuya explains. "Through daily activities such as napping in the sun or enjoying the evening breeze, as well as chatting with neighbors while drinking tea, the *engawa* allows people to form connections across the wider community."

Growing up in a large wooden house himself, Furuya has childhood memories associated with the *engawa* and wooden rain shutters. "As a child, wiping the *engawa*'s surface and closing all the rain shutters were my chores. I touched the wood in the house every day, and noticed subtle changes such as splinters and the rain shutters not sliding smoothly. By sensing the house's condition closely, you can take care of any minor damages before they become severe."

What makes wood so touchable is its warmth, caused by the low surface heat transfer coefficient, says Furuya. "It almost feels as if wood is breathing—a sense that inorganic materials such as cement, iron and glass are unlikely to provoke." Since wood also regulates humidity, it matches Japan's warm, humid climate, and its texture and fragrance comfort people. Research shows that influenza's prevalence is lower in schools built with wood than those built with reinforced steel; trees are known to have a positive health impact on humans, such as reducing stress.

Contemporary Japan is reevaluating wood and traditional buildings. For instance, old rural houses are being renovated and transformed into cafés and local communication hubs. Furuya has worked on architectural projects that optimize wood's positive attributes, including the renovation and preservation of the Hayashi Residence in Kochi Prefecture's Sukumo City as well as designing homes using plenty of wooden furnishings. He also creates designs that use high-quality wood from Yoshino, such as cedar and *hinoki* (Japanese cypress), responding to a request from Nara Prefecture.

In the "Forest Furniture" project, Furuya works with a manufacturing company to deliver wooden furniture to children in city schools who have little chance to interact with nature. "Even in Japan, where forests cover about seventy percent of the land, our urban lifestyle tends to make us forget about their existence. It's important to remember the forests surrounding us by keeping wood close by."

Awakening the memories of forests in contemporary Japanese people will ensure that a spirit of appreciation toward them endures. **17**

# THE SOUNDS OF TRADITION IN THE ART OF MAKING KOTO



## TAMAKI KAWASAKI

*The koto is a traditional Japanese musical instrument popular both in Japan and overseas thanks to its elegant shape and vibrant, beautiful tone. Masahiro Kaneko, a koto craftsman in Tokyo, produces exquisite Tokyo-style koto using Aizu-kiri—paulownia wood from the Aizu area. He shares his philosophy regarding the art of making koto.*

**I**N his workshop overflowing with materials and tools for making *koto* as well as unfinished instruments, Masahiro Kaneko laughs and says he remembers where everything is.

A *koto*'s body—carved from a single tree and measuring over 180 centimeters in length—is compared to that of a dragon and called the *kora*, or shell. After *koto* are decorated with materials such as tortoiseshell, ivory and kimono fabric, their cost can vary from a few hundred U.S. dollars up to ninety thousand dollars or more. “It’s the same as violins—the instrument’s sound and value are completely dependent on the materials used and the maker’s skill,” Kaneko says.

Musical instruments created by attaching strings over a wooden base have a long history, and instruments similar to the *koto* exist elsewhere in Asia. The number of strings of an instrument equals how many tones it can play at a time, and vary from only one string to up to eighty. The most common is the thirteen-stringed *wagon* (Japanese zither), which uses movable bridges called *kotoji* to tune the strings. It was brought to Japan from Tang Dynasty China during the Nara Period (710-94) and used in *gagaku*, Japanese court music.

Kaneko learned *koto*-making techniques from his father, a master *koto* craftsman. The Tokyo-*koto*, which only Kaneko

and a few other Tokyo craftsmen build, is rare and valuable. Compared to instruments made in Fukuyama in Hiroshima Prefecture—one of Japan’s major *koto*-producing areas—those made in Tokyo have a different shape



Kaneko creates each part of the *koto* to ensure each one is unique and original



- 1 *Koto* craftsman Masahiro Kaneko
- 2 The process of creating a *koto* requires many tools and detailed work
- 3 Each *koto* has a beautiful cloth-covered cap that protects the "head" of the instrument

and size, and boast a relatively mellower sound.

Out of all the *koto*-making materials, Kaneko is most particular about the quality of the wood. "There are many types of *kiri* (paulownia), and the hardness, softness and resonance of a *koto*'s sound depends on where the wood was grown. Paulownia from Aizu in Japan creates particularly fine, resonant sounds."

