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*Stories of
Entrepreneurship
from Kanagawa
to the World*

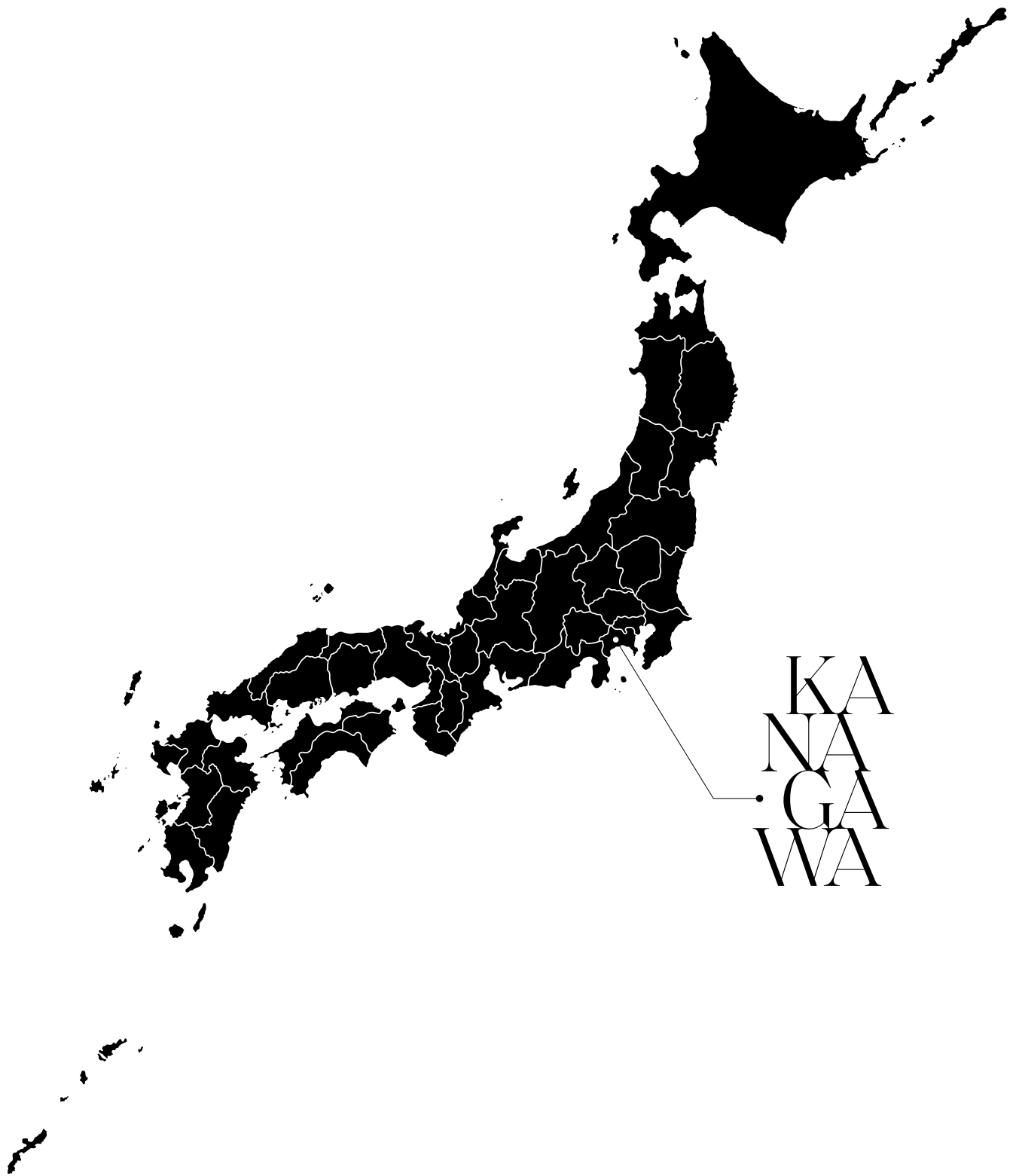


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Stories of Entrepreneurship from Kanagawa to the World

When US Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into the Port of Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, in 1854, his arrival marked the beginning of a new era for Japan. After 250 years of isolation, the country opened its gates to let in external trade—and the outside world along with it. Since then, Kanagawa has wholly embraced its role as the nation's international gateway, continuously welcoming innovation and expansion in all of its capacities. In 2020, Kanagawa stands proud as a leading hub for entrepreneurship, pushing for advancement in Japan's social, cultural, economic and technological approaches in all sorts of ways. In this booklet, you'll find the stories of the modern-day pioneers behind Kanagawa's own extraordinary story. Through a series of interviews with twelve Kanagawa-based companies, we learn how the roots of their local trade grew into the forests of a global enterprise. Among them, we see a journey of dreams from a room above a convenience store to a branch on Madison Avenue; an octopus caught one day while fishing turning into a nation's favorite snack, and two t-shirts multiplying into a famous streetwear label. Each of the stories offers further proof of the importance of Kanagawa across both the national and international business landscapes. But most of all, they show the power of just one idea and how its impact can be felt from Kanagawa to the world.



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A NEW KIND OF CULTURE

by **Alexandra Homma**

For those of us who love an occasional glass of alcohol, the world is an easy place. Wherever we go, whatever event we attend, there is always a glass to fit the occasion and we're never left empty-handed. For people who cannot consume alcohol, however — due to religious, physical or other reasons — the options are usually limited: orange juice, sparkling water, or if we're lucky, iced tea. Even if the setting is a celebration like a wedding or a milestone business event. The question remains: why is it easier to create a celebratory scene with alcohol than one without?

For Royal Blue Tea, the Japanese tea company that has been addressing this issue by offering luxurious non-alcoholic teas since 2007, it all started with this very simple question.

“The drink is one of the most important attributes to your dining experience,” says Setsuo Sato, Royal Blue Tea's chairman, and co-founder. “At a course dinner, you try different drinks, you enjoy the food, and you chat along. That is what makes a dinner complete — otherwise, you can just serve yourself a packed lunch,” he said with a laugh.

But he's only half joking; drinks are important. They help set the mood and break the ice. And very often, they elevate the taste of our food, too.

“We wanted to create a drinking culture where everybody — regardless of their cultural, religious, age or health restrictions — can enjoy on equal terms,” Sato adds.

Creating the World's First Wine-Bottled, High-End Tea

With this in mind, Sato, a tea sommelier and a former owner of a tea school, and Keiko Yoshimoto, a former student at the school and a tea aficionado, officially co-founded a company in 2006 that was to trigger a tea revolution: it would serve only the finest of non-alcoholic teas and serve them in wine bottles so that consumers would enjoy the drink in the same way they enjoy a wine's mood, and depth of flavor.

“It only made sense to turn to tea,” Sato explains. “Up until the Meiji Era in Japan, it was always a popular drink among the aristocracy.”

The market for the royal drink is also a major contribution for this decision: tea is, after all, the second most consumed beverage in the world and over 40 percent of it

“THE DRINK IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES TO YOUR DINING EXPERIENCE”

currently comes from Asia — China and India, specifically. And as to refined green tea, Japan continues to set up the bar high internationally, promoting not only the drink's delicious flavor but also its abundant health benefits.

We wanted to create a drinking culture where everybody — regardless of their cultural, religious, age or health restrictions — can enjoy.

But Royal Blue Tea's products are not just refined on the outside. Each product in their lineup of now nearly 20 kinds, is made of selected handpicked tea leaves from the finest tea plantations in Japan and around the world. The teas are produced organically, using the so-called mizudashi technique of infusing the leaves in cold water for up to seven days, which is followed up by filtering the tea using an unheated filtered sterilization process. The result of this intricate process is rich color, scent, and the taste of truly delicious high-quality tea.

And, just like wine, unique names derive from the source of production. There's the King of Green Masa from Shizuoka Prefecture, Riichi from Kyoto, Irika from Miyazaki Prefecture, the Queen of Blue from Taiwan, the Jewel of Flowers Hana from Fujian, China and more.

From JAL to G7: The Road to Chaen

Twelve years since the launch of Royal Blue Tea, the company's labels are now served at some of the most prestigious restaurants, bars and first-class hotels in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. They are being paired with a variety of international cuisine from French to Chinese fusion, and of course, Japanese. In 2011, the company also partnered with Japan Airlines to deliver the drinks on its first-class' inter-

national flights. It was a joint project with a shared goal: to promote Japanese luxury items around the world.

Following its success with JAL, the brand was quickly put in the spotlight, steadily becoming recognized as a luxury label fit for exclusive high-rank gatherings. Royal Blue Tea was selected by Kanagawa Prefecture as a welcoming drink at the 61st National Arboreal Fair, an event attended by the imperial family, and was later also served at a banquet held for Aung Suu Kyi during one of her recent visits to Japan.

It was in 2016, however, when the Royal Blue Tea brand gained full international spotlight when its Kyoto label, The Uji and King of Green Riichi Premium, were selected by the Japanese government as the welcoming drink at the G7 Ise-shima Summit in Mie Prefecture.

Two years since then, Royal Blue Tea now looks ahead toward further expanding its business, aiming at promoting the labels at over 1,000 restaurants and hotels worldwide.

“Our most important mission is to change the way tea is perceived in Japan and across the world,” says Sato. “We want to establish Chaen, the art of pairing non-alcoholic tea with fine cuisine, as a new global standard.”

Chaen, which literally translates into a “tea banquet,” is a term the company has registered a patent for, which embraces the concept of a dinner party where no alcohol is served. To help promote this concept and eventually turn it into a world standard, Royal Blue Tea is currently setting up a dedicated Japan-based organization.

“It's a new kind of culture,” Sato says with a smile as he lines five of the company's finest brands on the bar of his tea boutique in Tokyo's Roppongi district.

Queen of Blue, Fall in Love, Kaho, Irika, The Uji ... these fine golden labels certainly look promising from the other side of the bar. Cheers to that.



Gyokuro Hojicha

KAHO

Produced by
Akira Miyazaki (茶師十段)
Gokase, Miyazaki, Fukuoka
The name of the tea industry.
The new standard in tea.

名
取
茶

The Japanese Green

IRIKI

Tea grown by
Akira Miyazaki
Made from Gokase, Miyazaki
We must convey the charm of
tea for the future of tea culture.

