



CRAFTED TREASURES

As part of the Japan Information & Culture Center (JICC), Embassy of Japan's Crafted Treasures online exhibition, we are offering a look at ways in which Japanese ceramics are not only treasured pieces of art, but also treasured household items used in everyday life and a local eco-friendly initiative.

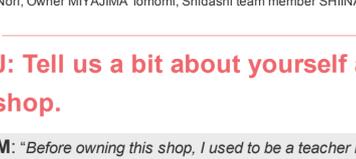
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JICC Crafted Treasures Special Newsletter An Interview with Tokiya Japan

While our exhibit, *Crafted Treasures*, focuses on ceramic artisans who are designated as Living National Treasures and their work, much of the ceramics made in Japan have a more practical and utilitarian history. Thanks to archeological discoveries, we know that ceramics were being used for both practical and decorative purposes as far back as the Jomon period (c. 14,000–300 BCE). In particular, ceramics have a strong connection with Japanese cuisine in both ancient and modern Japan.

As a result of this long history, it is no surprise that there are many types of Japanese ceramics and pottery techniques that vary regionally. In this newsletter we will focus on some of the historical and contemporary uses of Japanese pottery, and we will learn more about Minoyaki pottery through an interview with Tokiya Japan, a Japanese ceramics store in downtown Washington, D.C.

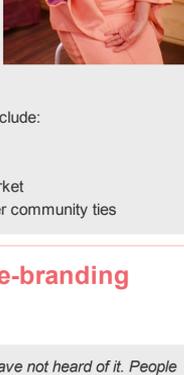
About Tokiya Japan



Tokiya Japan has a small storefront next to D.C. mainstay Hana Market on the corner of 17th and U Streets. The store features a beautiful collection of Minoyaki pottery coming directly from Toki city in Gifu, Japan, as well as kimonos and other Japanese handicrafts. In addition to the shop, owner MIYAJIMA Tomomi runs a Minoyaki Kids pottery program, webinar series, and has recently begun the Shidashi Project.

J: Tell us a bit about yourself and why you opened this shop.

M: "Before owning this shop, I used to be a teacher in Japan. During this time, I developed an interest in international education development and then worked at an international organization for 15 years. I traveled far away from my own country and I began to think I wasn't giving back to my own community in my hometown, which is struggling financially. Using this motivation, I started my business to give artists in my local community of Toki city in Gifu, Japan a global platform to share their work. I wanted to not only sell their products but also promote the cultures and traditions of my community and Japanese culture here in the D.C. metro area. In addition, I also work with my former students in Japan enrolled in a special needs school who are skillful potters and artists, by promoting and selling their work and raising awareness about the special needs community in Japan." (Right image: Owner MIYAJIMA Tomomi)



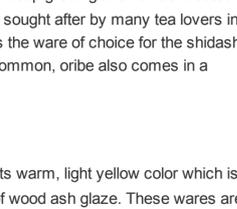
Miyajima also shared Tokiya Japan's **three main missions** which include:

- (i) to share the history and value of Minoyaki to a broader audience
- (ii) to re-define and re-brand Minoyaki for the 21st century global market
- (iii) to support sustainable growth of local craftsmanship with stronger community ties

J: How is Tokiya Japan re-defining or re-branding Minoyaki pottery?

M: "Minoyaki pottery has 1,300 years of history, yet many people have not heard of it. People struggle to define what it is and what it conveys, as it is not as clear as other types of pottery like bizen. The industry is also shrinking, so there is a sense of failure among the community. Together with the local Gifu prefectural government and the Toki City volunteer group I am a part of, which includes kiln masters and potters, we discuss once a month how to define and re-define or re-brand minoyaki pottery. I took on the role of promoting minoyaki pottery to a global audience. So we are still discussing this part of the mission, but it remains important to my store and business."

Minoyaki pottery's origin dates back to **7th century** in the region now known as Gifu prefecture. However, it was around the **Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1614)** that this pottery style flourished due to high profile patrons like **Shogun Oda Nobunaga** and tea master **Sen-no-Rikyu**. In the Edo period (1603-1868), a wide variety of Mino tableware was produced and in the Meiji period (1868-1912) mass production of high-quality Mino tableware began as well.



Now Minoyaki pottery coming from the Gifu region accounts for **70% of tableware and ceramics in Japan**. Minoyaki pottery is thought to be difficult to define, however over its long history four distinct styles were formed: Oribe, Shino, Kizeto, and Setoguro. (Right image: Tokiya Japan's Mino ware)



Shino - Characterized by its thick, opaque white glaze, red scorch marks, and spotting. Under the glaze some Shino ware will have tetsuke, or naturalistic motifs drawn with an iron glaze.



Oribe - Characterized by its deep green glaze. It was created by Lord Furuta Oribe and was sought after by many tea lovers in the Momoyama period. This is the ware of choice for the shidashi project. While green is most common, oribe also comes in a variety of other colors.



