

Boasting 340 Years of History

Ohiyaki Ceramics: a World of Poetic Zeal

By Toshimasa YOKOZAWA

Pottery: More Use, Greater Beauty

Earthenware, created from pot clay in all inhabited areas on this planet, is understood to represent a sense of beauty and ceramic art today. People learn the special sensitivities of pottery by not only viewing but also touching, using and feeling it. It is what is called “yo-soku-bi” (literally meaning “use i.e. beauty”) or a way of thinking that the beauty of ceramic objects comes into being by having them used by people. And that thinking is the philosophy of craftwork. Remaining unchanged since ancient days, ceramic articles are crafted all by natural material such as rock or clay.

Japanese pottery has been made since olden days based on earthenware coming from China and other countries. Japanese ceramic pieces found harmony with tea ceremony, the only culture of its kind in the world, opening the way for the emergence of tea pottery called *chato* and bringing about a refined world with highly distinguishing characteristics. It is as if ethnic groups and local regions looked for the roots of their traditional cultures in ceramic art. The *Ohiyaki* brand of pottery introduced here is among such *chato*, dating back to the 17th century.

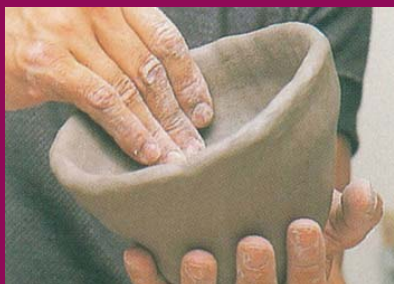
Rakuyaki: Root of Ohiyaki

Rakuyaki is traditional Japanese hand-molded earthenware regarded as the origin of *Ohiyaki*. It is generally shaped by hand and spatula in a process described as *tezukune* (hand-molding). It then is baked in a kiln at temperatures ranging from 750 to 1,100 degrees C. It is often called *raku-chawan* (*rakuyaki* teacup or tea bowl). Its distinctive feature is its thick warped shape that reflected the taste of Senno Rikyu, a tea ceremony master in the 16th century, and is used as a teacup, flower vase, water jug and incense burner. The family line of *rakuyaki* making – known as “Rakuke” or Raku family – has since been succeeded for 450 years to this day.

Chato: Ohi Chozaemon's Ceramic Art

Senno Sotan, third-generation successor to Senno Rikyu, had four children and three of them followed the founder's career of teaching

PHOTO 2



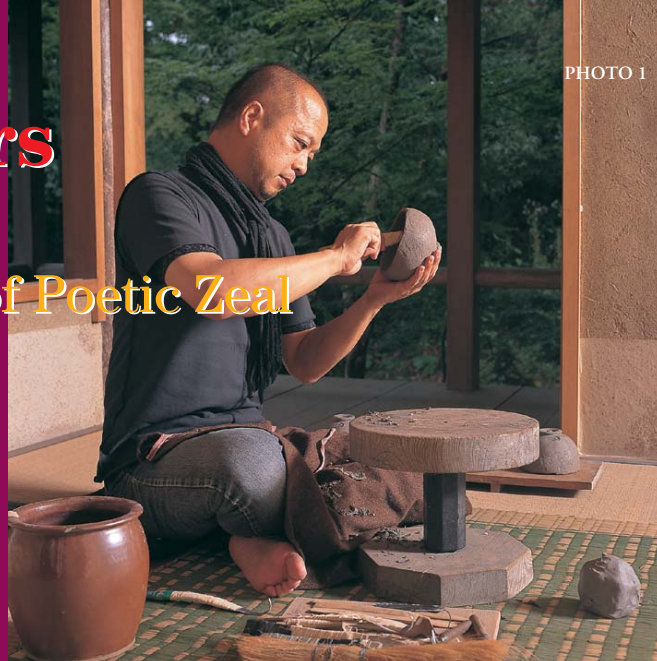
Hand-molding skill is vital to make “Ohiyaki” tea bowl.