However, selecting *kiri* is not easy. The craftsman purchases a large *kiri* log, judging quality by evaluating the wood grain. After drying and sawing it, however, chance dictates whether the grain will appear as expected; sometimes it does not, and other times can be far more beautiful than expected.

"A *koto* is considered more aesthetically attractive if the wood's aging creates a grain with more wavy patterns," Kaneko explains. "But the grain I find

pleasing can be altered instantly by a flake of only a few millimeters while I shape the wood. This is why wood is interesting"

Unfortunately, Aizu paulownia stocks are declining, he adds. Fortunately, his storage facility in Fukushima holds many valuable unfinished *koto*, each made from logs he selected personally.

Kaneko is also obsessed with the materials used for creative design work on the instrument, such as the *kotoji* bridges and ends of the main body—called *ryuto* and *ryubi*—which literally mean "dragon head and tail." Ceramic and plastic materials have replaced the ivory, tortoiseshell, deerhorn and whalebone inlays once used on these parts because of mass production, cost reduction and resource protection. Making *koto* requires thorough knowledge of materials required, and Kaneko devises ways to make beautiful sounds by combining traditional natural materials and new

manmade materials.

The art of making *koto* has changed with the times. Kaneko says his philosophy is to make instruments quickly and precisely while combining the old and the new in a well-balanced manner. He honors traditional materials but is not shy about incorporating contemporary technology where possible, such as putting *koto* components together using modern adhesives. "The world of traditional crafts is declining in some ways but improving in others," he says. "There are high school and elementary school *koto* players with the ears to recognize good sounds. I'm glad the younger generations have a passion for good sounds and good instruments."

Kaneko expects to continue shaping the wood and natural materials into instruments that create those beautiful sounds for future generations. **7**

Oda's home is filled with exquisite Scandinavian furniture and crafts



# The Satisfying Union of Scandinavian Furniture and Japaneseness

**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

*Scandinavian culture continues to gain recognition in Japan, and Scandinavian furniture has consistently enjoyed vast popularity here. Noritsugu Oda, a world-renowned chair researcher well versed in Scandinavian culture, explains why so many Japanese are drawn to those warm, simple and beautiful pieces of wooden furniture.*

**N**ORITSUGU Oda says the climate of Scandinavian countries—where the summer days remain light far into the night but the winters are cold, dark and long—is one of the reasons people there gained such fine woodworking skills. “In Scandinavia, people had to enrich the long hours they are forced to spend indoors,” he notes. “And since they had little in the way of natural resources, they would make necessities themselves from materials at hand instead of buying them. This practice led woodworking and handcrafting to take root in their day-to-day lives.”

Oda is a one-of-a-kind researcher who specializes in chairs. The items he has collected over fifty years include more than 1350 chairs, various other furniture and everyday items as well as documents. Referred to as the Oda Collection, it is highly regarded around the world.

Oda believes the reason Japanese people are fond of Scandinavian woodworking and furniture is that

Scandinavians and Japanese share common values. “One similarity is that both prefer natural resources such as wood, and also value simplicity in design that draws from the natural qualities of the materials,” he explains. “Perhaps it is in our DNA.”

The high quality of woodworking technology is another common characteristic. “Japanese woodworking has a genre called *sashimono*, meaning furniture built without nails,” he says. “Even when putting together different types of wood, the craftsmen’s deep knowledge of their materials allows them to create flawless pieces without measurement errors. There are many cases of people from the Scandinavian architecture and furniture-making sphere who come to apprentice under shrine and teahouse carpenters.

At times Japanese woodworking techniques have influenced Scandinavian works. A Danish-made cabinet from the 1930s—housed in Oda’s residence—is a perfect example. The piece features



Chair researcher Noritsugu Oda



Finn Juhl's famous "Japan" chair



The "Eri" chair is inspired by the collar of Japanese kimono



This cabinet from the 1930s features double sliding doors

double sliding doors, a style unique to Japan, instead of the usual double doors, and also uses metal handles that are commonly seen on Japanese *tansu* chests. "Even now, you can see Japanese-influenced Scandinavian furniture," Oda notes as he shows relevant examples of chairs crafted by Danish designers.

