

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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UTSUWA: DISHWARE AND OTHER  
VESSELS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

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THEME FOR JANUARY:

### **UTSUWA: DISHWARE AND OTHER VESSELS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE**



The Japanese word

"utsuwa" refers to

dishware and other types of container or vessel. In Japan, utsuwa are made and used with a view to creating a harmonious relationship between the vessel and whatever it contains. In this month's issue, we take a look at some classic examples of Japanese utsuwa as well as the sense of aesthetics that informs their production and use.

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### **ON THE COVER**

Lidded Dish with Plum Blossoms and Waves Design made by Ogata Kenzan (1633-1743) with Osechi New Year Cuisine

Photo: Courtesy of Koshida Gozen/MIHO MUSEUM

### **EDITORS' NOTE**

Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

**O**N November 21 and 22, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide attended the G20 Riyadh Summit. The overview of the meeting is as follows.

During the Summit meeting, the G20 leaders discussed major issues for the international community including the global response to COVID-19, global economic recovery and inclusive recovery. The G20 leaders agreed the Riyadh Leaders' Declaration released after the meeting. Prime Minister Suga led the discussion by presenting Japan's views for a post-COVID-19 international order.

Prime Minister Suga emphasized that the G20 should deliver the clear message that the members commit themselves to lead the world by (1) responding to COVID-19, (2) achieving global economic recovery, (3) resuming cross-border travel, and (4) shaping post-COVID-19 international order.

With regard to G20's response to COVID-19, Prime Minister Suga underscored the need to take a holistic approach for securing access to therapeutics, vaccines and diagnoses. In this respect, Prime Minister Suga stated that the concept of patent pool, to which Japan attaches importance, deserved to be supported by the G20. Prime Minister Suga described Japan's active role in promoting multilateral cooperation through becoming an original member to launch of the ACT Accelerator and supporting the COVAX facility. The Prime Minister also emphasized that quality, inclusive and resilient health systems are important to prepare for any future health crisis and that, in this regard, sustainable financing for health and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) are indispensable. Prime Minister Suga announced that Japan will lead the international efforts including hosting the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit in December 2021 in order to further contribute to generating an enabling environment for health security across broad sectors such as water and sanitation. The Prime

Minister stressed that, in order to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to uphold the principle of human security and to aim at achieving the goal of "leaving no one's health behind" as well as UHC. The Prime Minister explained that Japan has been providing assistance of over 1.54 billion USD at an unprecedented speed in addressing the current crisis.

On global economy, Prime Minister Suga stated that Japan will spare no effort to prevent infection while resuming economy and cross-border travel. As the pandemic revealed the need to accelerate digitalization, Prime Minister Suga explained Japan's plan to establish an agency in charge of digital transformation as well as its continued effort to promote international rule-making through Osaka Track, based on the concept of Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT). In addition, the Prime Minister pointed out the need to maintain and enhance multilateral trading system through achieving WTO reform and undertaking other efforts despite the possible spread of inward-looking tendency around the world. The Prime Minister stressed that spreading and implementing the "G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment," promoting the reinforcement of supply chains, and addressing debt issues in developing countries in accordance with the common framework agreed by the G20 members are all conducive to realizing a better recovery worldwide.

Prime Minister Suga reiterated his determination to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero, that is, to realize carbon-neutral by 2050. Addressing climate change is no longer a constraint on economic growth, the Prime Minister pointed out, and stressed that we need to embrace a paradigm shift that proactive climate change measures bring growth, as well as to realize a virtuous cycle of economic growth and environment protection through revolutionary innovations. In addition, the Prime Minister explained that Japan aims to reduce



G20 Riyadh Summit (Day 1)

additional pollution caused by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050 (in line with "Osaka Blue Ocean Vision") and supports developing countries in this regard. The Prime Minister also emphasized that the G20 should increase cooperation among its members more than ever to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals based on the idea of "leaving no one behind". The Prime Minister welcomed the commencement of the Private Sector Alliance for the Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation (EMPOWER) for women's advancement in leadership positions.

Prime Minister Suga reaffirmed Japan's determination to host the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games as a symbol of humanity's resilience and global unity in overcoming the COVID-19. Other G20 leaders commended the Prime Minister's resolution.

Prior to the Session 2 on November 22, Prime Minister Suga participated in the G20 leaders' side event "Safeguarding the Planet: The Circular Carbon Economy Approach" through a video message. The Prime Minister highlighted that Japan will strive to realize a greener society through progressive innovation, including achieving a decarbonized society by 2050, and lead the international community. Prime Minister Suga supported the vision of "Circular Carbon Economy (CCE)" proposed by Saudi Arabia, and emphasized Japan's contributions to international efforts on environmental issues including conserving marine resources as well as addressing the marine plastic litter.

**Feature**

## UTSUWA: DISHWARE AND OTHER VESSELS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE



# UTSUWA: DISHWARE AND OTHER VESSELS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

The importance of the harmonious arrangement of food and dishware in *washoku* (traditional Japanese meals) is understood in Japan by everyone from the top chefs of Kyoto cuisine to the humble Japanese home cook preparing a festive meal. The notion is captured in the expression “dishware is a ‘kimono’ for food,” a phrase bequeathed by the artist, potter and epicure Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883-1959) and expressed in the wide variety of beautiful and practical dishware produced around the country. This appreciation of harmonious arrangements extends to all manner of other vessels used in everyday life, from intricate bamboo lattice ware to *bonki* pots for bonsai. In this month’s issue, we take a look at some classic examples of *utsuwa* (dishware and other vessels) as well as the sense of aesthetics that informs their creation and use.

Photos: Courtesy of Kinobu; Courtesy of Know and Appreciate Japanese Dishware; Courtesy of the Edo Kiriko Cooperative Association

# Showcasing *Washoku* with Dishware



Kumakura Isao, director of  
MIHO MUSEUM  
Photo: Courtesy of MIHO MUSEUM

## How has Japanese dishware developed historically?

Japanese dishware comes in a wide variety of shapes and utilizes a diverse range of materials. Dishware can be made from materials such as clay, glass, wood or bamboo. A country like Japan that uses many different types of dishware is rare in the world. Yet the history of Japanese dishware design and techniques does not date back that far. Until the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, most dishware had consisted of lacquered wood, earthenware, and simple pottery with natural glaze. Around that time, however, large quantities of pottery made in China, the Korean Peninsula and Southeast Asia began to be imported and came to be highly prized. The influence of these potteries led to the flourishing of local pottery production, laying the foundation for today's famous pottery producing areas such as Karatsu, Mino, Seto and Imari, where the variety of dishware increased. In the background, there was the influence of *chanoyu* (way of tea). *Chanoyu*, enjoyed by feudal lords and other influential individuals, placed great importance on utensils such as tea bowls, so potters began to make a variety of dishware to meet the demand.

In Japan, some dishware pieces made over 400 years ago that were not made as ornamental items but were actually used are still carefully preserved and are designated as national treasures and important cultural assets. During the Edo period (1603-1867), when peace prevailed, people's quality of life improved and the cultural trend for enhancing the quality of everyday items such as

In Japan, many different types of dishware for serving food and drink have been made using a variety of materials. We spoke to Kumakura Isao, director of MIHO MUSEUM and a specialist in the cultural history of Japan, about Japanese dishware.

Lidded Dish with Plum Blossoms and Waves Design made by Ogata Kenzan (1633-1743) with Osechi New Year Cuisine  
Courtesy of Koshida Gozen/MIHO MUSEUM



dishware gathered pace. This placing of value in everyday items has continued to the present day.

I think Japanese people have a very deep relationship with dishware in their daily lives. For example, in many Japanese households each family member has their own rice bowl and teacup. Some sake lovers go to the trouble of bringing their own sake cup to parties.

In Japanese, a person who is tolerant and generous of spirit is described as *utsuwa ga ookii* (having big dishware). The word *utsuwa* (dishware) here refers to the innate capacity of a person. In this sense, *utsuwa* is likened to a person who demonstrates broad-mindedness. It is one of the key words to think about Japanese culture.

### **What is the relationship between Japanese cuisine and dishware?**

Two individuals who have had a great influence on modern Japanese cuisine are the artist Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883-1959) and the founder of a famous ryotei (traditional Japanese restaurant) Yuki Teiichi (1901-1997).