ROYALBLUE
MADE IN JAPAN

OUTFITTING THE CORPORATE WARRIORS OF JAPAN

by **VICKI L. BEYER**

In 1993, Yoshio Sadasue, with his wife Tamiko as his partner, began to operate Maker's Shirt Kamakura (today, popularly known as Kamakura Shirts), producing and selling business shirts for men and women. For the city of Kamakura, which was the political capital of Japan from 1192 to 1333, such a history is but the blink of an eye. Yet many aspects of this intriguing business reflect samurai/warrior roots, and maybe even a bit of ninja patience and strategy.

FIND A NEED AND FILL IT

At the time of starting his venture, Yoshio was 53 and had already had a long career in men's apparel, working in the "middle man" space between producers and retailers, helping to outfit the corporate warriors of 20th century Japan. Yoshio's experience told him that businesspersons, both men and women, were looking for daily business wear that was affordable while being good quality with good styling. Yoshio also realized that if he could cut out the

multiple middle stages common between production and retail at the time by being more directly involved in production and marketing himself, he could cut certain costs and better deliver the value proposition for customers.

By then, he had also realized that customer desires were not being met by the garments then in the market. Customers liked the elegance of Ivy League design, and they wanted shirts that fit well and were made of high quality fabric. But they also wanted good value for their money. Yoshio's basic philosophy was that a person may choose to wear the same suit for several days running, but in that case needs to be sure that their shirt (and tie or other neckwear) changes daily and always forms a positive impression.

The 1990s was also the time when women were just emerging into the workplace as "equals," thanks to Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law. At the same time, both men and women were struggling with the logistics of that equality. One particular challenge for women

was finding work garments that would help them to be taken seriously as equal to men. The Ivy League look helped.

THE RIGHT BUSINESS MODEL FOR THE TIMES

Starting up a new business in Japan in the early 1990s was a bit of a risky proposition. The country's economy was in free-fall, with bank failures, many companies forced to scale back their operations, and severe limitations on the ability to borrow, says Yoshio's daughter Nanako Sadasue, who joined the business in 1998.

At the same time, the family's business model was an extremely sensible one for the time. As the economy contracted, everyone became more cost-conscious and the demand for high quality business wear at an affordable price point rose. The model of direct sourcing for production and direct sales enabled Kamakura Shirts to produce and sell exactly what the market wanted.

To reflect his desire to "cut out the middleman," Yoshio decided on the name "Mak-



Yoshio Sadasue

Maker's Shirt



er's Shirt," but Tamiko thought the name a bit bland, so suggested they add the kanji characters for Kamakura (鎌倉) to their logo. They had already decided to locate their new business in Kamakura, Tamiko's hometown. It wasn't long before customers began calling their product "Kamakura Shirts" and later, when the business was expanded to the United States, that is the name they chose to use.

The Sadasues were willing to start out small and build slowly, playing the long game that many of Japan's most famous samurai are known for. Yoshio negotiated with an acquaintance who had production facilities to make men's and women's shirts to his specifications, including his required quality fabrics and shell buttons, and his careful sizing (in one centimeter increments) to ensure a good fit and professional look. Kamakura Shirts in different designs are now produced at some 13 factories across Japan.

In a highly competitive business, Kamakura Shirts had found a clear niche. Nanako reports that they don't worry too much about this shared production resulting in their designs being appropriated because they believe it would be difficult for anyone else to sell shirts like theirs at the same price point.

This is because of the second component of Yoshio's business plan: direct sales. As part of his drive to remove the costly middle stages between production and sales, Yoshio employed a model known as "Specialty store retailer of Private label Apparel" or SPA. Kamakura Shirts are only sold through their own specialty stores. The Kamakura Shirts venture began from just one store, on the second floor above a convenience store in eastern Kamakura city. The store was managed by Tamiko, whose personality suited sales, just as Yoshio's suited planning and production.

In those early days, the shirts were priced at 4,900 yen. The idea was that buyers could get two shirts and still have enough money left over from a 10,000 yen note for a cup of coffee. At that time, other retailers were selling similar quality shirts for around 12,000 yen to 15,000 yen.

For marketing, the business relied largely on word of mouth and, by the turn of the century, the internet and the growing social media phenomenon. Today, nearly a quarter of their sales are through the internet, even

though most online customers also say that they first learned about Kamakura Shirts by visiting a store.

SLOW AND STEADY EXPANSION

There are now 28 Kamakura Shirt's stores. And their garments are still 1/4 to 1/3 the price of competitor's garments.

For Nanako, the biggest challenge they ever faced was placing a store in the Marunouchi Building in front of Tokyo Station. Colloquially known as "Marubiru," when it was announced that the building was being rebuilt as a mixed-use commercial building, Yoshio was convinced that a Kamakura Shirts store there would stand as a symbol of the classiness of his garments, essential to project the right image to capture future sales. But first he had to convince the building's owners that his product was appropriate; and they had their doubts. Like *ninja* of old, Yoshio was dogged in his pursuit, and

eventually he prevailed. The sixth store to sell Kamakura Shirts opened in Marubiru in 2002 when the new building opened. It has proven to be a major success for the brand.

Opening a store in New York City was another milestone goal for Yoshio, who saw Manhattan as the Mecca of men's apparel. Kamakura Shirts opened on Madison Avenue in 2012, focusing exclusively on men's apparel, and has since opened a second branch in lower Manhattan.

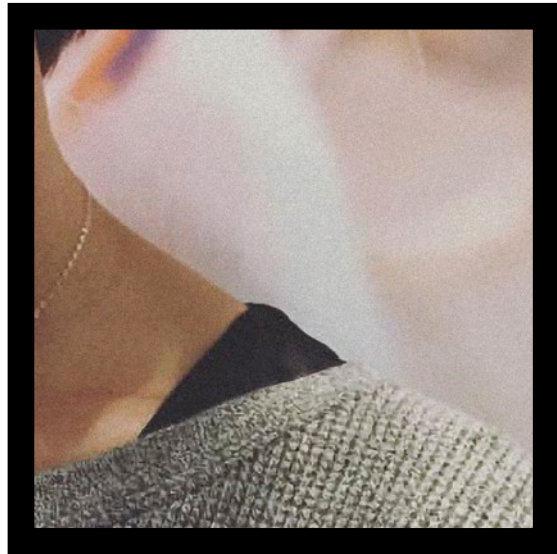
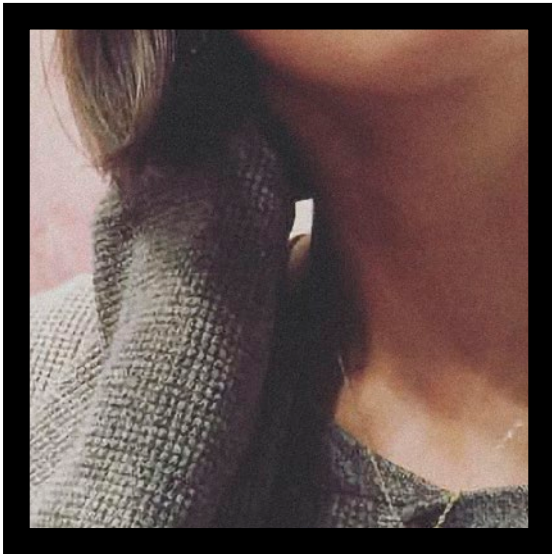
As in Japan, the high quality-good value proposition has proven a hit with customers. One interesting phenomenon is fathers introducing their sons to the stores as a kind of rite of passage into manhood.

The biggest future challenge for Kamakura Shirts is the shrinking domestic market. Like many other small businesses, the Sadasues are working on strategies for further expanding exports, possibly to other business fashion hubs like Shanghai.

But, like any good *ninja*, they will be careful and deliberate as they proceed.



Tamiko Sadasue



DRIVEN TO DESIGN

by Vicki L. Beyer

**“It’s unavoidable
that the identity of
a person who
wears glasses is
closely connected
to them.
After all, those
glasses are part of
who the person is.”**

This is how 41-year-old **Masataka Nakajima**, CEO of K.K. Scramble, the producer of Groover Spectacles, explains his philosophy.

In 1998, Nakajima joined his father in operating the eyeglasses retail store in Nakanoshima that had been running since 1975. While helping customers select frames and fitting them to customers, Nakajima began to see a need for frame designs that would really define the wearer. By the early 2000s, Nakajima was trying his hand at designing eyeglasses himself, using feedback from his customers to come up with frames in distinctive shapes and lens sizes calculated to make the wearer feel good about themselves as a person.

At first, it may seem a curious jump to make, from retailer to product designer. But Nakajima had originally studied graphic design and before joining his father's business he had worked on designing packaging.

A bumpy Road to Success

Driven though he may be, Nakajima's road has not been an easy one.

When he first started designing frames, Nakajima had no means of production, so he had to outsource production of prototypes. Then he had to somehow show those prototypes to customers and convince them to buy. It wasn't until 2007 that he was actually able to land his designs on a few noses.

He attended trade fairs as a means to heighten awareness of his designs and he at last began to get some orders from stores across Japan.

Expanding to Production and Export

Nakajima believes that export is an essential part of his overall business plan. His earliest attempts at export were to Taiwan, where he worked with a partner to generate sales. .

In 2014, Nakajima tried attending an exhibition in Paris. Interestingly, this brought his designs to the attention of a number of Asian distributors and gen-

erated orders. His designs have enjoyed particular popularity in Hong Kong ever since, with China and Korea also showing promise. Customers are attracted to the uniqueness, or perhaps individual expression, his designs offer.

It was around this time that Nakajima decided there was enough business that he should start up a factory and go into production for himself. It helped that Japan's leading eyeglass frame manufacturer, which has a century of history and about 90% of the market share, had decided to close down its Tokyo production facility and consolidate operations in western Japan. This meant that there were skilled craftsmen in the Kanto region now available for him to hire. Nakajima now employs five such skilled craftsmen in his factory.

He chose to site the factory in Kanagawa largely because of local support that was available to him to do so. Since he was born and raised in Kanagawa, it was a fortuitous confluence.