"Contemporary designer Hans Sandgren Jakobsen designed the 'Eri' Tatami Chair based on the motif of *eri*—the collar of kimono," Oda says. "Having stayed in Japan, he also created a chair that eases the issue of numbed legs from *seiza*—sitting on one's folded legs. In the past, Verner Pantone (1926-98) and Finn Juhl (1912-89)—both world-famous Danish architects and designers—designed the 'Tatami Chair' and the 'Japan Series' chair, respectively. I feel that Jakobsen understands and respects Japanese culture like they did."

Besides furniture, many people find a sense of warmth and nostalgia in wooden items that are

carefully crafted. "The more advanced technology becomes, the more people crave natural materials and wish to live a more human-paced life. Unfortunately, these days our lives are infested with 'fast' products," Oda remarks.

"Our current culture is one that emphasizes buying replacements, but I think the relationship between people and things should be much closer," he continues, "because if you take good care of well-made items, you can use them for a long time. Wood does not just last for a lifetime—it actually lasts for two or three lifetimes."

Oda's heartfelt wish, even though he realizes it may not always be possible, is for people to choose items of good quality, since wood can last for several lifetimes. Following the Scandinavian example and cherishing the symbiotic culture with trees would further enrich the mind and lives of Japanese people, who have loved trees since antiquity. 🌲

# SPECIAL VIEW: AUTUMN LEAVES AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE'S INUI STREET

TAKAYOSHI YAMABE

*Inui Street within the Imperial Palace was opened to the public in spring 2014 for viewings every spring and autumn. Many visitors now come to see the palace surrounded by beautiful cherry blossoms or colorful leaves. The autumn public viewing is expected to begin soon. Here is the latest information from the Imperial Household Agency.*

**I**NUI Street inside the Imperial Palace was opened to the public in 2014 to celebrate the eightieth birthday of the Emperor. The yearly spring and autumn viewings proved to be wildly popular among visitors. These events happen to match up with the Japanese government's new vision for tourism in Japan, as one of the key policies suggested making more of Japan's most beautiful public institutions open to the public. Since then the Inui Street public viewings have become regular events and even been featured on the news.

Inui Street got its name because it connects the Inui Gate and extends to the Imperial Household Agency building from the northwest, which used to be called "the Inui direction." The Imperial family regularly uses this street, and only a part of it can be seen during standard ceremonies. During the public viewings in spring and autumn, however, visitors can walk from the Sakashita Gate to the Inui Gate while enjoying the wonderful views of the cherry blossoms or autumn foliage. It also presents a rare opportunity to use Inui Street to enter the

East Gardens of the Imperial Palace. Visitors should be aware that during the viewing periods the paths from Sakashita Gate to Inui Gate and from Inui Street to the East Gardens are one way.

According to Hayato Hori, the administrative manager of the Imperial Household Agency, in 2014 the Imperial Palace received 385,060 visitors despite being open only from April 4 to 8. The public viewings were suspended between autumn 2016 and spring 2017 to care for the trees, but reopened between December 2 and 10 and welcomed 226,220 visitors. The palace grounds were opened again in the spring of 2018, and organizers are busy planning this autumn's event. The dates will depend on when the trees begin changing colors. The Imperial Household Agency's website provides the latest information about the public viewings at Inui Street in English.

Since the public viewings are so popular, massive crowds are expected, and it may take over thirty minutes just to cover the 750 meters from the Sakashita Gate to the Inui Gate. Hori advises



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- 1 Fall leaves frame an ancient watchtower and Tokyo's skyscrapers
- 2 The public viewings are always a very popular event
- 3 During the spring, visitors can enjoy the delicate cherry blossoms
- 4 Inui Street tinged with fall colors

checking the website prior to visiting to know what to expect.

For centuries the Japanese people have enjoyed cherry blossoms in the spring and colorful maple leaves in the autumn. During the fall months, many spots known for their Japanese maple trees attract visitors. There are approximately a hundred cherry trees along Inui Street and around seventy maple trees. Hori says visitors will be able to enjoy lovely views this autumn. (The number of trees is based on public information released in 2017.)

Hori shares his recommended sights. “Once you enter the Imperial Palace from the Sakashita Gate, you will be able to step away from the busy city and enter a different world. You will first see the palace on the left-hand side, where ceremonies are held. On your right will be one of the few remaining towers from the former Edo Castle, called Fujimi Yagura. Continue on and you will see the Imperial Household Agency’s office that was constructed over eighty years ago. After

enjoying the views of these historical buildings, you will find the Hasuike Moat next to Inui Street on your right.”