Rosanjin bequeathed the phrase “dishware is a ‘kimono’ for food.” Serving food on good dishware

elevates the food. Not satisfied with commercially available dishware, Rosanjin created many artistic pieces with his own hands that complemented his cuisine.

When devising a menu, Yuki is said to have first lined up pieces of dishware and considered the best food to serve with them. Yuki also collected precious dishware pieces almost worthy of important cultural asset status and served cuisine on them at his restaurants. As a result of these influences, the idea of dishware in Japanese cuisine as being not merely something on which to serve food but also a platform to showcase the theme or purpose of a meal spread widely, including in the home. For example, different dishware is used depending on the seasonal theme of the meal, such as the celebration of spring or the arrival of the New Year.

Recently, Japanese cuisine has become popular internationally. If you have a chance to enjoy Japanese cuisine, your pleasure may be enhanced if you are able to catch the theme of the meal being showcased by the dishware. □

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Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

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# Food and Dishware as Landscapes

The importance of the harmonious arrangement of food and dishware in *washoku* (traditional Japanese meals) is encapsulated by the expression “dishware is a ‘kimono’ for food.”\* Recently, the idea of enjoying beautifully arranged meals that create a harmony between food and dishware through coordinated table settings in the home is attracting attention.

YANAGISAWA MIHO

**T**RADITIONAL *washoku* meals typically comprise what is known as *ichiju sansai* (one soup and three dishes). At home, for example, the menu includes rice served in ceramic bowls, a soup in a lacquerware bowl, main dishes such as meat or fish served on a ceramic plate, and side dishes such as vegetables, mushrooms, or seaweed served on small plates. Just as the ingredients change with the seasons and various occasion, it is also traditional for the dishware to change accordingly. The one aspect that remains constant,



Example of an *ichiju sansai* meal: rice, pickles, miso soup, vegetables and fish



An arrangement of *osechi* New Year's food in a lacquered multi-tiered food box featuring *kuro-mame* (black soybeans) and *kazunoko* (herring roe) (foreground)

Photo: Courtesy of Know and Appreciate Japanese Dishware



however, is the care taken in selecting the appropriate dishware for the season and beautifully arranging foods. A typical example of the utmost attention paid to food and dishware is the Japanese cuisine served at *ryotei* (traditional Japanese restaurants) and famous *ryokan* (Japanese-style inns). Such establishments focus on showing hospitality to guests, arranging carefully selected seasonal foods on ceramic and lacquerware plates that can be considered works of art in themselves, thereby creating what the Japanese call *keshiki*, meaning scenery or landscape. In Japan, the taste of the cuisine is not the only factor determining the quality of a meal. The choice of dishware also plays a major role. Nishimaki Akiko, representative director of Know and Appreciate Japanese Dishware and who has won many awards at



Traditional Japanese dishware  
Photo: Courtesy of Know and Appreciate Japanese Dishware

Western-style food served on dishware designed for traditional Japanese cuisine

Photo: Courtesy of Know and Appreciate Japanese Dishware



tableware festivals, says, “At the core of Japanese cuisine is an expression of the sense of the seasons. There are also general rules for annual events, such as serving *kuro-mame* (black soybeans) and *kazunoko* (herring roe) at New Year’s. Most dishware too represents the four seasons or features designs appropriate for seasonal events. People choose dishware according to the season or event—auspicious patterns for New Year’s, for example, or *seigaiha* (wave) patterns that impart a visual sense of coolness in summer. It’s important to know these basic traditions in order to enjoy a meal.”

In order to choose the appropriate dishware, we need to understand the thought that went into the food, says Nishimaki. “The term *kibutsu chinshi* means ‘expressing one’s feelings through the use of objects.’ Take special New Year dishes, for example.



Example of a food and dishware arrangement in *kaiseki* cuisine

The reason we eat *kuro-mame* is because the sound of the word *mame* (bean) is used in the term *mame ni kurasu* (“to live well”), which is associated with the meaning of “be in good health.” Kazunoko has the meaning of praying for the prosperity of offspring. It’s important to choose the appropriate dishware paying attention to the feeling that went into the food, to arrange the food on the dishware, to think about how to express that feeling and how to convey that to those who will eat it. If you think about it that way, you will derive even more pleasure from coordinating a table setting.”

As a producer working on coordinating dishware and space, Nishimaki advocates not only using dish-

ware designed for traditional Japanese foods but also mixing and coordinating dishware designed for Western-style food, and even going so far as to serve Western-style food on dishware designed for traditional Japanese foods. “For example, packing a few hors d’oeuvres in a *jubako* lacquered multi-tiered food box will provide a visual treat when you open the lid, as it will look like a treasure chest. Lacquered multi-tiered food boxes make a good accompaniment to western-style food. Try it and see,” she says.

Of course, food is prepared to be eaten. However, Japanese cuisine offers more—the experience of appreciating a world depicted through food, along with the dishware, as if admiring a landscape. ■

\* An expression bequeathed by artist Kitaoji Rosanjin (1883–1959)



# KYOTO CUISINE

## Showing Hospitality with Dishware



All photos: Courtesy of Kinobu

Some of the wide variety of dishware used at Kinobu to complement the food, the seasons and the occasion.  
Clockwise from top left: glassware, porcelain, pottery, decorated lacquerware, and black-lacquered *bento* box

**Chefs of Kyoto cuisine take pride in its tradition and prestige, choosing their dishware according to the menu and their guests, while guests appreciate the cuisine and dishware as a seamless work of art and enjoy the meal.**

### SASAKI TAKASHI

**A**MONG the Japanese cuisines, Kyoto cuisine\*, cultivated in Japan's ancient capital and cultural center of Kyoto, places a particularly high importance on a welcoming spirit of hospitality. A key element of this is dishware, exquisitely arranged to make the most of the original colors and delicate textures of the seasonal ingredients, imparting a sense of seasonality that appeals to the feelings of the guests. Chefs of Kyoto cuisine select their dishware with this in mind.

Takahashi Takuji, the third-generation owner of Kyoto's long-established Japanese restaurant Kinobu and who appears on NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation)'s TV cooking program "Kyo no Ryori (Today's Cooking)," says, "First, I devise a menu to suit the guests. Then I choose the dishware. I choose the dishware as carefully as I choose the menu, because *kaiseki* cuisine is a multi-course meal where dishes are served one at a time, using a different type of dishware for each one. Japan has a wide variety of dishware, including porcelain, ceramics such as Bizen-yaki and Shino-yaki, and lacquerware. I choose dishware that complements the dishes and is seasonally appropriate, as well as taking into consideration the purpose of the guests' visit and their frame of mind."

Each item of dishware has a background story connected with the time and place that it was made as well as being imbued with the thoughts of the artist. The chef chooses the ingredients and dishware, and considers the arrangement of the meal, with an understanding of the story behind the dishware and of the guests on that particular day. For their part, the guests first admire the arrangement of the dish before enjoying the food, appreciating the dishware again as they savor the aftertaste of the meal.

"Western cuisine uses knives and forks and

Chinese cuisine uses ivory chopsticks, so porcelain plates and other sturdy dishes became the mainstream to prevent the dishware from getting scratched. Japanese cuisine, however, uses chopsticks made of wood, a soft material, so a wide variety of dishware can be used. As well as hard ceramics, unglazed dishware and delicate lacquerware came to be widely used and an extensive range of dishware emerged that is rarely seen elsewhere in the world," explains Takahashi.

Unlike French or other Western cuisine, which may be said to showcase the personality of the chef, in Kyoto cuisine the chef takes a backstage role. Likewise, the choice of dishware should be unassuming rather than ostentatious. At the same time, "Using a wide variety of dishware helps to express the long history and depth of Japanese cuisine in an unobtrusive way," says Takahashi.

It is interesting to consider how many pieces of dishware Kinobu owns. The restaurant's three storehouses hold some tens of thousands of pieces in total, with the number continuing to grow. The restaurant has even added Western dishware such as Meissen to cater to overseas guests. Takahashi has compiled a list of all the dishware owned by the restaurant, from which he chooses the pieces that best suit each dish and each guest.