Nakajima also turned to JETRO for assistance in 2016. JETRO's support enabled him to attend an exhibition in the U.S. later that year. On the heels of the exhibition, he started making cold calls on retailers on the U.S. West Coast. Sometimes JETRO staff even accompanied him.

Persistence and dedication to the craft

Nakajima chose the targets for his cold calls based on the fashion appeal of the individual shops, eschewing chain stores for boutique shops. He tried phoning or writing before his visits but usually got no responses. Thus he resorted to his cold call tactics. Between his tenacity and his designs, over time the cold calls, and repeated visits to show off new designs, proved to be a successful practice.

Still, it took about two and a half years before he began making substantial sales in the U.S. "There have been plenty of times when I've thought of giving up. It's tough going."

Although it's been a long, hard road, Nakajima has persevered. He's got sales represent-

atives for the American Midwest and West Coast, as well as in the Asian countries where his products are selling well. He's also displaying his products at trade exhibitions five times a year, in Japan, Hong Kong, Shanghai and New York. The reputation of his designs is slowly building, both overseas and in Japan.

There are even some celebrities, such as Samuel L. Jackson and Britney Spears, who own his frames.

Looking Ahead

Nakajima has conducted market research in the U.S. that showed his designs are particularly popular with older American women and African-Americans. To build sales with the former demographic, he's even looking into a tie-up with a major American cosmetics company.

Now that Nakajima has established a factory, a means of producing both prototypes of new designs and filling orders for designs, he feels empowered to be more creative in his design work. Yet, Nakajima says that when he's showing samples of his designs to generate orders, the designs already feel "old" to him. He's already thinking about the next season and new designs.

Indeed, it seems Nakajima is a man who is always ready to face the next challenge, never wanting to rest on his laurels. "I can't really identify any particular success I've had. The past is the past and I want to look forward. I'm still 'on the road' to wherever it is that I'm going." Nakajima notes that being an entrepreneur is a lot of responsibility. But he accepts that, managing the business he's built while also looking for new areas to innovate.

An example is a science/technology project Nakajima is now working on with eye doctors, trying to develop special lenses with laser display or that will project by laser directly into the wearer's eyes. It could be an interesting merger of lens production with utilitarian frame design.

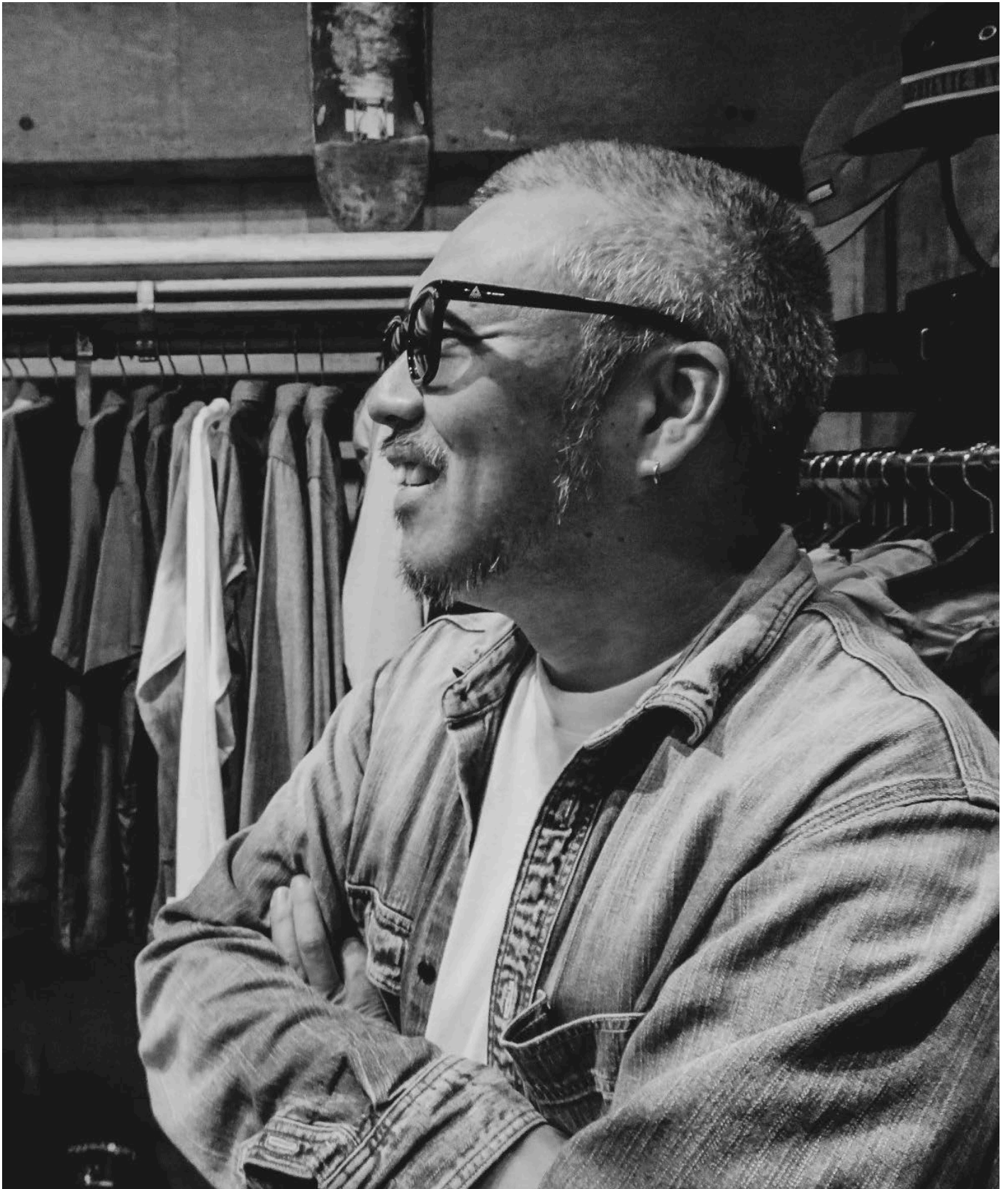
While Nakajima has come a long way from where he started, he still keeps going, developing new designs and now, new products. This enables him to help consumers and also to satisfy his own drive.



RAGS
TO
RICH
ES

LAFAYETTE: HOW A PASSION
FOR STREETWEAR FASHION
BECAME A SUCCESSFUL
RETAIL BUSINESS

by **VICKI L. BEYER**



LAFAYETTE CEO **JUNJIRO KANEKO**



RIVILEGE STORE IN NEWYORK



Stepping inside the Lafayette flagship store in Fujisawa, one is instantly transported to Harajuku. Not literally, of course, but the store feels like the kind of place near Takeshita-dori - the neighborhood's famous shopping lane — where shoppers can find the latest in American-style streetwear. Yes, Lafayette is all about streetwear, the iconic fashion that began on the American coasts low-slung on the hips of counter-culture kids, and is now a trend that transgresses social, economic and cultural boundaries across the world.

Lafayette CEO Junjiro Kaneko, 40, practically beams with pride upon learning this is the feeling evoked by his store. It is exactly what he was aiming for. In fact, he shares that while he opened his store in Fujisawa first, 17 years ago, the other six Lafayette flagship stores are in Yokohama, Sendai, Nagoya, Niigata, Takasaki, and, of course, Harajuku.

RAGS TO RICHES

Before venturing into opening his own stores, Kaneko learned the “rag trade” by working as a buyer of used “vintage” clothing for sale in shops like those so popular on Takeshita-dori. His job took him first to Los Angeles and later to New York, where he could immerse himself in the street/hip hop culture that has fascinated him since high school.

Kaneko is definitely one of those people who has turned his personal passion into a business, opening his store in Fujisawa, his hometown, with just two of his own t-shirt designs to start out with. Being personally drawn to the more fashionable New York style of streetwear, he chose to name his business Lafayette after a New York street name.

After about five years in business and some inventory expansion, Kaneko began to be approached by retailers who wanted to carry his brand in their stores. Not long after this, he also started attending trade shows to show off his line of streetwear designs. Still, it took 10 years for the business to grow to the point that he was producing head to toe streetwear. He now has over 200 different items in his inventory, sold through 20 retailers in addition to his own

Lafayette flagship stores and online sales. And he still believes in trade shows as a way to show off his wares.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Streetwear is a fashion niche where there is a lot of competition. One of Kaneko's keys to success in Japan has been building his own personal network and enlisting local support by attending events with local artists and musicians and convincing them to wear his clothes when they perform. A brand's success can often be made or broken by who else is wearing a particular item.

Another distinctive feature of Kaneko's streetwear is its quality. He is adamant that quality standards must be maintained. This is also key for getting celebrities to wear his clothes. At the same time, that quality means his clothing is just a little more expensive so that rather than high school or university students, his main customer demographic is 25 to 35-year-olds.

Perhaps it was the name or the fact that his product is streetwear, but when Kaneko first started out, many of his Japanese customers mistakenly thought his clothes were imported from the U.S. He wryly observes “Even now, probably half still think so.”

OVERSEAS EXPANSION

This may have been part of the inspiration for Kaneko's drive to market his clothes overseas as well. According to Kaneko, there aren't many, if any, Japanese streetwear brands selling overseas, so he feels this is space where his products can shine. He wants Lafayette, and now his new, slightly more upscale label, Privilege, to become known for being Japanese brands of streetwear, especially since streetwear is a global phenomenon. To this end, he opened a New York store in 2017, and a Hong Kong franchise store in 2018. He feels these stores are also a way to keep in touch with customers based outside Japan who may have first learned of the Lafayette brand while visiting Japan.

Operating outside Japan has been the biggest challenge Kaneko has faced so far. Customer expectations are different in different countries. While the choices of Japanese customers are often influenced by who else they see wearing it, American customers are influenced by other factors including personal taste. Japanese and American customers also have different ways of working and different approaches to leisure that can affect their clothing choices. Kaneko reflects that it's been interesting to observe the different reactions of people of different cultures, even though it does make his job more challenging!

MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

Kaneko's future aspirations include expanding further in the U.S. and into other parts of Asia, including Singapore, if he can find a suitable business partner, and possibly even into China. He also hopes to open stores under the Privilege name in Osaka and Fukuoka in the next five years. But he wants his expansion to be selective and, to some degree, elite. He's taking care not to go too far too fast.