PHOTO 3



Black tea bowl being pulled out from kiln: Tea bowls are made in a way hard to break by a secret technique developed by the Ohi family.

PHOTO 1



Toshio Ohi is set to take over the title of 11th-generation Ohi family master ceramic artist Ohi Chozaemon.

Photos: Ohi Toshio

and conveying tea ceremony. They were Sotan's second son Ichio Soshu, third son Koshin Sosa and fourth son Senso Soshitsu. It was Senso who discovered clay suited to *rakuyaki* in the village of Ohi, Ishikawa Prefecture. He used the clay to produce pottery, marking the beginning of *Ohiyaki* ceramics.

In March 1666, Senso was hired by the Kaga feudal domain's fifth lord, Maeda Tsunanori, to offer service on the art of ceremonial tea-making and on tools for it to nurture tea ceremony culture in Kanazawa.

At the time, Senso asked Haji Chozaemon, a disciple of the fourth-generation leader of *rakuyaki* earthenware in Kyoto, to accompany him to Kanazawa as the master of making tea bowls to relate to people in Kanazawa the art of tea ceremony and the technique of producing *rakuyaki*.

Every successive leader of *Ohiyaki* ceramics has taken up the first name Chozaemon, which presently is held by the 10th-generation family head. His oldest son Toshio (Photo 1) spared some time for an interview with *JAPAN SPOTLIGHT* out of his busy schedule that includes visiting many countries. The son is active, preparing himself for assuming the role of a leader in the coming generation.

Fusion between Tradition & Innovation

Toshio says he wants to aesthetically create his future life by learning brilliance from Japan's past traditions and classics, reconsidering and matching it with the present day. It is in this sense, he says, that he intends to look back on the history of *Ohiyaki* ceramics left over by successive family leaders and make earthenware from a point of view of completely new ingenuity in order to maintain the tradition of *Ohiyaki*.

A distinctive feature of Chozaemon's expertise is *amegusuri* glaze containing iron which is used to coat ceramics. It is said that the use of glaze in *Ohiyaki* ceramics was initiated by Ichinyu who was related to the Raku family lineage of the founder of *rakuyaki* earthenware. *Rakuyaki* tea bowls made from Ohi clay are twisted by hand (Photo 2) and *amegusuri* glaze is applied to finish off. Such teacups or bowls are baked in a kiln with temperatures rising to high degrees at a stroke before they are pulled out and cooled off (Photo 3).

PHOTO 4



"Crow-shaped Incense Burner with Ohi Black Glaze" made by Ohi Chozaemon 1st (possessed by Ohi Museum)

However, *Ohiyaki* products such as the "Crow-shaped Incense Burner with Ohi Black Glaze" (Photo 4) and the "Tea Bowl Known as 'HIJIRI' with Ohi Amber Glaze" (Photo 5) are different from those of the Raku family as they are dynamic, powerful and full of ingenuity in formative design.

Ninth-generation Chozaemon continued to protect his family tradition associated with ceramics and was active as a regular member of the Japan Art Crafts Association. His successor, 10th-generation Chozaemon, engages in the production of ceramics from the standpoint of both tradition and new ideas. He has been named a Person of Cultural Merit by the government and is a member of the prestigious Japan Art Academy. His eldest son Toshio has come up with products of ingenuity displaying his attempt at new ideas and infused with the *Ohiyaki* tradition. Critics say his products represent an excellent fusion between tradition and innovation.

Kanazawa Nurtures Next Generation

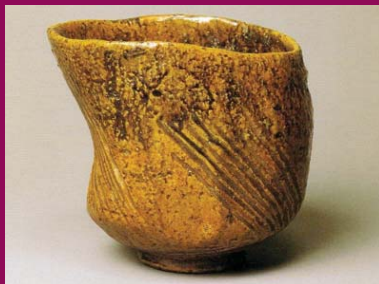
Traditional craftwork has been handed down to family members from generation to generation, but in Kanazawa, "everybody engages in work as a regional tradition," Toshio says. "Everyone in areas where ceramic art, lacquer art, metalworking, et cetera, are concentrated cooperates with one another. They are tied in collective power and networks. Through these efforts they make regional brand-name products. The art of ceremonial tea-making is thriving in Kanazawa. For example, in tea ceremony, the host is the master (someone must assume such a role). The host must not overstep his position nor stay away too much. We in the Ohi family call it *gyoto* (occupational governance)."