The Inui Gate connects the Hasuike Moat to the Inui Moat. You can see the stone castle walls of the former Edo Castle along the moat, and on the left Fukiage Gyoen garden’s many trees come into view.

“The wonderful array of cherry blossoms, maple trees and pine trees look picture perfect by the traditional Japanese structures,” Hori notes. “Another great spot to view the foliage will be at the Shimo-dokan-bori Moat, where you can see the trees reflected in the water. Depending on the type of maple, the leaves change color at different times. It is an opportunity to capture a seasonal view you can only see for a limited time.”

The Imperial Palace is a wonderful spot to bask in nature within the busy metropolis of Tokyo. The autumn viewing at Inui Street is a rare opportunity to enter and marvel at historical and natural sights in the Imperial Palace. **7**

\* Inui Street in the Imperial Palace will be open to the general public from December 1 to December 9, 2018. It is open from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (last entry at 3 p.m.).

# SENSITIVE ROBOTIC ARMS HOLD A BETTER FUTURE IN THEIR GRASP

**BIFUE USHIJIMA**

*A newly invented pair of robotic arms and hands boasts a grip sensitive enough to pick up something as light and delicate as a potato chip. It also incorporates haptic technology that transmits the sensation of actually holding and manipulating the object being held, offering exciting possibilities for avatar robots and prosthetics.*



Assistant professor Takahiro Nozaki of Keio University's Department of System Design Engineering

**T**HE dual-arm robot assistant professor Takahiro Nozaki and his team at Keio University's Department of System Design Engineering have built—dubbed General Purpose Arm (GP-Arm)—can pick up potato chips with its fingertips and hold water balloons without bursting them. While traditional robots struggle to perform such actions, GP-Arm succeeds handily because it can vary its grip pressure just like a human can.

GP-Arm consists of a human-operated master unit and a slave unit with robotic arms. When the hands grip an object, they transmit the tactile sensation to the operator's fingertips, allowing the latter to adjust the robot's grip appropriately. The slave unit has a camera that feeds images to a head-mounted display on the master unit, and when the operator applies pressure the muscle contraction measurement system attached to his or her foot picks up this feedback, and allows the operator to move the robot forward and backward. The system allows people to explore remote locations

as though they were actually there and touching and manipulating objects directly.

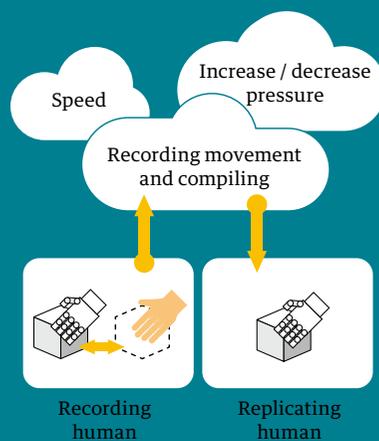
The core technology behind the mechanism that transmits tactile sensations is known as acceleration-based bilateral control, an advanced haptic technique that Professor Kouhei Ohnishi of Keio University's Haptics Research Center introduced to the world in 2002. The technique involves turning the reactive force when the robotic arm handles an object into a digital signal in real time, which is then translated into the torque of a motor each time force is applied.

Since this data is relayed to the operator instantaneously, it produces the realistic sensation of touching an object. The haptic data from the operator's grip adjustments is also recorded and modeled, so robots without operators can perform the same actions.

"Of the five senses, touch is the most difficult to reproduce with machines," says Nozaki, describing his research into real haptics. "Haptic technology used to rely on phenomena such as vibrations to



Nozaki using the GP-Arm



By recording, editing and repeating operators' movements, the robot can replicate them

transmit pseudo-sensations of touch, like you'd find on a video game controller. Although that creates the illusion of holding something, it's not enough when it comes actually picking up an object."

The GP-Arm's range of potential applications is extensive, including medical care, nursing and manufacturing, and Nozaki and his team are carrying out collaborative research and trials with various companies. Some machines already incorporate this system, including one that sorts mandarin oranges according to size and hardness, and another that handles many different kinds of screws. Magnifying or reducing the force the operator exerts will lead to further applications, making it possible to lift heavy objects and perform microsurgery.