The number of pieces of dishware aside, the depth of the hospitality shown to each and every valued guest by Kyoto chefs is impressive. If you have a chance to visit Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, I recommend that you experience Kyoto cuisine along with the dishware. ■



Takahashi Takuji, third-generation owner of Kyo-ryori Kinobu

\* Cuisine created using cooking methods backed by traditional techniques based on "dashi" (soup stock), synthesizing the five systems of Japanese cuisine formed over the history of Kyoto (daikyo ryori, shojin ryori, honzen ryori, kaiseki ryori, obanzai)  
<https://www.kouiki-kansai.jp/koikirengō/jisijimu/nosui/kansainosyoku/870.html>

# Beautiful Porcelain for Everyday Life

Kutani ware decorated with paintings of flowers  
Photo: Courtesy of Ishikawa Prefectural Tourism League

**Tokuda Yasokichi IV, the fourth head of a famous family of Kutani ware potters, has been dedicating her life as an artist to enrich people's everyday lives through porcelain.**

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**YANAGISAWA MIHO**

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**K**UTANI ware is said to have originated in what is now Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The pottery is known for its elaborate figurative paintings of landscapes, flowers and birds. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), a technique to add gold to colored glaze, called *saishiki-kinrande*, was developed by the porcelain artist Kutani Shozai (1816-1883). The style of pottery which developed using this technique became known globally as "Japan Kutani" after examples were exhibited at the 1873 Vienna World's Fair.

However, not all Kutani ware is made using the *saishiki-kinrande* technique. According to

potter Tokuda Yasokichi IV, "Just as each person has a different face, so there are many different types of Kutani ware." This point of view should not be surprising since Tokuda's father, Tokuda Yasokichi III (1933-2009), a living national treasure, was known for works which entirely broke with the characteristic figurative painting style of Kutani ware. His works are treasured for their abstract designs featuring beautifully gradated color glazes.

In Japan, the works of living national treasures typically become art objects that are exhibited in art museums. According to Tokuda, however, "My father wanted his pottery to be used intimately by people."

Tokuda inherited her father's name after he died and continues the family potting traditions as Tokuda Yasokichi IV.

"It is difficult to maintain a handicraft pottery studio today, when many products are flooding the market. I've thought about closing the studio when I've fallen ill. But I want to create porcelain that enriches

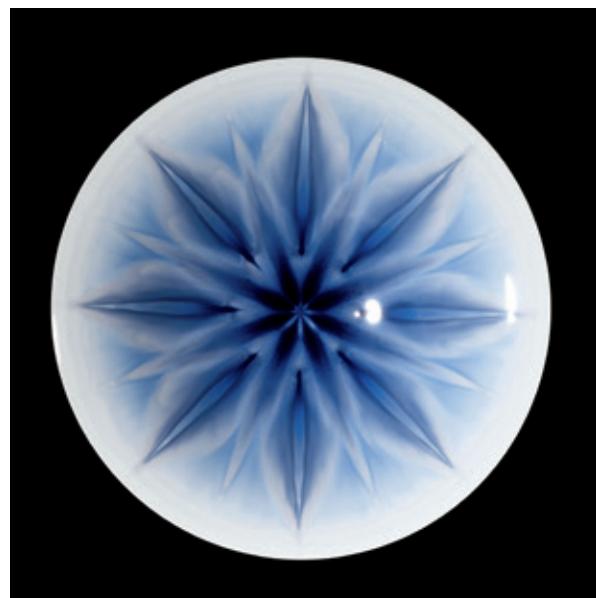
Kutani ware works by Tokuda Yasokichi IV on display at the British Museum in London  
Photo: Courtesy of Tokuda Yasokichi IV



the everyday life of as many people as possible and I want to share these techniques with young people. I am able to keep going because I have this sense of duty.”

Having studied in the United States, offered guidance in pottery abroad and having received guidance from her distinguished father herself, Tokuda sincerely hopes that more people outside of Japan will become familiar with and use Japanese pottery. She says that she wants to interact with people from around the world through pottery as she searches for Japanese identity. Tokuda’s stage is expanding globally, with some of her works now being displayed as part of the permanent exhibition at the British Museum in London. Her works are popular among international art collectors, too.

Enriching everyday life by using quality pieces of pottery—even just a single piece. Inside Tokuda Yasokichi IV is a strong will to communicate this Japanese tradition to the world. ▀



A Kutani ware plate by Tokuda Yasokichi IV made using colors and techniques inherited from her father (2009)  
Photo: Courtesy of Tokuda Yasokichi IV



Sake cup with crane and young pine tree created using the *makie* technique

Soup bowls inlaid with lobster designs using the *chinkin* technique

# Durable and Elegant Lacquer Ware

Among Japanese traditional crafts, there is a type of lacquerware finishing or coating (*nuri*) that is known outside of Japan as “Japan” ware. There are a variety of lacquer ware-producing areas all over Japan, and the Wajima-nuri variety is loved by Japanese people as a durable and elegant variety among them.



All photos: Courtesy of Wajima Museum of Urushi Art

## KATO KYOKO

WAJIMA-NURI, a type of wooden lacquer ware that is both ornate and durable, is produced in Wajima City, Ishikawa Prefecture, which faces the Sea of Japan. Thought to have originated in the fifteenth century, Wajima-nuri expanded via shipping routes across Japan from the seventeenth century when Wajima flourished as an important point along shipping routes for cargo ships.

progressed and a system to mass produce higher quality lacquer ware was established.”

Today, Wajima is a production area representing Japan, boasting a high production value for wooden lacquer ware made with traditional techniques.

There are three stages in the production of Wajima-nuri: creating the wooden base, applying the lacquer, and decorating. Each of these stages is completed using highly specialized manual techniques, and there are more than a hundred steps to the entire process. There are different artisans for each pro-



*Yasumazen* bowls and table coated with red lacquer

According to Wajima Museum of Urushi Art Curator Terao Aiko, “Among wealthy merchants and farmers throughout the nation, demand increased for high-grade lacquer ware to adorn elegant auspicious occasions. Such goods were made using materials including lacquer (sap extracted from the trunks of Japanese lacquer trees), zelkova and other wood used as a base for applying lacquer, diatomaceous earth, and more, all of which was produced in Wajima at the time. From the eighteenth century, the division of labor

cess, and it can take more than a year to complete a single bowl. Moreover, the *chinkin* technique from the middle of the Edo period (1603-1867) and the *makie* technique from the Meiji period (1868-1912) were incorporated in earnest, and the popularity of Wajima-nuri grew as the dishes were gorgeously decorated with gold or silver in addition to their durability as practical products. The chinkin technique makes use of the thick coating on Wajima-nuri, where patterns are carved with chisels into the hard lacquer-coated surface



Yellow lacquered tiered box with a cherry blossoms and birds design created using the *chinkin* technique

and gold leaf or powder is fixed to these carved areas. In the *makie* technique, patterns are drawn on the surface of the dish using lacquer, and before this hardens, gold, silver or other metal powder is sprinkled on and set into the surface of the dish.