Perhaps predictably for a 21st-century business, Kaneko finds internet sales to also be increasingly significant. More than half of his sales are via the internet, particularly through Lafayette's online store (as opposed to e-commerce marketplaces like Rakuten or Amazon) with online sales exceeding the sales of his seven domestic and two overseas flagship stores combined. Even non-U.S. customers make purchases through Lafayette's U.S. website. Social media advertising, especially on Instagram, plays a significant role in Lafayette's online success.

Confidence is probably another factor in Kaneko's success. From the very beginning, he was confident that this venture would be successful, another example of how Kaneko's passion is paying off. It was just two years after opening his first store in Fujisawa that he opened the second store in Yokohama. His seventh Japanese store opened in Takasaki this year.

In building the Lafayette and Privilege brands, Kaneko's is a real rags-to-riches story. And one that he intends to keep telling.



ON THE RIGHT TRACK

by Vicki L. Beyer

All Aboard the Tuna Express

Back in 1898 when a few clever minds got together to set up a 2-km-long railway to assist the increasing population praying at the Kawasaki Daishi Shrine in Kanagawa Prefecture, they knew they were on the right track. Over 120 years later, today this same line is called Keikyu and covers a total distance of 87 kilometers from Tokyo all the way to the splendid coastlines of Kanagawa Prefecture, and serves 2.63 million passengers per day — no laughing matter.

With a maximum speed of 120 km/h — the fastest of all local lines in the Kanto region — the “red bullet,” as many loyal fans

call it, takes its job seriously: busy Tokyoites like doing things fast and their morning train ride is no exception. They also like to be entertained, however, and it turns out that this, too, is something Keikyu is good at.

Launched as the first railway company in Japan to operate electric railways in the wide metropolitan Kanto region, Keikyu Line, operated by Keikyu Corporation, debuted under the name of Daishi Electric Railway. At the time, it connected Rokugobashi and Daishi stations, finally offering Kawasaki’s growing — and up

to then, patiently walking — population a convenient transportation to the area's most popular shrine. The line soon became well known, leading it to further expand its services between Shinagawa in Tokyo and Kawasaki in Kanagawa by 1905, to Uraga further in Kanagawa by 1933 and until Misakiguchi at the very tip of the prefecture by 1975. By this time, it had changed its corporate name to Keikyu Corporation, securing itself a position as one of Japan's most valued commuter train operators.

Keikyu Corporation today is comprised of 54 group companies (as of March 2019), covering transportation, real estate, leisure, retailing and even construction businesses. But the core of its business lies in transportation, with the company now running five different lines, each connecting a key location in the capital with Kanagawa: the Keikyu Main Line runs from central Tokyo to Kawasaki and Yokohama, the Keikyu Airport Line goes to Haneda Airport, the Daishi Line to Kawasaki, the Zushi Line to Zushi and the Kurihama Line to the outskirts of Kanagawa. The company is also behind several of Japan's best-known shopping complexes and entertainment facilities, including Keikyu department store, Keikyu EX Inn, Hayama Marina, and the Boat Race Heiwajima.

A Ticket to Kanto's Freshest Tuna ... and More

But despite all of the accomplishments the company has achieved so far, local and international foodies would unanimously agree that Keikyu's greatest invention to date is its Misaki Maguro Day Trip Ticket, launched in 2009. This clever discount ticket offers the full package of round-trip transportation from Shinagawa to Misakiguchi, plus a meal and activity coupon that can be used in a number of facilities in Misaki city, Kanagawa's port city known for its delicious and fresh tuna. Reasonably priced (just ¥3,500 from Shinagawa), the discount pass was not only successful for Keikyu and its customers but for Misaki as well, a small town with an increasingly declining population. It helped boost tourism in the area to the extent that on weekends, queues of hungry customers in front of sushi shops around Misakiguchi station could easily be mistaken for Disneyland.

Ten years since its launch, sales of the Misaki Maguro Day Trip Ticket went from 15,898 in fiscal 2009 to 203,634 in fiscal 2017, becoming one of the most famous day trip destinations from Tokyo to Kanagawa Prefecture.

And that was only the beginning.

In the following year, Keikyu launched the Yokosuka Enjoy Ticket, a similar day trip package combining a dining and entertainment experience in the marine town of Yokosuka, famous for its massive USA-style burgers, curry, and U.S. base. Five years later, in 2015, the Hayama Excursion Ticket went on sale attracting predominantly women and couples to the beautiful beaches of Hayama in Kanagawa. The two discount passes sold 25,359 and 48,355 copies in fiscal 2017, respectively, increasing sales between 5.4 and 8 times since

their launch, quickly becoming one of Keikyu's best-selling products and a new source of tourism influx in each area.

This major success led Keikyu to further focus on tourism-related projects in the Miura Peninsula, focusing predominantly on underdeveloped and underpopulated areas.

One of its currently ongoing projects is "snow peak glamping keikyu kannonzaki" (glamorous camping) in Yokosuka, which Keikyu began operating at its Kannonzaki Keikyu Hotel in 2017 in collaboration with outdoor maker Snow Peak. The luxurious experience begins at the company-operated three fully equipped cottages at the beachside of the Miura Peninsula, overseeing the ocean, and comes with barbecue-style dinner using local and seasonal ingredients, an open-air bath and even an aroma massage.

With plans starting at 50,000 yen per cottage on weekdays, you'd think it wouldn't be a peak destination, but Keikyu employees proudly say that it's almost always booked — especially in summer.

The Importance of Having Fun

As you get to know the company better, you start realizing that one of its greatest charms comes from the company's ability to have fun at work giving its employees carte blanche to bring to the table even their most ridiculous ideas.

"It's extremely easy to talk about new ideas here," says Sanae Kaneko, an assistant manager at the Corporate Strategy Department, as she sips her green soda with a vanilla ice cream topping at the company's office. "Most of the time those ideas also get incorporated, very soon too, and it's fun to be able to constantly think of how we can entertain our passengers."

So at Keikyu, it's perfectly fine to change station names once in a while if a project is deemed fun. Keikyu Kamata suddenly became "Keikyu Kaamata-ta-ta-ta-ta" in July 2018 to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the popular anime *Hokuto no Ken* (Fist of the North Star) — if you're a fan you'll know where the atatatata comes from, and Kenritsu Daigaku Station became "Hokuto no KENritsu Daigaku" station, just for the sake of play on words.

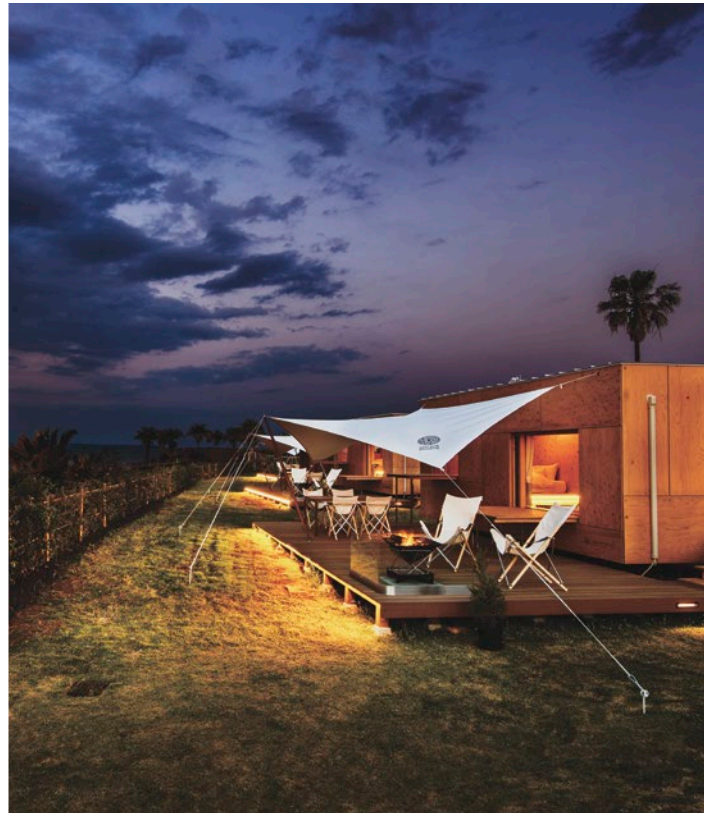
A year before that Keikyu also thought it'd be fun to start selling bath mats inspired by station platforms or towels with maps of all Keikyu lines — and surprisingly these sold like fresh bread. And the latest gag was when Keikyu thought it'd be a good idea to install 3D arrow signs that appeared to pop up from the floor at Haneda Airport International Terminal Station. There was a bit of confusion at first, a few delicate trip avoidances followed by a good laugh — and tons of social media posts later.

"You can see we're not bored here at all," Kaneko says with a laugh.

This year, she promises that there will be an even greater surprise.

"Make sure you don't miss it," she nods with a cheeky smile as she tries to catch the last piece of ice cream in her glass.

With all that Keikyu has offered us so far, we'll certainly keep an eye on it.



Clockwise, from left to right: A **Keikyu line train** framed with Japan's iconic cherry blossom; a cottage in **Keikyu's "Snow Peak"** glamping resort in Yokosuka; the scenic coastline at **Misaki**; the famous **Yokosuka burger**.



THE KEY TO GLOBAL STRESS RELIEF

by **ALEXANDRA HOMMA**





While the latest OECD global employment outlook report reveals that Japan is finally making a major progress in reducing its total working hours, for those of us living here, it takes a simple train ride to notice a different reality. Glasses tilted, people dropping their phones after dozing off on the comfortably bouncing long commute to and from work, worn out faces and impressive marathons through stations in a desperate attempt to catch the last train (because after work drinking sessions are also part of the job!), it is sadly noticeable: Japan is an exhausted nation.

On the flip side of this, however, there is also another reality: it is exactly due to this pervasive social concern that Japan has continued to stand at the forefront of stress relief research and development, annually releasing dozens of commercial products and academic studies to help its nation stand on its feet.

Venex, a venture company based in Kanagawa Prefecture, is one of those pioneering visionaries, and its mission to help Japan and the world find a solution to exhaustion and better quality rest has taken the company farther than it could have ever imagined.