A prosthetic hand that can feel has been developed using these techniques. Mounting the controls under the armpit was considered, but practical testing revealed that operating the prosthesis with the toes was easier—the prosthetic hand moves in sync, and feeds back the sensation of

grasping objects to the toes. This type of prosthesis is cheaper than myoelectric hands that respond to brain signals, and requires no special training. Participants in the experiment said the best thing was being able to feel the objects they were holding.

"In Japan, with its low birthrate and aging population, the shrinking workforce is becoming a major issue," says Nozaki. Being able to vary the force that a robot exerts is particularly important in fields concerned with people, he explains, such as medical care and nursing. Nozaki believes this technology will play an essential role as additional manpower for manufacturers, or as robots that help seniors go about their daily lives.

Nozaki announced in September 2018 that he and his team are joining the AVATAR X Program, launched by ANA Holdings and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, to develop their haptic technology for use in space. The possibilities of realistic interaction never experienced by humankind will extend all the way into the cosmos. **7**

Ruth Marie Jarman, the director of Jarman International



# An American Cheering On Japan's Globalization

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**TAMAKI KAWASAKI**

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*Using her decades of global marketing experience, Ruth Marie Jarman works with businesses to champion Japan's globalization. It's a venture that allows her to use all she's learned over thirty years living here to promote what makes Japan and the Japanese special.*

**B**ORN in North Carolina in the United States and raised in the state of Hawaii, Ruth Marie Jarman was a student at Tufts University in the U.S. when she decided to study abroad at Japan's Nanzan University in Aichi Prefecture. She learned Japanese and began working at a Japanese company in 1988, and has been living in Japan for thirty years.

Japan was right in the middle of its bubble economy at the time. "I was blessed to have busy yet powerful Japanese bosses and coworkers," Jarman says, "and I struggled desperately to keep up with them despite my Japanese not being very good yet." She worked in the general affairs department and became the first cheerleader captain of the company's American football club.

She eventually left to start her own small translation and interpreting operation. But when the

former CEO of her first company asked her to join a real estate firm he owned in 2000, Jarman seized the opportunity. That firm, with its vision of a rapidly internationalizing Japan, began creating furnished rental apartments for international employees coming to Japan to work.

For twelve years, Jarman handled the individual living environment and lifestyle requests of over three thousand international businesspeople that came to Japan every year. Now, as the director of Jarman International K.K., she uses the deep knowledge of Japanese culture and business she gained while searching all over Japan for services to accommodate these businesspeople to devise international sales strategies for Japanese businesses.

"Japan is internationalizing rapidly, with 2.4 million international residents living in Japan and



- 1 One of the rooms at a hotel Jarman collaborates with
- 2 Jarman often presents business seminars about the inbound market
- 3 A welcoming and elegant ambiance is important for business travelers

Location : HOTEL & RESIDENCE ROPPONGI  
Members Salon 1310

the number of visitors continuing to rise,” Jarman states. “The issue Japanese businesses face is how to turn these people into customers.”

She notes that the services and products Japanese businesses offer to international visitors often differ from the experience those visitors expect, so they lose potential customers.

“Outdoor baths in traditional Japanese inns are a good example,” Jarman explains. “They’re a wonderful example of Japanese hospitality, but for people coming from countries that do not have a communal bathing culture there is a psychological resistance to getting naked in front of others and bathing as a group—much less outdoors. Of those coming to Japan for the first time, many stay in business hotels, and their first bath experience is in a tiny plastic tub in a unit bathroom, and they’re very happy with it. It’s all about not trying to translate Japanese culture, but instead putting it in a format that’s easier for visitors to understand. We provide that help.”

Jarman’s company works with restaurants, hotels and leisure facilities that want to attract international guests, as well as train companies and other businesses that see a large influx of visitors from outside Japan on a daily basis.

“We’re seeing drastically improved customer numbers and morale in local staff, and we work to form a relationship of mutual trust with each business,” says Jarman, reflecting on the sense of fulfillment she gets from her work. “Japanese people are truly struggling with how to handle international visitors and need the perspective of someone from outside Japan, so I feel this is work worth doing.”