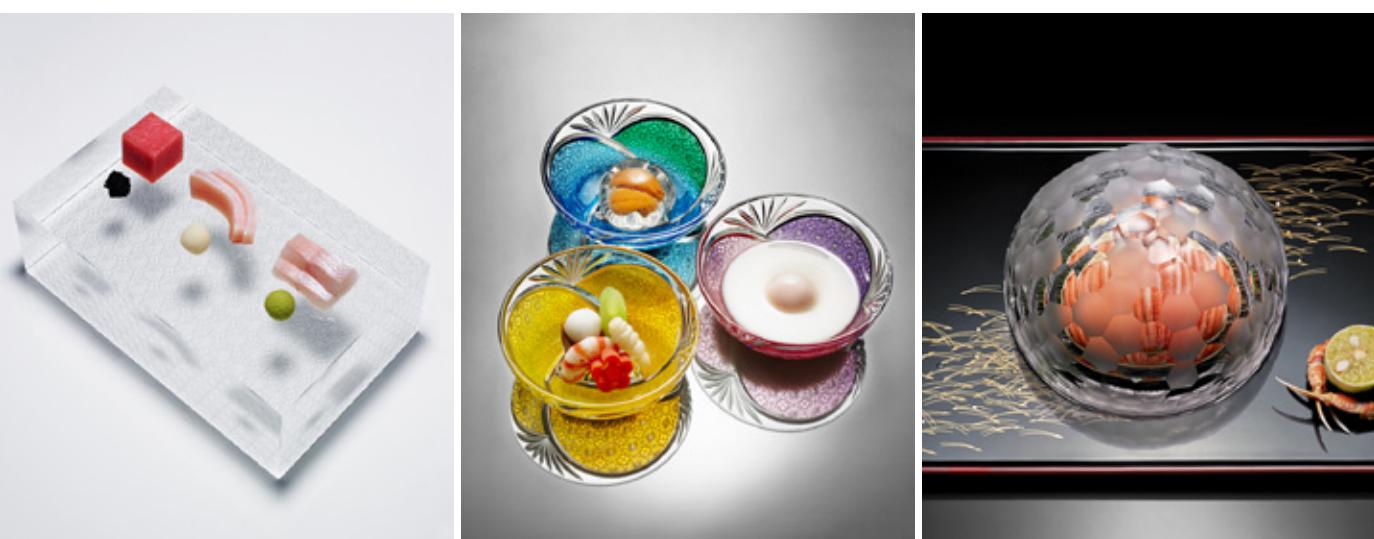
The Wajima Museum of Urushi Art is the only museum in Japan which specializes in lacquer art, exhibiting lacquer work not only from Wajima but also from different regions of Japan as well as overseas.

Curator Terao says, “We also hold workshops where visitors can paint objects such as chopsticks and spoons for themselves. We have prepared written explanations in English and Chinese for overseas visitors.”

After admiring masterpiece works of lacquer ware in the museum, it would surely be fun to create your own original pieces and take them home as presents for family or as souvenirs. ■

New look *Edo kiriko* glassware

Photos: Courtesy of Horiguchi Kiriko Inc.



# Glittering Patterns Engraved on Glass

Edo kiriko glassware cut with some of the popular patterns  
Photo: Courtesy of the Edo Kiriko Cooperative Association

*Edo kiriko* is a traditional Tokyo craft. It was born of an admiration for Western cut glass. The shine of Japanese traditional design emerges on the surface of *Edo kiriko* glassware.



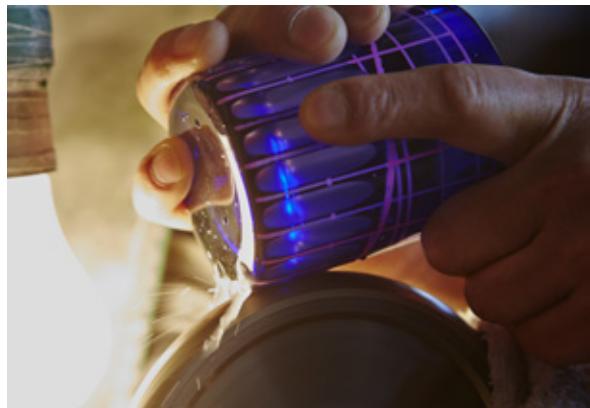
## SUGIYAMA MAMORU

**E**DO *kiriko* is a type of cut glass in which patterns are created by etching the surface of the glass. Its origins date back to the late Edo period (1603–1867) when people admired the beauty of glassware brought to Japan from the West and experimented with ways of reproducing it in Japan. The result was a technique called *kiriko*.

Edo *kiriko* is said to have first been produced in 1834 by the glass merchant Kagaya Kyube. In 1881, early in the era of national modernization during the Meiji period (1868–1912), the government established Japan's first Western-style glass factory, inviting an Englishman to take the helm. The techniques introduced at that time are still used today.

Nowadays, the patterns of Edo *kiriko* are handmade by pressing the glassware against a high-speed rotating grindstone tool. Many of the patterns originated in the West, but the incorporation of traditional Japanese patterns and designs makes the glassware unique. One example is Edo *kiriko* engraved with a fish egg pattern (*nanako-mon*), a traditional pattern that embodies a wish for prosperity for future generations. Other traditional Japanese patterns include *kiku-kagome* (chrysanthemum basket weave), *yarai* (bamboo fence), *asa-no-ha* (hemp leaves) and *kikko* (tortoiseshell). Inventive new works featuring new patterns and shapes have also been released, diversifying the range of expression.

"*Kiriko* reflects the light like a glittering jewel," says Shimizu Yuichiro of the Edo *kiriko* Cooperative Association's public relations department, explaining

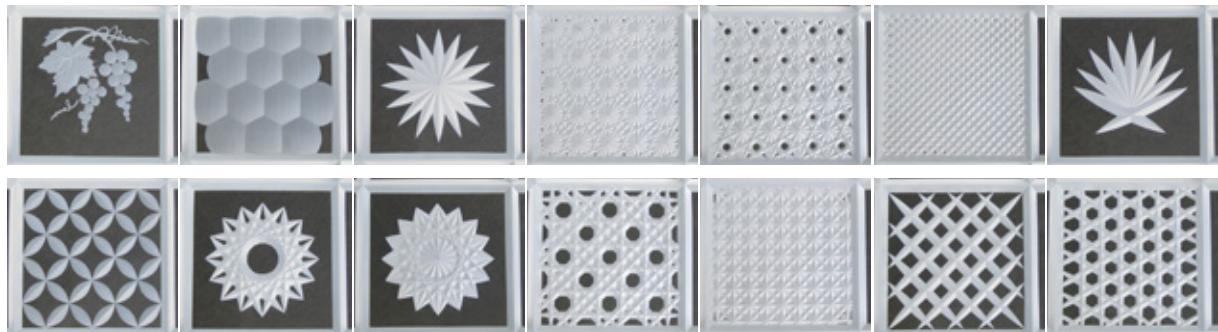


Patterns are cut into the glass using rotating grindstone tools

Photo: Courtesy of the Edo Kiriko Cooperative Association

the glassware's charm. "It has a shorter history than other Japanese traditional crafts such as lacquerware or ceramics, so we're challenging ourselves in new directions, responding flexibly to the modern culture and lifestyle of the times."

Edo *kiriko* has been attracting particular attention of late as tableware for Japanese-style food and sake. In Japanese cuisine, value is placed on a sense of the season and beauty in the arrangement of food. Glassware is therefore often used in the summer because its transparency imparts a feeling of coolness. The clean lines of Edo *kiriko* glassware also make it the perfect vessel for chilled sake. Collaborations between restaurants and *kiriko* manufacturers to produce custom-made *kiriko* to suit the ambience and cuisine of restaurants are also on the increase. With the growing popularity of Japanese cuisine and sake overseas, Edo *kiriko* glassware is taking on a new role as tableware that expresses a sense of Japaneseeness. □



Tiles showing some of the traditional Edo *kiriko* patterns

Photos: Courtesy of the Edo Kiriko Cooperative Association

# The Beauty of Bamboo Basketry

**Suruga bamboo lattice ware (*Suruga-take-sen-suji-zaiku*)** is a folk craft of Shizuoka Prefecture in which finely split bamboo strands (*takehigo*) are assembled into vessels. The delicate beauty of the basketry is now being incorporated into modern fixture designs, bringing a new lease of life to this traditional craft.

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**YANAGISAWA MIHO**

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**I**N Asia, where bamboo is abundant in nature, various household implements and agricultural tools have long been created out of bamboo. Similarly in Japan, dried bamboo has been cut into thin strips and woven into bamboo baskets, bamboo strainers and other vessels.

However, the craft of Suruga bamboo lattice ware handed down in Suruga (modern day Shizuoka Prefecture) differs from other regions in one key way. Instead of “weaving” the bamboo, the bamboo strips are “assembled” to create gorgeous bamboo products of delicate beauty. Holes are made in the large bamboo frame that defines the shape of the overall product, and several thin and rounded bamboo strands less than a millimeter thick are threaded through these holes to complete products that are both beautiful and practical, including insect cages, flower

bowls, trays, paper lamp shades, and handbags.