GROUNDBREAKING INVENTION

“Since the very beginning, we had a very clear idea of what we wanted to achieve,” says Venex vice president Dr. Hideki Katano during a recent interview at the company’s office in Atsugi. He had just briefly returned to Japan from Europe, where he typically spends half of the year working at Venex’ subsidiary company in Germany, Venex Europe GmbH.

“We wanted to expand the global regeneration market and find a solution to the growing problem of exhaustion in a sustainable, yet simple and user-friendly way,” he explains.

Coming from very different backgrounds — Dr. Katano, a paramedical staff and researcher, Taiichi Nakamura, a caregiver at a facility for the elderly, and Shigenobu Hoshi, a sales director — the three founders of Venex came together in 2005 in search of a solution. It was initially Nakamura’s experience in caregiving that helped the trio narrow down the concept of their business plan. During the many years of his work helping bedridden patients, he had been aware that many people were suffering from severe bedsores. A continuous lack of movement causes poor blood circulation and, in extreme cases, leads to cell damage. The three began thinking that if they could invent a material that would improve

blood circulation just by touching the skin, it would help millions of bedridden people, as well as those carers responsible for massaging and moving the patients every three hours to prevent blood clots.

Thanks to Dr. Katano's medical research background, the company began searching for hints in nanosized minerals that could be kneaded into the fiber strings, which as a result would lead to an improved blood circulation and regeneration.

After a year and a half of various experiments, the newly formed team found that a certain combination of platinum-mixed minerals and polyester fibers continuously showed stable results in stimulating the parasympathetic nerve activity, increasing the blood circulation, relaxing the muscles and as a secondary effect, improving the quality of sleep and strengthening the immune system. The team called the new invention "platinum harmonized technology" (PHT), based on which they developed their patented V-TEX® Regeneration Fibre.

"In the beginning, we used the technology to make bed sheets that would assist at care facilities," Dr. Katano explains. "But the production cost was high and therefore, the product itself became far too expensive for care facilities."

Despite their efforts to promote the product, it wasn't successful and the trio found themselves caught at a dead end.

FROM CAREGIVING TO RECOVERY WEAR AND GOING GLOBAL

But just as the business was starting to look grim, in 2009, Venex joined what turned out to be a fateful health and beauty goods fair in Japan.

"We were by chance introduced to the idea that our products could be beneficial in the sports industry," Dr. Katano recalls. "It was something we hadn't considered earlier, but began to research right away."

The company used their original fibre to



make men's and women's sportswear in various colors and designs, calling the new lineup Recovery Wear. With strategic planning, marketing and a continuous effort to boost exposure through publication of academic research papers and participations in expos, the company began growing exponentially.

Venex' Recovery Wear gradually took off, providing solid data in an increase of parasympathetic activity body temperature. Simply by wearing the clothes, users would report better sleep, lessened exhaustion and increased relaxation, the company explains.

In 2013, Venex' further won a gold award at the prestigious ISPO in Munich, the leading international trade fair for sporting goods and sports fashion, which secured the company with solid recognition in Europe as well. It was then that Venex launched its subsidiary company in Germany. As a result, today, Venex' products are gaining popularity in a number of countries, including Germany, Austria,

Switzerland, Belgium, Taiwan, China, South Korea, and of course Japan.

"It was never a question of whether we wanted to expand overseas," Dr. Katano says. "This was our original plan from the beginning and we are more than proud to have found a way to break the negative cycle of exhaustion," a problem he says is, sadly, universal.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Nearly 15 years into its launch, today Venex has established itself as a leading regeneration wear maker in the sports industry, though its products are used by much broader audiences. From neck warmers to eye masks and simple room wear, Venex' product users include regular tired people, like most of us, just as often as popular athletes.

“We have been thrilled to find out that famous athletes in sumo, figure skating, yoga, triathlon and many other sports are using our products because they find them helpful,” Dr. Katano says with a smile, making a point that Venex is not officially sponsoring any athletes as of present.

“But we don’t think that we are the only solution,” he continues modestly, emphasizing that the three good health factors are balanced nutrition, exercising and good rest.

“Nutrition studies and exercising are widely promoted all over the world, but it is essential that people also start trying a

variety of ways to help them also rest well — this can be music, traveling, aroma therapy, mental distress and anything else that works for them. We, at Venex, are here to fill in one missing gap in the 'rest' factor.”

Following the conversation, it doesn’t come as a surprise when the Venex team introduces their next project: a power nap machine that simultaneously stimulates various senses.

“We have partnered with experts in sound, light and smell to create a power nap machine which people would use during short breaks for a quick recovery,” Dr.

Katano says, not hiding his excitement.

The dome-like machine, he explains will assist users with a 20-minute power nap assisted by light, sound and Venex’ Recovery Wear blanket. The machine, which is expected to be released on the market this summer, will most likely be placed at hotel lobbies, lounges and even regular offices.

“We’re so excited,” Dr. Katano says. With prospects for a future where companies own their own power nap machines and encourage their employees to rest, frankly, so are we.

“IT WAS NEVER A QUESTION OF WHETHER WE WANTED TO EXPAND OVERSEAS”



Let's face it. There's no sweeter gift than a box of assorted cookies. And the good folks at Tivoli, headquartered in the Kanagawa hot spring town of Yugawara, know this well. They've been specializing in producing gift boxes of assorted cookies for over 50 years.

Surprisingly, gift boxes of assorted cookies is a bit of a niche market, albeit one in which Tivoli commands a top share. And they intend to keep it that way.

Giving the Gift of a Red Hat

The company began by designing gift boxes of assorted cookies for department/grocery chains across Japan, with different branding and stock for each. Since 1980, they also have their own specialty brand, Akai Bohshi, marketed both domestically and internationally.

Akai Bohshi is Japanese for "red hat." Akai Bohshi boxes are characterized by a drawing of a young woman sporting a red bowler-type hat. The boxes come in seven different sizes and assortments containing between five and 16 varieties of confectioneries, each size box a different color.

Tivoli's gift boxes are particularly popular in Taiwan, where it is customary for couples to announce their engagement by giving some kind of gift to friends and relatives. Between this custom and the Chinese preference for red as the color of luck, joy, and happiness, Akai Bohshi gift boxes perfectly fit the bill. Apparently, couples will pre-order hundreds of boxes of cookies for this purpose. Recently, this popularity has begun to spread to other Chinese-speaking countries in Asia as well.

At the same time as it is shipping 130 freight containers of cookies a year to Taiwan alone, Tivoli is also working on expanding its market in other countries. Less than 15 years ago, Taiwan was Tivoli's principal overseas market,

A BOX FULL OF JOY

by **Vicki L. Beyer**





with some shipments also to Hong Kong and the U.S., where Tivoli's products have been largely stocked in specialty Asian groceries. Now Tivoli exports to 21 countries and is determined to introduce its products to "mainstream markets" in the U.S.

According to Satoka (Sarah) Sakamoto, a senior manager in Tivoli's Trading Department responsible for overseas sales, extensive research was conducted to determine which of Tivoli's wide variety of cookies will appeal to mainstream U.S. customers and what adjustments were needed. Tivoli's unique and popular Kukkia, a cookie sandwich with whipped chocolate in the center, seemed a good fit. Unusually, the "bottom" of the cookie sandwich is a light cookie, while the "top" is a crispy *gaufre* wafer, on which the Akai Bohshi hat is emblazoned. The resulting flavor and texture has been popular with everyone who tries it.

It turned out there was a challenge to introducing Kukkia cookies to the U.S., however: the whipped chocolate filling. Original Kukkia assorted packages contained four flavors: milk chocolate, dark chocolate, strawberry, and green tea. Market research in the U.S. revealed that many customers were disinclined to buy a cookie assortment containing anything with green tea. In response, Tivoli decided to produce a mint chocolate version for the U.S. market instead. But this made the assortment a bit "chocolate heavy." So they also replaced the milk chocolate variety with blueberry. The resulting assortment — dark chocolate, strawberry, blueberry, and mint chocolate — is pleasantly balanced between fruity flavors and chocolate while allowing for colorful and visually pleasing packaging. For those Americans who have a taste for green tea chocolate, don't worry; Tivoli expects to continue to export the original assortment to Asian specialty stores in the U.S., too.

When the new Kukkia flavors were rolled out at the Chicago Sweets & Snacks Expo in May 2018, they were a huge hit. Hawaiian retailers immediately began placing orders and Tivoli is now working on orders from the mainland as well.

All of Tivoli's 750 cookie and confectionery varieties are produced only in Japan, at three Tivoli factories located in Kanagawa and Yamanashi prefectures. Two other factories handle packing the cookie assortments into their respective gift boxes.

Tivoli believes that the key to the best possible flavor is using the

best quality ingredients. Says Sarah Sakamoto, "When I joined this company, I was amazed to learn there were so many types of chocolate."

With its headquarters and site of one of its factories located a couple of hours from Tokyo, Tivoli is often the employer of choice for people living in and around Yugawara. It is seen as a working mother-friendly workplace; around 70% of staff are female.

Tivoli also takes seriously its role as a member of the Yugawara community. When the company rebuilt its premises a few years ago, the city asked if they would include a small outlet shop and café that would be an appealing destination for tourists and locals alike. The result is an elegant area on the ground floor that sometimes serves as

a community event space. One flight up, visitors can take a mini factory tour, watching cookie production through plate glass windows while enjoying the delicious aroma of baking cookies.

Among the specialty products sold in the shop are sweets featuring the Yugawara mikan, a locally grown citrus fruit. These products are only on sale at this location and a Dynasty store in nearby Odawara.

The shop also has a small corner featuring Italian-made products: foodstuffs, dishes, and kitchen items. This area is an homage to Yugawara's sister city, the original Tivoli in Italy.

While visiting Europe on business early in his career, Tivoli's founder, Izumi Higuchi, so fell in love with the Italian town on the outskirts of Rome that he decided to name his company for it. He was especially impressed by the spectacular fountains at the Villa d'Este, influencing him to choose a stylized image of a fountain as

the company's logo.