Kizeto - Characterized by its warm, light yellow color which is achieved through a thin coat of wood ash glaze. These wares are commonly decorated with floral patterns like cherry blossoms or irises. This style is often favored by masters of tea ceremony.



Setoguro - Characterized by its deep black glaze. This is achieved by firing the iron-glaze ware in an oxidizing kiln which is removed and immediately cooled.

J: Speaking of Minoyaki pottery, how did this Shidashi Project idea come about and what was the process to begin this project?

M: "One day in the early stages of quarantine, I was talking with Nori-san and I told him I was so tired of and concerned about the plastic waste created through delivery services. Of course, it is okay to cook at home, but sometimes we want to experience something different. I asked him, could we do something about it?"

In our chat we brought up the shidashi meals we used to have as a child. Our meals came in pottery which were then picked up by the vendors afterwards. And suddenly we were like, wait a minute you can provide the meals and I can provide the containers!

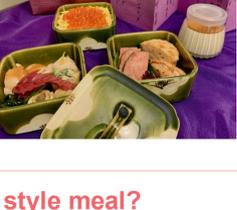
Since we started from scratch and there was no existing model to follow, we didn't know where to start after we had the idea though. I happened upon a friend who offered to help initially test it out and spread the word about the service. We continued to listen to the customers and improve our product and it started to branch out from there. Then I recruited Izumi-san to help us with delivery and taking orders, etc."

S: "My husband is in the military and we moved all around, and I experienced all the different foods and cultures abroad and saw the situation of the plastic use as well and it began to be an issue I was focusing on as well. I noticed the US was shifting away from waste in eating out, but still it is lacking. So I agreed a lot with this mission of the project."



Shidashi (仕出し じだし), also known as *demae* (手前 であえ), is a traditional food delivery service that dates back to the **Edo period (1603-1868)** in Japan. As this was a time period before disposable takeout containers existed, shidashi services used both **ceramic dishes and bowls and wooden containers** to deliver their food to hungry customers' homes. When containers were finished eating, dishes were placed outside their front doors and collected at a later date by the shidashi staff. Popular shidashi meals included soba, tempura, and grilled eel. When the program became widely used in the 1960s, demae services one again grew in popularity with new Western food offerings such as pizza. (Left image: Fukuyama soba restaurant 1771 shidashi.)

Tokiya Japan's **Shidashi Project** mimics this process of these services, delivering meals in beautiful **100% reusable Minoyaki pottery** and scheduling a pick up once you finish your meal. (Right image: Tokiya Japan's Shidashi Project autumn meal)



J: Why did you decide on a kaiseki style meal?



M: "Overtime we discovered we wanted a more traditional and less widely available meal, the kaiseki meal served during the tea ceremony. It represents the culinary excellence of the Japanese cuisine well. Nori-san chose the container."

Y: "When I came to her shop, I was in awe of all of the pottery but was most taken by the multi-tiered dish we are now using for the shidashi and I thought, oh this is a great chance to do something different! In my previous experience, I didn't work in an authentic Japanese restaurant, so my food has always been a sort of fusion that is common here in the United States. I wanted to learn more about how to create more authentic meals for the beautiful minoyaki dishes we chose."

Kaiseki ryori (懐石料理 かいせき りょうり) is a banquet or course meal that originated in the 16th century and was closely associated with **tea ceremony culture**. The seasonality and great care put into cooking and arranging the food in an aesthetic manner remain hallmarks of this Japanese culinary tradition. (Above image: Chef YASUTAKE Nori; Left image: First course of a summer kaiseki meal)



J: Did you have any concerns starting this business?

M: "At first we were really nervous to see how customers would react. But it turns out the D.C. metro area locals are more that excited to participate in our cause and 100% of our dishes have been returned and taken care of. It is very much thanks to our customers' cooperation that this project can continue to be sustainable." (Right image: Tokiya's shidashi service)



J: What is your favorite part of the project?

M: "Every time we deliver, [customers] tell us about how they learned about Japan and share their experiences with Japan. I love to feel the connection with our shared passion of Japanese culture. We love to see the care and concern and advice of our loyal customers. They are just as much a part of this project as we are."

Y: "It has made me happy to have returning customers. It has been a good challenge for me to create new meals and concepts for the kaiseki meals. It helps me grow as a chef and in my skills to hear from the customers' feedbacks. I very much appreciate the customers."

S: "I love to connect back with my own culture. It has been an enjoyable experience working with [Tokiya Japan]."

To learn more about Minoyaki pottery or Tokiya Japan's Shidashi project and other initiatives, please check out the following link: <https://www.tomotoki.com> or contact info@sowaka.org.

If you are interested in the diverse collection of Mino ware offered at Tokiya Japan, please check out their website and/or visit the store at:

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MORE ABOUT JICC'S CRAFTED TREASURES EXHIBIT

In Japan, artisans who are masters of various forms of traditional artistic expression are themselves officially designated as "Living National Treasures!" Check out 6 National Living Treasures' works from the Embassy of Japan in the USA's collection and learn their history [here](#).

Let us know what you enjoyed most from this newsletter on social media with #DCJICC!

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