According to one explanation, the source of this kind of bamboo basketry can be traced back to a court aristocrat who loved the seasons and composed *waka* (traditional Japanese poems) about such things as fireflies in summer and the sounds of insects in autumn, and sought out fine baskets in which to hold the insects that represented these seasons. It is believed that the craft was further developed to produce containers to hold bait for falconry at the request of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), who lived in Suruga after stepping down as Shogun. As the story goes, the focus shifted to making the items look beautiful largely because they were for the Shogun’s hobby.

Suruga bamboo lattice ware was designated as a traditional craft by Japan’s Ministry of International Trade and Industry (now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) in 1976. Today, faced with competition from cheap foreign products and plastic

All photos: Courtesy of Shizuoka Bamboo-craft Cooperative Association





Suruga bamboo lattice ware products

items, the number of establishments practicing the Suruga bamboo lattice ware craft has declined to around ten. However, it is precisely under this adversity that Miyabi Andon Seisakusyo pressed forward in an effort to create products of masterful beauty.

“Our products weren’t selling well and we were in danger of losing our livelihoods,” recounts the company’s third-generation president Sugiyama Masatoshi. “That was why we turned our attention to Europe, where the appreciation for beauty and craftsmanship is deeply rooted, and decided to take on the challenge of creating unique products that would be treated as objects to last a lifetime.” But as the person actually making the products, thinking of their design at the same time was extremely challenging, he says. “Naturally I had ideas about what I could create in my head, but when I brought in a designer who wasn’t familiar with those techniques, they suggested innovative design that made me think, ‘it’s impossible. I can’t make that.’ From there, I took on the challenge of creating products that would capture people’s attention.”

The products created out of that process have transcended the boundaries of Japan and the West and attracted worldwide attention through their use as lamp shades at famous hotels, afternoon tea trays and various other products.

The vessels of Suruga bamboo lattice ware are boldly spreading beyond the realm of delicate Japanese beauty. ■



Stripping bamboo strands (*takehigo*) for the lattice work



Bending bamboo over heat to form the product frame. Holes are drilled in the frame into which bamboo strands are inserted to assemble the product.



# Bonki

## Perfect Pots for Bonsai

In recent years, Japan's bonsai culture has spread around the world, while at the same time *bonki*, the dedicated pots in which bonsai are planted, have also begun to draw note.

SATO KUMIKO

**B**ONSAI, the potted plants cultivated for appreciation of their form, have spread around the world while retaining the Japanese "bonsai" name. The number of bonsai enthusiasts has also increased, and since its start in Japan in 1989, the World Bonsai Convention, regarded as the "world cup" of the bonsai community, has subsequently been held once every four years in the United States, Germany, Puerto Rico, South Korea and China. During this time exports of bonsai plants from Japan to Asia and countries in Europe have also grown.

The aesthetics of bonsai lies in expressing a natural scene in its ideal form within a pot. "Bonsai pots are referred to as 'bonki' among enthusiasts," explains Taguchi Fumiya, curator of the Omiya Bonsai Art

Museum, Saitama, located in Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture. "We also have terms such as *hachi-awase*, which refers to matching the shape and size of a pot to the shape and species of the tree to be planted, and *hachi-utsuri*, which refers to the harmony in the appearance of the tree and the pot, so choosing the right bonki is very important for bonsai. To put it another way, bonsai are appreciated with the planted tree and its container as an integrated whole."

There are a wide variety of bonki shapes, including round, rectangular, oval, and hexagonal pots. In order to raise trees to be small, bonki are generally shallow. Surface designs also vary. Some bonki are plain, while others bear auspicious patterns such as imaginary plants and animals. The main types of pottery used in bonki include Tokoname ware and Seto ware from Aichi Prefecture, Banko ware from Mie Prefecture, Shigaraki ware from Shiga Prefecture, Kutani ware from Ishikawa Prefecture, and Arita ware from Saga Prefecture.

During the gardening boom of the late Edo period (1603-1867), gorgeous porcelain flowerpots created using the *sometsuke* technique of blue and white

All photos: Courtesy of the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum. All works are part of the collection of the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum.



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ceramics primarily from the Seto area spread around Japan, but from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onward, more understated earthenware bonki pots created by Yixing potters in Jiangsu Province, China were increasingly imported, and these designs became the standard for bonki. Today, bonki made from Tokoname ware, whose techniques were developed after learning from Yixing pottery, has gained the deep trust of bonsai artists, and all Tokoname potters are enthusiastically engaged in the production of bonki. Tokoname bonki, like the masterpieces from Yixing, are fired at high temperatures to produce an exquisite, smooth ceramic quality with excellent moisture and air permeability. These qualities combine to create the composed grace and growing conditions that are essential for bonsai.

Over time, Tokoname bonki have taken on various colors, shapes and materials to suit a wide variety of bonsai trees. Some bonki are made from different clays that are blended before firing to harmonize with the patina of trees several hundreds of years

- 1 *Udei* dark clay unglazed oval pot with landscape design (19th century, Yixing pottery from Jiangsu Province, China, from the former collection of renowned bonsai master Okuma Shigenobu)
- 2 *Shidei* dark purple clay unglazed oval pot (*omoi-no-mama* species of plum blossom, estimated 120 years old)
- 3 Rimmed rectangular pot with two embossed lines around the base (Japanese black pine, named *shishi-no-mai*, estimated 100 years old) (Produced by modern Tokoname potter Nakano Gyuzan)
- 4 Trapezoid *sometsuke* glazed pot with handles featuring pomegranate design (19th century, Seto)

old. In recent years, the world of bonsai has been further expanded with the emergence of artists who bake more compact and stylish bonki, catering to the popularity of enjoying small bonsai trees indoors.

The 8th World Bonsai Convention was held in 2017 in Saitama City, welcoming around 45,000 people including overseas visitors over three days. Due to COVID-19, the 9th convention has been pushed back one year and is now scheduled for 2022 in Perth, Western Australia. If you have the chance to see bonsai at such an event, paying attention to the bonki together with the trees will surely double the appeal of the bonsai. ■

# Foreign Residents Support Center

About half a year has passed since the Foreign Residents Support Center (FRESC) opened in Yotsuya, Shinjuku City, Tokyo. Local governments, private companies and individuals are making good use of its services.

SAWAJI OSAMU

Last July (2020), FRESC opened on the 13th floor of the CO・MO・RE YOTSUYA high-rise building near JR Yotsuya Station in Shinjuku City, Tokyo. It is a facility operated by the Japanese government to carry out activities including support for consulting requests from foreign nationals residing in Japan, support for companies that want to hire foreign nationals, and support for local governments engaged in supporting foreign nationals. A major characteristic of the facility is that eight organizations related to foreign nationals' residence in Japan, such as visas and employment, are gathered on a single floor. These organizations work closely with one another to provide the necessary support for users regarding residence as quickly as possible.

The staff at FRESC's reception desk speaks Japanese, English and Chinese. Using a tablet, they are also able to receive visitors in Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian and Nepali languages as well.

The following outlines the services available from organizations at FRESC. Since the available lan-

guage services and the procedures to apply for services are different for each organization, visitors will need to visit the FRESC website or to call its main phone number to check before visiting to apply for services.

## [Immigration Services Agency \(Disclosure Request Office\)](#)

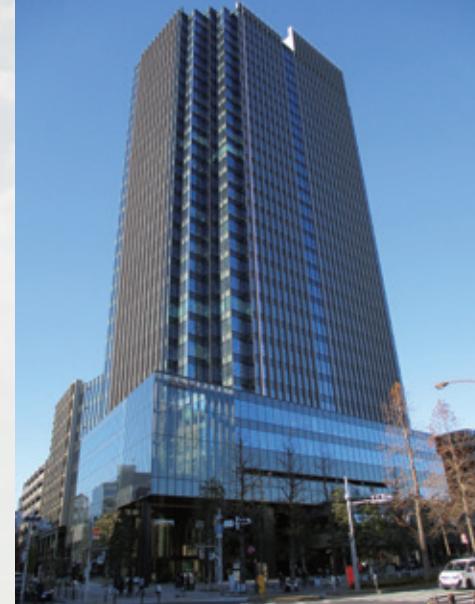
The Disclosure Request Office accepts requests to disclose immigration records and alien registration records in addition to administrative documents held by the Immigration Services Agency (head office).