The sister city relationship between Yugawara and Comune di Tivoli is the brainchild of Emu Shima, who handles marketing and public relations for the confectioner. The launch of the sister city relationship coincided with the inauguration of the confectioner's rebuilt headquarters in 2016.

As a company, Tivoli provides not only wonderful gift boxes of an ever-evolving array of top quality sweets to an ever-expanding domestic and international market, but it also quality employment opportunities and quality community participation. What could be sweeter?



The key to the best possible flavor is using the best quality ingredients

FROM
MISAKI
TO
THE
WORLD

by Alexandra Homma



The Misaki Port stretches before your eyes in an endless landscape. It's nothing but dozens of fishing boats here, occasionally a few seagulls and a handful of souls working busily around the boats. The rest is just the ocean: the wide, profound source of life and income for this small town's community. Here is Misaki, the hometown of the Misaki Maguro, one of Japan's most delicious and high-quality tuna brands. This small town on the tip of the Miura Peninsula in Kanagawa Prefecture lives hand in hand with the kingfish, surviving off it and living for it.

“Misaki has long been known for its superb quality maguro,” says Masa Ishibashi, third generation managing director of Misaki Megumi Suisan, a local fishery with a history of over 50 years of catching some of the port's best tuna. His company, like many others in the town, has the so-called *mekiki*, he proudly explains, “an eye” for the best fish. It's a skill they have acquired through years of experience processing it, and of course eating it.

“We know what really good quality maguro looks and tastes like,” he says, and everything about him tells you that he definitely knows what he's talking about.

Founded by Ishibashi's grandfather in 1968 under the name of Ishibashi Suisan, the company specializes in processing and selling maguro and other fresh fish and marine products to supermarkets, Japanese restaurants, and hotels in the wider Tokyo metropolitan area, as well as other regions in Japan. In recent years, since Masa Ishibashi joined the company, Misaki Megumi also began exporting fish overseas, selling their best maguro to a number of countries including Singapore, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Australia, in addition to the U.S.A.

Ishibashi, however, frowns when you call his maguro *tuna* and argues that it is not the same.

“Foie gras is foie gras in any language,” he smiles persuasively. **“There is no need to translate it — it's a brand on its own and everyone knows what it is. It is my dream to promote our fish, the maguro, in the same manner. We're not selling tuna. We're selling maguro.”**

With a background in advertising, Ishibashi knows more than a few things about branding. He also knows when a product is worth promoting and when it's not and that in this case, his task is more important than any other work he's ever been in charge of. Now, he is not only selling fish, he's promoting Japan, too.

“People love our Japanese fish wherever we serve it,” he says. **“And yet, there is still a lot of room for improvement as far as both recognition and understanding go. Many people abroad still don't understand that in the case of our maguro ‘frozen’ isn't something nega-**

tive; to the contrary, it means more than fresh.”

Misaki Megumi Suisan's maguro is known as “super frozen tuna,” fish that is frozen at minus 60 degrees as soon as it's caught. This way of processing maguro, common in Misaki, is one of the best ways to preserve the fish fresher than when eaten right after it's been caught. It preserves its best taste no matter how long it takes until you actually eat it, Ishibashi explains.

With fresh fish, from the moment it's caught to the time it ends on customers' tables, it may take a day or two. That naturally degrades the taste to a certain degree. The super low-temperature freezing method, however, keeps the fish fresh until it's defrosted right before it is served to customers, thereby preserving its best taste.

With Ishibashi devoting years to promoting the understanding of the many differences in maguro quality and the super-frozen method through various methods, including actively attending overseas fishery exhibitions and advancing overseas export, he is gradually observing stable achievements and business growth.

“I'm spending half of the year traveling abroad,” Ishibashi laughs, counting on his two hands all the overseas business trips he'd gone to in just the past couple of months. The maguro market abroad is expanding and there is a growing demand for high-quality Japanese produce, he says.

Now in its fifth year since the company started exporting maguro abroad, Misaki Meguro Suisan and its group companies own three sushi restaurants in Singapore and two in the United States. The tables are almost always full and customers don't shy away from expressing their satisfaction with the food. The menus, of course, all bear the label “maguro,” not tuna.

The company also operates four domestic restaurant brands with 18 stores mainly in Tokyo and Kanagawa, including the popular *Megumi* sushi bar at Shibuya Hikarie, the sushi conveyor belt chain *Megumi Suisan* with stores in Kinshicho and Yokohama's Minato Mirai, and *Miura Misakiko*, with stores in Ueno, Enoshima, Yokohama and more. Misaki Megumi also operates a restaurant chain in Okinawa, *Yazaemon*, and an online shop with deliveries throughout Japan.

“It may take a while until maguro becomes a common term overseas, but people are gradually beginning to recognize it,” Ishibashi proudly says. **“My dream is to spread our culture — the Japanese culture of our diverse food, abroad, through the fish we have been taking pride in for generations. I want to help people understand how delicious maguro is.”**

“FOIE
GRAS IS
FOIE GRAS
IN ANY
LANGUAGE

Yukio Ishibashi, president
of Misaki Megumi Suisan

”



THE TASTE OF ONE FAMILY'S BUSINESS

by **ALEXANDRA HOMMA**

Its rich amber color, distinctive aroma, and gentle flavor have helped make it an essential component in the Japanese cuisine — from a simple addition to salad dressing to the seasoning of freshly steamed dumplings or the healthier alternative to cooking oil for stir-fried dishes. The same scent — of freshly roasted sesame seeds — surrounds Iwai Sesame Oil's factory upon our recent visit.

We are introduced to the

company's factory and day-to-day business by Tetsutaro Iwai, Iwai Sesame Oil's president, a soft-spoken man who smiles naturally every time the topic of conversation changes to the company's over century-old legendary products. We are at the company's Yokohama-based factory, the home of the family business since 2005. The retro posters on the walls, the deeply infused sesame oil scent and the familial interactions between

the employees, remind us that this is a company with over 160 years of history; a company that prides itself in producing one of Japan's leading sesame oil brands.

PLANNING THE SEEDS

Founded in 1857 by Toshichi Iwai, Iwai Sesame Oil began as a small family business (under

a different name at the time) producing vegetable oil from various natural ingredients, including peanuts. It wasn't long before it started focusing on sesame oil, however, a product known to be a health booster since as early as in late 19th century Japan. Sesame oil's history is said to date back to up to 5,000 years ago when sesame was cultivated in the Nile River basin. A popular plant in northern Africa and Mesopota-



mia, sesame oil was used not only in food, but as a beauty product, too.

“It is said that even Cleopatra used it as a face pack,” Iwai says with a smile, but he is only half joking. Extremely rich in antioxidants and containing the perfect balance of conjugated linoleic acid and oleic acid — both known for their use for weight reduce, obesity, and high blood pressure — sesame oil is commonly used in beauty treatments and as a massaging oil.

Iwai generations’ strong belief that sesame oil would remain beneficial for health and would have a future to grow, kept them focused throughout the years through business’

ups and downs, changes, and rising competition.

LETTING THE SEEDS GROW

Manufacturing sesame oil, however, did not come as easily for Iwai Sesame Oil as it sounds.

“Sesame is hardly produced in Japan,” Iwai explains. Japan imports approximately 160,000 tons of sesame annually, a number that accounts for nearly 99.9 percent of its total production of the seeds. Half of this amount is used to produce sesame oil and

the rest is used for other food and beauty products. At Iwai Sesame Oil, sesame seeds are predominantly imported from Africa and Myanmar.

Making sesame oil is also an intricate process, which requires a lot of determination, experience, patience, and professionalism. But these are all skills that Iwai Sesame Oil prides itself in.

While its share on the market is not the largest in Japan (Iwai’s products are slightly more expensive than the mainstream labels), its products’ quality remains unquestionable and customers who know the value always return.

A major contribution to this factor and one of the reasons that sets the company

apart from the competition, is that Iwai Sesame Oil uses no preservatives and chemical additives in its products, a common practice among other manufactures for extracting maximum amount of oil in a limited time. Iwai’s sesame oil is made of raw sesame seeds, which are roasted at length before being transferred for oil extraction.

Unlike most mainstream larger manufacturers, Iwai’s oil is extracted naturally by a unique method, known as assaku, which extracts oil by adding extreme pressure on the roasted seeds by using an expeller. This method, known as “the assaku press,” is of the highest quality because it uses no foreign elements whatsoever.



er. By using this method, half of the seeds' body is turned into oil — and to make a 140g bottle of sesame oil, it takes over 110,000 sesame seeds, which only makes us rejoice all the health benefits packed in such a small container.

“Staying in the business for so long has taught us so much,” Iwai says with a smile as he looks around the factory. “Things have changed but our method of extracting the oil will always be the same because it is the healthiest. Every morning, our employees checks the roasted seeds and can tell — just by the smell, taste and color — how well roasted they are and what sesame oil products they could best turn into,” he says, his

eyes sharply set on the roaster.

AN EXTENSIVE LINEUP

Today, Iwai Sesame Oil has a line up of nearly 20 key products, each packed in different sizes for private and business use. Among them are the signature Iwai's Pure Sesame Oil, carrying Iwai's “retro but new” green and red logo and fit for all cooking purposes, including deep-fry and dressings, the Koikuchi (Dark) Pure Sesame Oil for those preferring stronger tastes, the light Pure Sesame Oil (Shirokuchi), which is so mild that it could replace

butter in pastry baking, pasta and dressings, the Pure Sesame Paste fit for hummus and other dips, Iwai's Sesame Chili Oil that goes perfectly well with gyoza (dumplings), any spicy dishes and even pizza and pasta. The company also sells supplements that contain carefully-selected high-quality black sesame seeds.

At the end of our interview, I find myself significantly intrigued in sesame oil, which by now, I know I can use as a substitute to regular oil in any possible way I can imagine. I also know it is better for my health compared with regular oil and I can't help but ask my last question for the day: “Why isn't sesame oil usage as widespread as it should be?”

It seems to be a pressing question for Iwai Sesame Oil as well.

“Three of the major reasons why sesame oil is not as popular as it should be are as simple as they could be: people just don't know well about it, don't know how to use it, and don't know how beneficial for the health it is,” Iwai explains.

But this no longer has to be the case.