As someone who has raised children in Japan, Jarman feels there is still pressure placed on working mothers, but she has high praise for how Japanese business culture keeps promises and expresses gratitude.

“I’d like to create a new economy that includes non-Japanese people to encourage growth amid Japan’s wonderful societal common sense and morals,” she states. “One day I’d like to become a politician in the United States, live in both countries, and impart the goodness of Japanese morals to the United States.”

For the time being, though, Jarman continues to dream big, intent on helping Japan internationalize and show its best features to the rest of the world. **17**

# THE LIVING APPEAL OF BONSAI ART

**YUKIKO ISHIKAWA**

*Bonsai, the art of planting and tending to miniature trees in pots, is a noteworthy offshoot of Japan's vaunted gardening culture. Bonsai gained worldwide notice in the 1970s, and its popularity only continues to grow. "Bonsai evangelist" Kaori Yamada describes the appeal of bonsai and the differences between homegrown Japanese bonsai and bonsai outside Japan.*



Japanese juniper *bonsai* are particularly popular

**O**MIYA Bonsai Village in Saitama Prefecture is one of just a few bonsai villages in Japan. According to Kaori Yamada of Seikouen, a bonsai nursery that is part of the town's bonsai industry, "The art of bonsai is about planting trees in pots and capturing a small piece of natural scenery to make it look like a picture." The roots of bonsai date back to the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907) and the practice of cultivating tiny gardens or *bonkei*. This was a traditional art that involved placing plants and stones atop a tray and arranging it to look like a scene from nature, and Yamada states that bonsai is "a blending of the Japanese reverence for trees and the desire to keep carefully arranged greenery near oneself."

Bonsai has many charms, one of which is using the tree to express a particular feeling or atmosphere. "Bringing out the expressive power of the tree is

fun, just like painting a picture," Yamada explains. "It's also interesting from a horticultural standpoint to think about how to make the tree healthier and whether it will produce fruit. Aside from that, many people find joy in living with something that's alive. There are people who call their trees 'our babies,' just as if they were pets."

About ten years ago Yamada realized that there was a lot of interest in bonsai outside of Japan as well. Nowadays, two or three tour groups from the United States, Europe, Asia and the Middle East visit Seikouen each day, and they offer glimpses of different trends from each country. "In bonsai, people express their own particular scenery," she notes. "For example, in South Africa you'll see baobab bonsai, which we don't have in Japan. And in China, large arrangements are popular, some in pots almost the size of a bathtub."



*Suiseki* stones are often displayed alongside bonsai to accentuate the miniature landscapes



Kaori Yamada, bonsai artist and fifth-generation owner of Seikouen



Seikouen does not just sell bonsai, but also offers classes and even a rental service



*Saika bonsai*: a tiny landscape featuring a birch tree and moss

By contrast, Japanese bonsai is all about the art of subtraction. A Spanish guest once told Yamada, “Japanese bonsai is crazy. Why do you use such small, shallow pots?” She explained, “I think for Japanese sensibilities, squeezing things down small and cutting off excess until there’s no waste appeals to our sense of aesthetics. That’s why we prune the trees and arrange them that way, which may be why people outside Japan think they look cool.”

Several types of trees are popular both inside and outside Japan, such as the Japanese juniper, a member of the cypress family. It’s a classic in Japan and extremely popular outside the country as well, since many people love the enigmatic appearance of its white, withered trunk.

*Saika bonsai*—which incorporates grass and flowers to look like they’re growing with the tree—is recommended for beginners, and Yamada hopes it

will bring people even closer to bonsai. Some people feel it’s difficult to express themselves using only one tree in one pot. This allows people to create a whole garden in the pot, so it’s an easy, inexpensive way to get started.

Starting with *saika bonsai*, Yamada wants to reach more and more people and share the joys of bonsai. Seikouen opened in the late Edo Period (1603-1867). As its fifth-generation owner, Yamada says: “We can’t continue to run this as a small business, so we need to keep coming up with new things. It’s important to preserve traditions, but at some point I’d like to incorporate a restaurant and use other ways to create a more expansive environment, with bonsai at the center.”