## [Tokyo Regional Immigration Services Bureau](#)

The Tokyo Regional Immigration Services Bureau provides individual counseling by appointment to foreign nationals living in Japan and business people who want to hire foreign nationals. It also gives advice and provides counseling, etc., to local governments relating to foreign nationals.

## [Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau, Human Rights Department](#)

The Human Rights Department at the Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau provides counseling on various human rights issues such as bul-



□ CO・MO・RE YOTSUYA

lying, abuse, various types of harassment, and privacy violations through misuse of the Internet, in addition to discriminatory treatment of foreign nationals and people with disabilities. The department also conducts simple, quick and flexible relief activities and human rights awareness-raising activities for these types of human rights violations.

## [Japan Legal Support Center \(the JLSC, Houterasu\)](#)

Houterasu is a public agency that helps to resolve legal issues. For people who reside in Japan and face financial difficulties, Houterasu provides free legal consultation and interest-free loans to cover the fees for lawyers' services (depending on income level and other conditions).

## [Tokyo Labour Bureau Consultation and Support Office for Foreigners](#)

Tokyo Labour Bureau Consultation and Support Office for Foreigners provides consultation and support regarding labor-related

## Consultation booths of the Foreign Residents Support Center on the 13th floor of CO・MO・RE YOTSUYA

Photo: Courtesy of the Immigration Services Agency



laws such as the Labor Standards Act and labor management, safety and health management consultation for business owners who employ foreign workers. It also provides seminars by experts and sends consultants to companies in relation to personnel management including safety and health issues. Consultations for foreign workers regarding working conditions are also available.

### Tokyo Employment Service Center for Foreigners

The Tokyo Employment Service Center for Foreigners is an institution of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare that provides support for highly skilled foreign professionals (students and specialist/technical expert status of residence holders) who are seeking full-time employment. It also supports business owners by providing them with information and counseling for hiring foreign

nationals in addition to conducting employment counseling and placement, holding job fairs and implementing internships.

### Ministry of Foreign Affairs Visa Information

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Visa Information receives various general counseling inquiries relating to visa application procedures and provides guidance concerning documents required to apply for entry visas for Japan.

### Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO)

JETRO has established a platform for promotion of active participation by highly-skilled foreign professionals while coordinating with relevant government ministries and agencies in order to facilitate the utilization of foreign nationals who have a high-level of knowledge and skill. The organization provides information through

seminars and its portal site, and provides support services to companies interested in hiring highly-skilled foreign professionals.

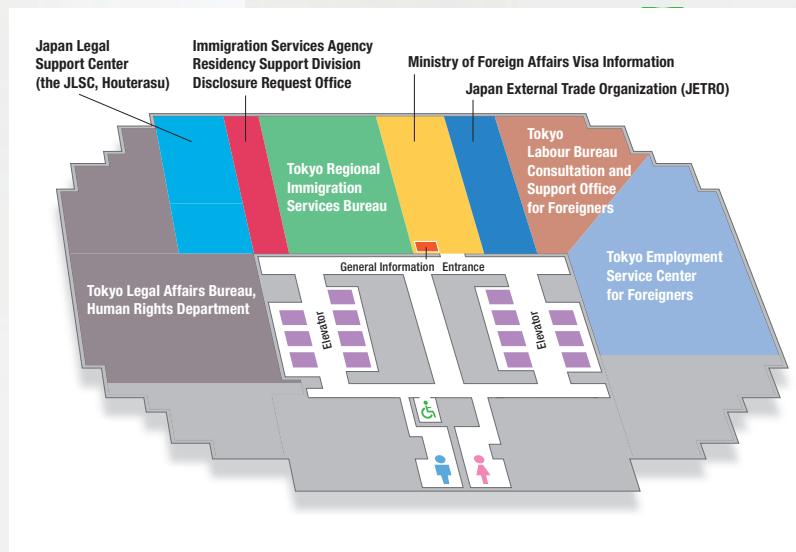
### FRESC Helpdesk

Currently (as of January 20, 2021), FRESC operates the FRESC Helpdesk to provide telephone consultation services for technical intern trainees and other foreign nationals residing in Japan experiencing difficulties due to the COVID-19.

Services are available in 14 languages, including Japanese, Vietnamese, Chinese and English.

Phone: 0120-76-2029

**Note:** This article has been created with the consent of the Ministry of Justice's Immigration Services Agency of Japan and on the basis of materials published by the agency.



### Foreign Residents Support Center

**Opening hours:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
(Closed on Saturdays, Sundays, National holidays and New Year holidays)

**Access:** JR Chuo Line/Sobu Line Yotsuya Station: 1-minute walk

Tokyo Metro Marunouchi Line Yotsuya Station: 3-minute walk

Tokyo Metro Namboku Line Yotsuya Station: 1-minute walk

**Phone:** 0570-011000 (Navi dial forwarding service)

(+81)3-5363-3013 (Dial this number when calling from outside Japan and selected IP phones)

**URL:** [www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/930005927.pdf](http://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/930005927.pdf)

Tamamushi lacquerware □  
tableware

Photo: Courtesy of Tohoku  
Kogei Co., Ltd.



# Lacquerware with a Sparkle that Lasts

Lacquerware, a traditional Japanese craft famous for its deep black color, has a surface that is predisposed to being easily scratched. Tamamushi lacquerware from Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, has overcome this weakness through technological developments, improving lacquerware's durability and versatility.

## □ Lustrous Tamamushi lacquerware

Photo: Courtesy of Tohoku Kogei Co., Ltd.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

Tamamushi lacquerware, a lacquering technique developed in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, features a shiny luster that subtly changes depending on the angle of the light, just like the wings of the jewel beetle (*tamamushi* in Japanese) from which this technique takes its name. The history of this technique goes back to the National Research Institute of Industrial Arts (NRIIA), which was established in Sendai City by the government in 1928 with the aim of developing the industries of the Tohoku region through the development of craft products for export. As part of the initiatives there, research and development was carried out to make traditional lacquer work that would appeal to international markets, and experiments were carried out multiple times for all aspects, including color, design and texture.

From this, there was an idea to use metal powder in lacquering, and in 1932, this came to fruition as Tamamushi lacquerware.

For Tamamushi lacquerware, the base is first created by polishing wood, metal, or other materials. Next, the base is painted with lacquer and polished, and this is repeated. Then, silver or aluminum powder is sprinkled on top of that, using the lacquer as an adhesive. Lacquer with added red, green or other colors of dye is then applied. Finally, patterns are created in the final process and the item is finished. In this way, Tamamushi lacquerware is created and the characteristic surface luster is formed through the reflection of light as it hits the sprinkled silver or aluminum powder.

Tohoku Kogei Co., Ltd. currently works with products that use the Tamamushi lacquerware tech-

nique. This company was established in 1933 with support from the NRIIA and Tohoku Imperial University (present-day Tohoku University). In 1939, the company was authorized to use the Tamamushi lacquerware patent held by the NRIIA, and they began commercializing Tamamushi lacquerware. Following the Second World War, the company then developed and sold coffee cups, salad bowls, flower vases, pencil cases, coasters, and other products aimed at both the Japanese and international markets. In 1985, these products received Miyagi Prefecture's traditional crafts designation, and became known as a specialty product of Sendai.

A new turning point for Tamamushi lacquerware came in 2012.

Executive director Saura Midori says, "Tamamushi lacquerware dishes were displayed at one of the

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largest design festivals in Europe held in Germany and they were received well by many visitors, but we were asked by a buyer if they could be washed in a dishwasher. Lacquerware is easily scratched and can't be washed in a dishwasher. To widely seek out international sales markets, including in countries where dishwashers are commonplace, there was a need to overcome this issue."

What solved the problem was nanocomposite coating, a coating technology on the nano level (1 nanometer = 1 millionth of a millimeter). Tohoku Kogeい and the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology Tohoku jointly developed a hard resinous material by uniformly mixing clay and resin at the nano level. Products that are hard, difficult to scratch, and resistant to ultraviolet rays became possible by creating and overlaying a protective layer (the nanocomposite layer) on to Tamamushi lacquerware with this material.