He hands me a sheet of paper with colorful illustrations of sesame oil recipes and he smiles. The paper has everything from an omelette to avocado and cucumber salads — and even vanilla ice cream.

“You doubt it, right?” he challenges me. “Give it a try. You'll know what I mean.”

Contrary to its current appearance — overflowing with a huge variety of *senbei* (rice cracker) snacks — Chigasakiya first opened its doors as a Japanese tea store in 1961.

“My father wanted to open either a flower shop or a tea shop,” says Takahashi.

He recalls looking back on his childhood and knowing that he would eventually inherit the family business. “Back in those days it was natural for the son of a greengrocer to become a greengrocer, a barber’s son to become a barber, and so on,” he says.

SHONAN SOUVENIR

Tea stores in the Showa era (1925-1989) were essential to Japanese people’s lives. They sold not only tea but many kinds of dried foods such as shiitake mushrooms and sweets. As tea became industrialized, people switched to drinking tea out of PET bottles. “More people drank tea, but they no longer enjoyed making tea themselves,” Takahashi says. “So when my turn came, I looked for a new product.”

He contemplated creating a souvenir for the Shonan beach area, where Chigasaki is located, since it’s one of the Kanto region’s most famous areas for beach lovers. Still, Takahashi wasn’t sure which would be the right product. So he rolled up his sleeves to explore what might best be suited for a Chigasaki souvenir.

SPREADING HIS TENTACLES

Takahashi grew up in a fishing village where mackerel, horse mackerel, and baby sardines were plentiful. Baby sardines being sun-dried in the neighborhood was a common sight — one that dated back to the Edo era. On Tuesdays when his store was closed, Takahashi would sit by the ocean, sipping sake, trying to figure out a way to use baby sardines as souvenirs. Then one day, he caught an octopus while fishing. He cut off the tentacles and

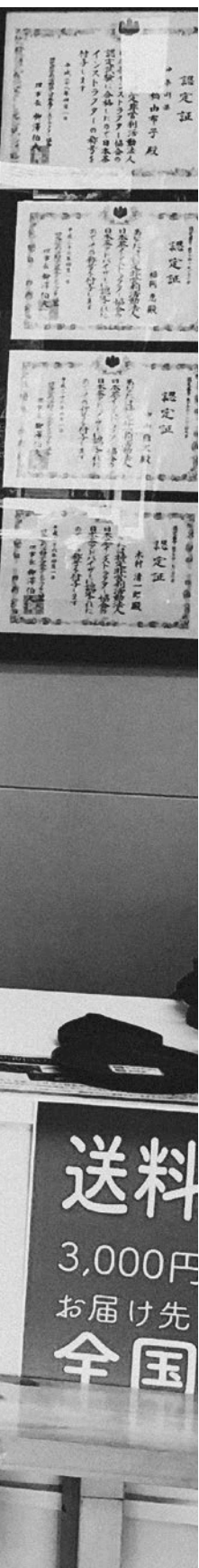


Chigasakiya:

WHERE
YOU'LL FIND
A BEACH
BOY WITH A
TASTE FOR
TAKO-SENBEI
& ALOHA
SHIRTS

by Mai Shoji

TA
STY
EXP
ERIME
NTS



grilled them — perfect nibbles to go with his sake. Then he caught another one. “After about four hours and five octopi later, which happened every Tuesday, by the way, I wondered how come this place was not famous for octopus.”

This is when Takahashi decided to go with the idea of making *tako-senbei* (octopus crackers). In central Japan, mainstream crackers are made of deep-fried sticky rice, but it would be difficult to add octopus. Takahashi found out that thin crackers made of starch would work better. The crackers were first smashed into thin pieces with a pressing machine. Takahashi next had to decide what kind of taste would be ideal. “I don’t remember how many samples we made but a Japanese-based sauce with a hint of spice went well.”

After settling on the taste, the package design was next. “I decided that an illustration of Enoshima would be perfect, but hiring an artist would be costly, so I drew it myself. Hiring calligraphers would cost me, too, so I did the wording myself. You know, people can do anything when they’re under pressure,” he says with a beaming smile. After the product and package design were set, Takahashi went to a 7-Eleven store to use the Xerox machine to color copy the drawings, then he packaged the *tako-senbei* to test-sell for ¥100 each. It was a hit.

Takahashi’s intuition had been to support Shonan and local residents, but to his surprise, many people, including customers, ridiculed him for taking the liberty of selling “Shonan souvenirs.” Some people didn’t like the fact that it wasn’t strictly a Chigasaki souvenir like baby sardines. So he went back to the drawing board. He experimented with many types of snacks using the sardines. One day, he took a small piece of *mochi* (rice cake), added *mentaiko* (spicy cod roe) and baby sardines and threw it into a pot of oil. “It exploded! I wasn’t aware that you’re not supposed to deep fry roe, and I burned my face and arms...But I tasted a bit and the result was delicious.” His “Chigasaki souvenir” was born. Takahashi drew the symbol of Chigasaki, the Eboshi rock, for the package design.

But his *tako-senbei* continued to gain popularity far and wide and remains his best-selling product. Some say the best way to eat octopus is *takowasabi* (octopus marinated in wasabi sauce), which he made. Other customers requested a *senbei* to pair with their wines, resulting in a black pepper flavor. Some wanted a pizza taste; he chose a basil flavor. His latest request was for *tako-kimchi* (spicy Korean pickles) flavor. He received a fan letter all the way from Okinawa Prefecture’s Iriomote island, requesting the *tako-kimchi* flavor because apparently in Iriomote, that’s the most typical way octopus is eaten.

Takahashi is happy to take requests but admits that he sometimes gets a bit carried away. Next to the series of *tako-senbei* is a Japanese sweets section, which includes Chigasaki-themed delights such as sweet bean jelly shaped like the Eboshi rock; biscuits in the form of Shonan local’s favorite *genbei* beach sandals; and a *mikoshi* (portable shrine)-shaped steamed bun.

ALL STAR CURRY

The idea for another Shonan souvenir came from the pop-rock band Southern All Stars. The group, formed in 1978, is especially known for their summer songs about the Shonan area. Lead vocalist Keisuke Kuwata was born and raised in Chigasaki, and

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DELICIOUS.”

it wouldn’t be an overstatement to say that Chigasaki became well-known because of the singer. Takahashi says he stood at the station collecting signatures for a petition to ask Southern All Stars to perform a concert by Chigasaki beach. His dream came true in August of 2000, which was reportedly the first ever outdoor concert on such a large scale.

“After the concert, I was eager to use the word ‘Southern,’ which the group is called for short,” Takahashi says. “I couldn’t use ‘Southern All Stars,’ but I thought maybe I could get away with ‘Southern.’” The result was Southern Curry. Takahashi and his friends waited for complaints from the group’s agency, but none came. Emboldened by Takahashi, the people of Chigasaki started to make new souvenirs with the name “Southern.” Even the beach is referred to as “Southern Beach,” which Takahashi admits to being responsible for. “Well, I guess I might have, but all I want is for more people to love this place.”

His creative instincts next led him to pasta sauce. Chigasaki Meat Spaghetti Sauce is made with cherry tomatoes from the O-Ishii farm in Chigasaki. The sauce is made under the supervi-



sion of an acclaimed local chef from the Italian restaurant Barrique. The package was designed by a former student from Takahashi's swimming class who grew up to become an illustrator.

USING HIS NOODLE

"Have you seen demonstration sales of rice crackers using the entire octopus crushed in a pressing machine in Enoshima or elsewhere?" Takahashi asks. "Most Japanese people have probably seen this on TV. It's one of the must-buys in Enoshima sold at Asahi Honten. Well, that store used to be a *manju* (steamed bun) store. Yonei-san, the owner of Asahi, asked me if he could sell my *tako-senbei*. They were flying off the shelves to the point where I had to make several trips to Enoshima a day. And one day, Yonei-san said that he'd like to sell something he himself created."

Takahashi brought a simplified pressing machine and his original sauce to him and experimented on pressing a couple of whole octopi. As they were experimenting, customers came rushing up to them.

"I told him that he's going to need to put his soul into this because it's the same kind of phenomenon that happened to me. He didn't believe me at first, but later he needed to close down the *manju* store to concentrate on this new creation."

Chigasakiya's *tako-senbei* are still selling strong and are available in more than 100 stores across Kanagawa Prefecture, centered on the Shonan area. The only place overseas you can buy them is in Honolulu — Chigasaki's sister city — where they are sold in some supermarkets.

Perhaps his affinity with Hawaii explains his dress style. Takahashi calls it "formal attire" in Chigasaki. Public transport drivers, shop owners, and even government workers wear aloha shirts to work. "Most *izakayas* (bars) give you a free beer if you're wearing an Aloha shirt," he says.

Besides his business activities, Takahashi is also currently vice president of the Chigasaki Tourism Department, helping to promote his hometown there.

"Many people move to Chigasaki. It's not too cold in the winter and even during the summer, it gets much cooler from around 2:30 p.m. due to the sea breeze. So there are lots of people walking their dogs around that time of the day on the beach. Your lifestyle will change in Chigasaki."

From *tako-senbei* to soba restaurant to festivals to events every week, Takahashi really is the quintessential Kanagawa entrepreneur.



For Izumibashi Sake Brewery, a 162-year-old Japanese liquor company based in Ebina, Kanagawa Prefecture, this saying couldn't be more accurate. Surrounded by Mt. Oyama and the vast Sagami River, the brewery is based at the very heart of massive alluvial plains in the area, known and treasured by local settlers as some of the country's most fertile soils. Thanks to that — and a lot of hard work — since its founding in 1857, the brewery has continued to proudly prove that “good sake begins in the rice fields”: one of the many slogans the family-run company has developed to describe its versatile business through the years.

**SAIBAI
JOZO KURA:
GROWING THE
RICE THAT MAKES
THE SAKE**

Blessed by fertile land, a good climate and professional sake brewers with decades of experience, Izumibashi Sake Brewery has dedicated their entire business life to producing some of Kanagawa's best-known sake labels. But it was in 1995 when the company experienced a drastically positive corporate change. Prior to that year, Japan's post-war laws had required that agricultural landholders circulated their produce within agricultural unions, who were then in charge of distributing it to consumers and private owners. But

**WHERE
THERE IS
GOOD
WATER,
THERE
IS GOOD
SAKE**

by **ALEXANDRA HOMMA**



»SAKE PAIRS VERY WE

the loosened regulations in 1995 began allowing farmers to take charge of their own distribution roots — in other words, they could decide what happened to their produce and whose hands it landed into.