This is the kind of thinking and flexibility that will help a new form of bonsai culture arise both in and outside Japan. **7**

*The Sagano Scenic Railway runs the popular sightseeing train known as the Sagano Romantic Train, which takes you on a seven-kilometer journey between Kyoto's Arashiyama district—a tourist spot in the Sagano area famous for its fall foliage—and Kameoka. During the 25-minute ride, you can immerse yourself in the natural wonders of the Hozugawa Canyon.*

# Riding the Rails Along Hozugawa Canyon

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**KATSUYA YAMADA**

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**T**HE Sagano Scenic Railway was founded in 1990, when Kyoto Prefecture sought a way to make a disused train line into a new tourist attraction, with just nine staff members taking up the challenge. Since the railroad had been abandoned after the line went out of service, it was in a state of disrepair—rusted rails, rotten ties and collapsed road shoulders rampant with weeds.

As such, the staff's first task was to restore the rails and trail along the line. With the help of renowned cherry tree arborist Toemon Sano and local residents, they planted cherry trees and maple tree seedlings. In April of the following year, the first train went into service. The nine staff members handled every task from vehicle maintenance and

inspection to ticket handling and cleaning the restrooms, adhering to their motto of “the spirit of *omotenashi*.”

Originally used to transport cargo, the line's small, box-shaped train cars were renovated to carry passengers. The cars are pulled by a diesel locomotive that runs at a leisurely 25 kilometers per hour—about as fast as a bicycle commuter rides. About three minutes after leaving Saga Torokko Station, the train arrives at Arashiyama Torokko Station. After going through a tunnel, the dynamic beauty of the Hozugawa Canyon suddenly appears in front of your eyes. The train gradually slows so that everyone can enjoy the first scenic spot, the Arashiyama Onsen area. The train also lingers at JR Hozukyo Station, whose platform is built above the river's waters and around the bridge that spans the Hozu River, giving passengers plenty of chances to appreciate the winding cliff walls.



The Sagano Scenic Railway

The Sagano Scenic Railway during the height of fall



At one of the stations along the way visitors can stop by the popular Arashiyama Bamboo Grove



This charming train is popular with locals and visitors from overseas



The train offers stunning views of the Hozu River

Painted yellow and red, the Art Deco style passenger cars of the five-car train have a classical atmosphere. The simple interior consists only of wooden chairs and old-fashioned light bulbs, projecting a nostalgic feeling. The fifth car, known as “The Rich,” is an open-air car without windows. You can experience the wind, light and sounds of the canyon directly. There are no advance tickets for these special seats—walk-in reservations only.

The most popular seasons to ride the Sagano Scenic Railway are during the fall foliage period in November and cherry blossom time from late March to early April. Especially during the fall when the railroad is illuminated and special evening trains with box seats become available, the cars are filled to capacity daily, boarding about five thousand passengers on the busiest days.

“Aside from these peak seasons, I also recommend savoring the different seasonal faces of the canyon,

such as the fresh greens of summer, the deep greens in early autumn, and the snow-covered scenery in winter,” says the public relations manager of Sagano Scenic Railway’s department of general affairs.

The areas around the train’s stations also offer various attractions. From Saga Torokko Station, Tenryuji Temple and the famous Arashiyama Bamboo Grove are within walking distance. By renting a bicycle, you can extend your explorations to Okusaga, where Nenbutsuji Temple and traditional thatched houses await. From Kameoka Torokko Station, the end of the line, you can take a horse carriage to the Hozugawa River Boat Ride boarding site and take a cruise downriver. It is also fun to get off at the unstaffed, quiet Hozukyo Torokko Station in the middle of the route and go trekking through the mesmerizing beauty of nature.

When in Kyoto, be sure to make time for a relaxing train trip on this line to experience the beauty of the four seasons of Hozugawa Canyon. **7**



# HITAKI-SAI FIRE FESTIVAL

At the Hitaki-sai (fire festival)—a Shinto ritual held every November 8 at Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine—priests offer thanks to the god Inari Okami for the year’s harvest. In addition to worshippers joining large-scale purification rituals performed by priests, shrine maidens perform a dance dedicated to the gods, and prayers are offered for people’s happiness and to ward off misfortune.

The highlight of the festival occurs when three bonfires are lit on the shrine grounds. Smoke rises high into the sky as rice straw bales and tens of thousands of prayer sticks inscribed with the wishes of worshippers from across the country are thrown into the sacred bonfires. You’re sure to be entranced by this serene and graceful festival, and can join in the prayer ceremonies if you like.

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