According to Saura, "Development of this technology was a repetitive trial and error process. High precision technology was needed to thinly and uniformly spray the coating agent, and initially, there were problems with the coating becoming cloudy white or uneven textures occurring. Based on the coating process used by our veteran lacquer painter, we adjusted the viscosity of the coating agent, spray pressure, and the

number of coatings, and established this technology over the course of about three years. I think that a meticulous coating technology was created based on our lengthy experience."

The new Tamamushi lacquerware technology that was achieved in this way not only made the items resistant to scratches but also made it possible to apply to glass and porcelain. As a result, the company received the Sixth Monodzukuri Nippon Grand Award from the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2015 and their products were selected as gifts from Japan for the world leaders at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit in Japan. This technology also attracted the attention of the local Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles professional baseball team, and the technology has been applied to the coating of players' helmets since the 2020 season.

Saura is placing high expectations on future potential, saying, "By having this technology used in helmets for baseball players proves that the technology stands up even to demanding uses, including against ultraviolet rays and impact. And I am thrilled that many people have experienced the charm of Tamamushi lacquerware through the sight of players moving around as the colors subtly change depending on the light. In the future, in addition to tableware which has been the main conventional application of lacquerware, I want to apply Tamamushi lacquerware to

- 1 The base is created by polishing wood, metal, or other materials and is repeatedly painted with lacquer and polished
- 2 Silver or aluminum powder is applied then coated again with lacquer
- 3 Patterns are created in the final process and the item is finished

Photo: Courtesy of Tohoku Kogeい Co., Ltd.

a wide range of uses, including cell phones and interior parts of cars."

From seeds planted by the Japanese government some 90 years ago, private sector efforts have created a technology with a practicality and sparkle that will continue to be used and enjoyed long into the future. 



- The Sendai-based Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles baseball team uses helmets made with a Tamamushi lacquerware nanocomposite surface layer

Photo: ©Rakuten Eagles, Ltd.



# Spiritual Growth and the Way of Tea

**Canadian Randy Channell traveled to Japan more than thirty years ago to study martial arts. He is now a master of *chado* (also known as *sado*, the way of tea) who goes by the name Soei.**

**SATO KUMIKO**

“**T**here is a phrase in tea, *ichigo-ichie*. It can be directly translated as ‘one term, one meeting’ though more commonly it’s understood as a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. It means to treasure the moment. This attitude of cherishing the present, which can never be repeated, is the same spirit that both the tea master and the guests embrace when attending a *chaji* (formal tea gathering) or *chakai* (informal tea gathering). I think sharing these ‘moments’ with people is one of the most appealing aspects of *chado*,” says Randy Channell Soei,

professor of Urasenke, one of the main schools of *chado*.

After learning of the term *bunbu-ryodo* (union of cultural and martial ways) through kung fu in Hong Kong, Channell, who is Canadian, traveled to Japan to learn Japanese martial arts. Living in Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, he spent his days practicing various martial arts including *kendo* (Japanese fencing), *kyudo* (Japanese archery), *iaido* (Japanese sword-drawing), *naginata* (Japanese glaive) and *nito-ryu* (two sword style *kendo*). He later relocated to Kyoto to begin serious studies in *chado*, and has now

■ Tea master  
Randy Channell Soei

been living in Japan for over three decades.

The “way” (*do* in Japanese) that caught Channell’s interest represents a way of life that is not bound by the mere acquisition of skills or results such as winning or losing, but instead seeks spiritual growth through that process. In addition to martial arts, some traditional cultures and techniques are also referred to as *geido* (way of arts) and include the same *do*, such as *kado* (flower arrangement) and *kodo* (incense appreciation). Proficiency in both types is referred to as *bunbu-ryodo*, as described above. While studying martial arts in Matsumoto, Channell also began to practice *chado*, *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy) and the *koto* (Japanese harp). Of these, it was *chado* that particularly captured Channell’s heart.

“Interestingly there are many similarities in *budo* (martial arts) and *chado*, obvious ones being movement and posture. Say for example when I bring the *mizusashi* (water container) into the tearoom, or assume the middle fighting position in *kendo*, or begin raising the bow in *kyudo*, the shape of my upper body is basically the same. I’m well centered with my back straight and my arms rounded. The similarities extend beyond just the physical movements and postures as well. Like *budo*, tea is ‘steeped’ in Zen thought. There’s even a phrase, *Cha Zen Ichimi*, which could be translated as “Tea and Zen are of one flavor.” The Four Principles of Tea, *wa* (harmony), *kei* (respect),



□ Channell making tea



□ Channell's café, ran Hotei, in Kyoto

□ Channell hosts a tea ceremony

*sei* (purity) and *jaku* (tranquility), are ideals that can be shared by both," explains Channell.

Channell moved to Kyoto in 1993 and began his formal studies in chado at the Urasenke Gakuen Professional College of Chado. He graduated the college in 1996 and was personally given the name Soei as a master of chado by the 15th Grand Tea Master of Urasenke in 1999. The name contains the character for *sakaeru*, which means to flourish or prosper, and expresses the hope for Channell's long success.

Channell is currently based in Kyoto City where he teaches chado at Nashinoki Shrine, which is located on the east side of the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Many of his pupils are Japanese, he says. Inside the shrine is the Somei well, known as one of the three best sources of water in Kyoto.

The slightly sweet and mild water from this well is said to be suited for the tea ceremony, and he uses this water to make tea.

Channell also runs the ran Hotei café in Kyoto. Based in a remodeled traditional townhouse more than 100 years old, the café serves fragrant and smoothly frothed *matcha* (powdered tea) and *matcha* sweets using his original *matcha* produced in Kyotanabe City. The café also offers tea ceremony experiences and tea gatherings that make it easy for those interested in the way of tea to take part. Essential to the hospitality offered at a tea gathering are the utensils used. From a collection accumulated over many years, Channell combines the utensils most befitting the theme of each gathering to delight his guests. At his café, the bowls used change each month so the guests can enjoy *matcha* even if they are

unfamiliar with chado. Additionally, to ensure the entryway to the world of tea is always open, Channell also holds *ryurei* tea gatherings with tables and chairs so that people who have trouble kneeling on tatami mats and others new to the tea ceremony can easily attend, as part of his commitment to sharing the joy of tea.

"Chado doesn't have to be difficult. You can start by simply enjoying the tea as a guest. As you gradually learn the spirit behind it, you can begin to understand how deep it is. There is no destination along this 'way,' it's the journey. Even though I am a 'tea master' I feel I must continue to study and practice. That's another appealing facet of the way of tea," says Channell, whose smile captures the joy that chado and its once-in-a-lifetime encounters have brought him. 

# World Class Whiskies from the Chichibu Countryside

Whiskies distilled using local mineral water and barley in Chichibu in the abundant natural environment of Saitama Prefecture are winning fans around the world.

## KATO KYOKO

Chichibu City, located in the northwestern part of Saitama Prefecture, is almost 90 percent forest. Running through the center of the city is the Arakawa River, which collects water from the mountains and flows into Tokyo Bay. Here in Chichibu's abundant natural environment, Akuto Ichiro makes whisky.

Akuto's family had been brewing sake in Chichibu since the seventeenth century, shifting in his grandfather's generation to making whisky as well in a distillery in the prefecture's Hanyu City. However, the distillery had been in financial difficulties since his father's generation, and soon after Akuto became the 21st head in 2001 he was forced to transfer the business to a company in another prefecture. As a result, 400 casks of unblended whisky, which in some cases had been aged at the

distillery for close to twenty years, were in danger of being discarded.

"Due to the expense of storing the casks, the company that took over the business decided to dispose of the entire stock and withdraw from the whisky business. However, it seems that Akuto couldn't bear the thought of this and was so troubled by it that he couldn't sleep at night. So,

in 2004, he decided to take back his father's unblended whisky and set up a new company, Venture Whisky Ltd.," says Yoshikawa Yumi, the company's global brand ambassador.