If anything, people in Kyoto are inclined to maintain their tradition. While people in Kanazawa pay respect to the culture of Kyoto, they change it according to Kanazawa's originality so it may suit the local climate that alters in accordance with times.

Meiji Restoration Brings Biggest Crisis

During the Edo period (1603-1867), *daimyo* feudal lords were the biggest supporters of *Ohiyaki* ceramics, which were under their patronage – purchased for their use rather than presented as gifts to them by craftsmen – but the 1868 Meiji Restoration abolished the *daimyo* system at the end of the Edo period. It meant a loss of customers for ceramic objects. The Meiji Restoration set off the greatest crisis for ceramics in their long history. The Rev. Shoun Roshi of Daitokuji Temple who hailed from Ishikawa Prefecture came to the aid of the *Ohiyaki* family by ordering a large number of pottery products. It was around 1897 that patrons such as men who had their hearts on ceramic art and master craftwork showed up in the times of great change to replace the old ruling family of Maeda as the supporters of *Ohiyaki*. In the midst of these developments, the Ohi lineage discontinued at the end of the seventh generation and allowed the family's distinguished disciple to succeed as eighth-generation Chozaemon.

PHOTO 5



"Tea Bowl Known as 'HIJIRI' with Ohi Amber Glaze" made by Ohi Chozaemon 1st (possessed by Ohi Museum)

tion. The craftsman's spirit is in his hand-made articles. Constant changes may be necessary, but what is most important for creators is that they must become aware of things they should not change.

The secrets of sustained management lie in (1) common ideas (philosophy), (2) having a long-term perspective and knowing one's caliber and (3) maintaining balance between tradition and innovation.

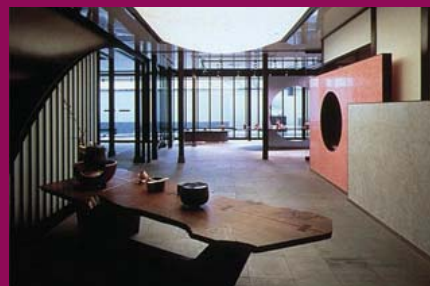
Ohiyaki Pottery Estate & Art Museum

Ohi family head Chozaemon's pottery, which gives the characteristic feeling of natural features befitting a historical town, is located in Hashiba, Kanazawa City. It is designated by the Kanazawa city government as a traditionally important cultural structure. It received a cultural award for urban beauty from the city in 1993. In the garden of the structure is a city-designated pine tree named "Orizuru-no-Matsu" (literally pine of folded paper crane) said to be 450 years old.

In the back of the garden is the Ohi Museum where Ohi ceramics made by founder Chozaemon and each of his successors to the present are stored to enable visitors to come in contact with them as well as with Kanazawa culture on ceremonial tea-making. The art of *Ohiyaki*, which has gone through a period of more than 340 years, unfolds its bygone years and present in three exhibition rooms in the museum, featuring *amegusuri* glaze donated by the Raku family, pottery with tea ceremony master Senso's favorite designs and the works of successive family heads showing their ingenuity. The museum also presents the appearance of a new tradition to add to the past.

Placed side by side is the Ohi Gallery where 10th-generation Chozaemon and his oldest son Toshio (a visiting professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology), who is destined to succeed his father as a next-generation leader, have their works on display for sale (Photo 6).

PHOTO 6



An Ohi Museum gallery

Next to the gallery is a Japanese-style *tatami* room with a *tokonoma* alcove that pleased my eyes. I had *matcha* powdered green tea in a black *rakuyaki* tea bowl and a Japanese-style confection made by Morihachi, which was founded in 1625, soaking up an atmosphere of Japanese tradition and beauty. **J S**

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