“It really made a major difference in the way we approached our business,” says Izumibashi Sake Brewery president Yuichi Hashiba. “Prior to the reforms, farmers and sake makers were practically invisible. The changes, however, gave us the freedom to decide — and test our chances.”

Starting from the following year, Izumibashi began using the several rice fields it owned to cultivate the rice that they would turn into their branded sake. This not only gave them more control over

the quality of their rice (and therefore sake) but allowed them to expand their research to areas they had previously hadn’t had the need to: such as potential new sake brands and plausible cooperations with other local producers.

Furthermore, in 2009, a second Agricultural Land Act revision began allowing stock companies to get involved in farming and agriculture. This led Izumibashi to purchase even more paddies in its area, work with local farmers and take full control of every grain of rice that goes into their sake. They also had the freedom to make changes and get creative with their business.

The *saibai jozo kura* (literally, a brewery

that cultivates its own sake) era for Izumibashi Sake Brewery had officially begun.

FROM THE FIELDS TO YOUR TABLE ... AND BEYOND

Having established itself as a fully-integrated sake producing company — something that is surprisingly very rare in Japan — and already owning nearly 20 *junmai* (rice and koji mold only) popular sake labels, following the law changes in 2009, Izumibashi gradually began also looking beyond its comfort rice field spectrum.

“We kept thinking of ways we could



LL WITH FINE CUISINE«

collaborate with other people and businesses and promote our brands in a win-win situation for all,” Hashiba says. “One of the things we immediately thought of was food — sake pairs very well with fine cuisine,” he assures.

In 2016, the company opened *Kuramoto Kako Izumibashi*, a Japanese *izakaya*-style diner located just outside Ebina station.

Kako became the place where Izumibashi would offer the finest local ingredients and pair them with its sake labels for guests from all over the world. The restaurant offers a seasonal menu of everything from seafood to vegetables and meat paired with a glass (or two) of customers’ favorite sake. The purpose of the restaurant is to give visitors a special, intimate taste of what Izumibashi —

and Kanagawa as a whole — have to offer.

“We make our sake here so we thought of collaborating with other local producers by serving the finest of what we can all offer,” Hashiba says.

“We had created our third motto: ‘from the fields to your table,’” he says, unable to hide the pride in his smile.

The company, however, did not stop there in its mission to create more slogans — and more business opportunities.

“We also wanted to let people know and learn more about how rice is made and how sake companies operate,” Hashiba explains. Since the past several years, Izumibashi began hosting observation tours and sake-tasting events in a bid to promote the area and

its sake. The tours, typically held every Saturday, involve a full guide of the brewery and the sake-making method, plus seasonal sake tasting and casual snacking.

“It’s typically limited to 24 people, but it gets full quite fast,” Hashiba says, as he takes a deep breath before — as expected — announcing the company’s newest slogan: “We’ve added ‘the closest brewery to the city’ to our catchphrases,” he says with another big smile.

English-guided tours are on his next agenda, he says, though he’s not sure when that’s coming up.

“I have to work a bit on that,” he says with a laugh, but something tells us he’s not far from getting there.

GET
READY
FOR
ROMANCE

by **ALEXANDRA HOMMA**

**ODAKYU
ELECTRIC
RAILWAYS:**

LEADING ALL
ROADS TO
HAKONE AND
BEYOND

You have just arrived at Shinjuku station, bought a freshly baked pastry for a quick snack, stopped by at the travel information center to plan your trip for tomorrow and now you're about to catch a taxi and head to the Hyatt Regency Tokyo where you'll be staying for the night. Tomorrow, you'll be boarding the Romancecar and heading to Hakone for a well-deserved *onsen* (hot spring) retreat. Without even realizing, you have already used Odakyu Electric Railway's services at least five times — yes, including the pastry.

One of the largest and most influential private companies in Japan, Odakyu Electric Railway, established in its current governance in 1948, today incorporates everything from passenger transportation to merchandising to real estate, sightseeing and recreation, travel, hotels, restaurants and even insurance. It is composed of nearly 100 companies (and growing), employing over 25,000 staff altogether and serving millions of customers on a day-to-day basis. Its three main railway lines — Odakyu Odawara Line, Odakyu Tama Line and Odakyu Enoshima Line — connect Shinjuku in Tokyo with prominent destinations in Kanagawa Prefecture and cover 70 stations and over 120 kilometers in total route, accommodating over two million passengers every day.

Add public buses, the Hakone Tozan Train, cable car, ropeway and

THE ROMANCECAR
GSE 70000 (GRACEFUL
SUPER EXPRESS)





HAKONE'S LAKE ASHI WITH A VIEW OF MT. FUJI

the Hakone Sightseeing Cruise (you've surely seen the pirate ship on Lake Ashi) and all remaining railways and transportation tools and you get the picture: whether a local or a tourist, Odakyu is an essential attribute to your Tokyo and Kanagawa experience.

Romance may mean a milliard of things to different people but for Odakyu it stands for Romancecar, its signature limited express train that links Shinjuku with the popular holiday spots of Hakone, Enoshima and Kamakura. It is Odakyu's signature face and one of the largest sources of its income: it is used by about 13.3 million people per year, predominantly for sightseeing but also for shopping and daily commuting to work (seats are reserved and the commute is stress-free).

The first Romancecar, SE 3000, debuted in 1957, breaking the world speed record (145 km/h or 90 mph) for a narrow gauge train. This record and the train's stylish refined design were groundbreaking at the time.

The name Romancecar, which remains unchanged to date, derives from "romance seats," at the time popular two-person seats at movie theaters and other venues without a separator armrest in between. While many railways

had those seats at the time, the concept survived and developed with Odakyu's Romancecar, giving the company further incentives to enforce its tourism and hospitality sector, one of its key businesses today.

The Romancecar has since undergone various transformations, with the latest GSE 70000 (Graceful Super Express), which debuted in March 2018 with the driver's seat elevated to the second floor, leaving passengers sitting at the front with a stunning observatory view of their journey ahead.

FROM SHINJUKU TO HAKONE, **ENOSHIMA** AND A STOP BY AT MT. FUJI

While one day trips and predesigned travel packages are a standard practice today, Odakyu Railway introduced the concept as early as in 1967 with the launch of its Hakone Freepass. Since then, the company has developed various discount passes, offering tourists a variety of packages to its best locations, combining transportation and special discounts at selected facilities. Today, Odakyu offers mainly five passes, each focusing on a

key location primarily in Kanagawa Prefecture and central Tokyo, and conveniently accessible at ticket vending machines at stations, Odakyu Travel or Odakyu sightseeing service centers.

The three top sellers lead to Hakone and its neighboring ocean-side cities, Enoshima and Kamakura, all of which are popular recreation destinations for locals and tourists alike.

The Hakone Freepass, costing only ¥5,140 (¥5,700 from April 1, 2019), includes round-trip transportation from Shinjuku to Odawara stations, unlimited use of eight types of on-location transport, including the Hakone Tozan Railway and the Hakone Sightseeing Cruise, the main attraction on Lake Ashi, as well as special discounts at multiple locations, such as hot spring and tourism facilities in the Hakone area.

The Enoshima/Kamakura Freepass (¥1,470) takes travelers to the beautiful oceanside of Kanagawa Prefecture, Enoshima, and its neighboring city Kamakura, a historical town and home to the Great Buddha of Kamakura. In summer, this is a convenient pass for beach-goers, in autumn for those keen to view fall foliage, and year-round for stress-relief sightseeing and a moment of silence and peace along the ocean.

The Fuji Hakone Pass, ¥8,000 (¥9,090 from April 1, 2019), combines a visit to two landmarks in Japan: Hakone and Mt. Fuji on a single trip (and Fuji-Q Highland if you wish, too!). The pass covers transportation to Ha-



THE SEATED BUDDHA AT KOTOKU-IN TEMPLE, **KAMAKURA**

kone by train or an express bus to Mt. Fuji, transportation within each area and discounts at several locations, including art museums and restaurants.

Other popular passes include the Hakone Kamakura Pass and Tanzawa-Oyama Freepass, a hidden gem lined up with temples and the outdoors, particularly famous with hikers.

RESPECT **EMPLOYEES** AS THEY'D RESPECT CUSTOMERS

However, it is not only the customers that benefit from Odakyu's innovative spirit.

"It's a very good company to work for," smiles Satoshi Okutsu, manager of the Corporate Communications Department at Odakyu Electric Railway. He has been with the company for almost 20 years already and he's looking forward to more. "I've moved around different departments, have been stationed overseas and have had the chance to learn a lot on the job." His eyes sparkle when he talks about his work and he clearly has an answer for every question that's sent his way. Being in the service sector, it is crucial that the staff is treated well, he reassures.

Among the many in-house corporate support measures the company provides its employees with is support for babysitters for working parents, short-shift work for employees with young children, full-time employment for employees with physical disabilities and re-employment of retired senior employees based on their needs. In 2018, the company was selected for the New Diversity Management Selection 100 Project by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), a project that awards companies that have promoted diversification at the workplace by empowering diverse human resources in their business, including women, foreign nationals, the elderly, and physically- and mentally-disabled people.

"The basic principle of our work is assuring customers' safety and providing the best services we can to ensure their satisfaction," Okutsu says.

ENOSHIMA ISLAND WITH THE SEA CANDLE BEHIND



Royal Blue Tea
www.royalbluetea.com

Maker's Shirt
www.shirt.co.jp

Scramble
groover.tv

Lafayette
lafayettecrew.com

Misaki Megumi Suisan
misaki-megumi.co.jp

Venex
www.venex.de

Keikyu Corporation
www.haneda-tokyo-access.com

Tivoli
www.tivoli-cookie.com

Iwai Sesame Oil
www.iwainogomaabura.co.jp

Chigasakiya
www.chigasakiya.co.jp

Izumibashi Sake Brewery
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Odakyu Electric Railways
www.odakyu.jp





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