The distillery had been torn down, but fortunately a sake brewery in Fukushima Prefecture, alarmed by the prospect of losing the unblended whisky, came to the rescue and agreed to store it temporarily. Akuto used this to make



 1 Ichiro's Malt Wine Wood Reserve

2 Double Distilleries blend of single malt from Hanyu Distillery and malt from Chichibu Distillery

The two pear-shaped stills at Chichibu Distillery



Whisky matures in casks made from a variety of different oaks in a warehouse at Chichibu Distillery



his first whisky, launching Ichiro's Malt in 2005 and going round bars and liquor stores to promote it. Eventually, the reputation of Ichiro's Malt began to spread by word of mouth, and was rapidly gaining in popularity in 2006 when it was awarded the Gold Medal in the Japanese Whisky category by a UK whisky magazine.

In 2008, Akuto's Chichibu Distillery began operations. The decision to build the distillery in his hometown of Chichibu was largely due to the environment. One reason is that the city is blessed with good quality water. As well as containing just the right amount of minerals, Chichibu water is neither too hard nor too soft, and has no distinct flavor. Another reason is that the area experiences extreme differences in temperature. In winter, morning and evening temperatures fall to minus 5-10 degrees Celsius, while summer temperatures can exceed 30 degrees Celsius. These temperature differences cause the whisky to mature more quickly.

The hallmark of the company's whisky production is its washbacks, the containers where wort, the crushed malt infusion, is fermented. Instead of the more commonly used stainless steel or conifer wood, Chichibu Distillery uses wooden washbacks made of

mizunara oak, a broad-leaved tree native to Japan.

"The lactobacilli that live in mizunara oak produce fruity notes that give the whisky a more complex aroma. The fermentation period for whisky is usually 48 to 72 hours, but we ferment it for an average of 90 to 100 hours to extract the maximum aroma," says Yoshikawa.

While imported British malt is also used, barley grown locally in Chichibu contributes some 10 to 15 percent of the total malt used. This locally grown barley is said to have a significant impact on the fruity aroma.

Chichibu The First, the first whisky brewed at Chichibu Distillery, was launched in 2011, with all 7,400 bottles sold out through pre-order the same day. Since then, the company has been highly acclaimed both in Japan and abroad, regularly winning or placing in various categories at the World Whiskies Awards (WWA), for example, including winning the World's Best Blended Limited Release award in 2020. In 2019, Akuto won the Blender of the Year award at the International Spirits Challenge.

Every February since 2014, the Chichibu Whisk(e)y Matsuri (festival) has been held in Chichibu City, inspired by local whisky pro-

duction. Bringing together Japanese and international whisky makers, the festival attracts large numbers of visitors from Japan and overseas. Visitors are able to enjoy tastings and make purchases of various whiskies as well as attend seminars led by critics and others involved in whisky making. In 2021, virtual tours of the distillery and seminars based in Chichibu will be held online in view of the impact of the novel coronavirus. Until the next tasting, we will wait patiently for the whisky to quietly mature. 



Chichibu Whisk(e)y Matsuri



# A Shrine Dedicated to the Gods of the Sea

□ The four main sanctuaries of Sumiyoshi Taisha

**Sumiyoshi Taisha, a revered shrine familiarly known as “Sumiyos-san” features an ancient architectural style of Japanese shrine.**

## SUGIYAMA MAMORU

Osaka, which has benefitted from Osaka bay, a large inland sea, is one of Japan's most prominent commercial cities even today. The city has flourished as a result of maritime trade with other areas of Japan and abroad conducted mainly through the port of Osaka at the tip of the bay. Sumiyoshi Taisha Shrine was built in 211 AD according to the shrine's literature and has been revered by people as the place dedicated to the deities that guard sea traffic. The shrine, approximately eight kilometers from the coast today, was originally constructed on the seaside, for the worship of the god of the sea. The Japanese envoy to the Sui dynasty of China in the

seventh century, the subsequent missions to the Tang dynasty that continued until the ninth century, and people engaged in the shipping business in the Edo period

(1603-1867) offered their prayers here for safety during travel on the seas.

A notable characteristic of Sumiyoshi Taisha is its four main sanctuaries, which are designated as national treasures. They are dedicated to the three deities of



□ A bird's eye view of the four main sanctuaries showing their resemblance to a fleet of ships

creation that are believed to have appeared from the sea in Japanese mythology and to Empress Jingu who established the shrine. All four of the main shrine buildings, each dedicated to a god, were constructed to face Osaka bay. Three of the four main shrine buildings stand in line while the fourth stands alongside the third, creating a unique layout that looks like a fleet of ships navigating the sea, reflecting ancient ritual forms. The approximately 600 stone lanterns that line the coastline were donated chiefly by people engaged in shipping during the Edo period and reportedly their light was used as a landmark for navigation. The shrine, which has supported the people who have made Osaka prosperous as a city of merchants by bringing products and new culture from other areas of Japan and abroad, is still so revered that approximately two million people pay their respects during traditional new year's visits in the first three days of January in a normal year.

"In Osaka, people affectionately call the shrine Sumiyossan, and traditionally the new year begins with a visit to Sumiyossan. Sumiyoshi Taisha provides spiritual support to the local people in their daily lives as well as being a place for the rituals that mark the milestones of their lives," says Kawano Mitsuhiro, an employee of the General Affairs Division of Sumiyoshi Taisha.

Various facilities within the 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> premises of Sumiyoshi Taisha reflect the shrine's long history.

The four main shrine build-



□ One of the main sanctuaries, a national treasure constructed using the *Sumiyoshi-zukuri* style with *kiritsuma-zukuri* gabled roofs

ings are particularly noteworthy because they were constructed in an ancient architectural style using *Sumiyoshi-zukuri*, which is characterized by *kiritsuma-zukuri* gabled roofs using many layers of thinly peeled Japanese cypress bark. Unlike the Five-storied Pagoda of Mount Haguro (*Highlighting JAPAN* May 2020) and the Jizodo (Jizo Hall) at Shofuku-ji Temple (July 2020), whose four roof corners slope upwards, the sanctuaries have roofs featuring straight slopes that do not bend upward. The interior is divided into two rooms called Gejin (outer sanctum) and Naijin (inner sanctum). The pillars are painted with *ninuri*, a vermillion lacquer, and the walls are finished in white with a *gofunnuri* coating that uses a pigment made of ground seashells.

The main shrine buildings that are currently standing were built in 1810 and clearly reflect the ancient architectural styles that had been adopted long before then. They are extremely valuable in terms of the history of shrine architecture.

In December of last year (2020),

UNESCO approved Japan's application to inscribe the "Traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The selected seventeen skills, techniques and knowledge for conservation include those relating to the repair of and materials for buildings with *Hongawarabuki* roofs and cypress bark roofs as well as for cypress bark peeling, which are key elements of Sumiyoshi Taisha. Significant progress may be made in the preservation of the shrine's historical value reflecting the history of Osaka. ■

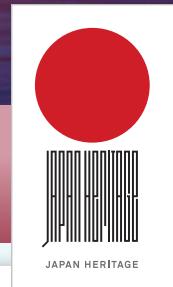


□ The golden door of the second main shrine building



Ukimido "Floating Temple"  
of Mangetsu-ji Temple

## Lake Biwa: Object of Worship, Bringer of Life (Shiga Pref.)



JAPAN HERITAGE

Lake Biwa, the largest body of fresh water in Japan, has long played an immense role in the spiritual and daily life of the area. The lake has an area of about 670 square kilometers, and supplies much of the water needed in the nearby metropolises of Kyoto and Osaka.

Water has been revered as a medium for purification and healing since ancient times, believed to have the power to drive away bad omens and cure illnesses. When Buddhism spread to the country in the sixth century, the clear blue water of Lake Biwa was likened to the pure blue world of the Buddha and the lake became the focus of worship. There are numerous temples and shrines devoted to the worship of water in the area surrounding Lake Biwa, including Enryakuji Temple, a World Heritage site.

The lake is home to many species of freshwater fish such as the indigenous Biwa trout and *nigorobuna*, a type of crucian carp. Unique methods of catching these fish and delectable dishes made with them have developed over centuries, creating a rich food culture that visitors can still enjoy today.

In addition, there are many springs in the area around Lake Biwa, and some towns and villages have a system of waterways to take advantage of this. In the tiny coastal community of Harie, *kabata* waterways flow next to residents' kitchens, and the pure water was historically used for cooking, washing, and for keeping vegetables cool in the hot summers.

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