

## Ancient Capital Kamakura

In a corner of the Tokyo metropolitan area, in southeastern Kanagawa Prefecture, lies Kamakura, an ancient power center of Japan. It was here that Minamoto Yoritomo established his military headquarters (*bakufu*) when he was appointed generalissimo (*sei taishogun*) by the emperor in 1192, initiating the feudal era. For the following century and a half, the city was Japan's political and cultural center. Its past glory is evident in old temples, historical sites and Kamakurabori, traditional wood carving that is practiced to this day.

Kamakura flourished in the early 13th century. By this time, the city had been shaped in the fashion of classi-

cal Japanese capitals and ornamented with a series of large Zen temples in the newly-imported Sung Chinese style. A perfect example is Engaku-ji Temple. The shogun government employed the new Chinese style instead of existing Buddhist styles to bolster its attempts in establishing a genuine Kamakura warrior class culture. Kencho-ji Temple was opened in 1253 and Engaku-ji Temple in 1282 and both are included in the Five Kamakura Temples—the top five temples of the hierarchical order imposed by the government, emulating South Sung China. Having been destroyed by fire several times, most of the original temples no longer stand but the premises still maintain a somewhat Chinese atmosphere.

At that time, as a matter of course, highly skilled artisans, such as master carpenters, Buddha carvers, altar fitting makers and temple tableware makers flowed into the city. Among them, a school of artisans from Kansai called Kei-ha brought the Chinese carving technique (*karayo*), laying the foundation for today's Kamakurabori. We visited Ozono



Hiroshi, a director of the Traditional Kamakurabori Business Cooperative.

There are dozens of carvers in his workshop but basic instruments are chisels and knives. In Ozono's hand, the knife moves swiftly making circles over a piece of wood as if it was part of his finger, leaving beautiful impressions on the surface. "When carving, I always think how to make the product more beautiful," says Ozono.

The main kinds of wood used are Japanese katsura, ginkgo and maple trees; typical patterns include the peony, orchid, camellia, chrysanthemum, and pine, bamboo and plum trees, all of which are often regarded as auspicious by Japanese. Born amidst the warrior class culture, the art retains a feeling of strength within the overall delicacy. Only a few of the nearly 100 students in his class actually complete the final process which involves poisonous lacquering. A piece is completed only after repeating the lacquering and polishing process up to 30 times, a technique which seems to work as a good piece can serve for many generations.

Originally, Kamakurabori was used mainly for Buddhist altar fittings, but by the Meiji era, it was being used for daily utensils like tea services. Now it figures in a wide range of work including tableware, furniture and interior goods. Ozono's workshop is full of cake bowls and small storage boxes. "Kamakurabori is a traditional craft for daily use, and you'll recognize its merit the more you use it," he says.

For detailed information about the history, material and coating process of Kamakurabori, you can visit the Document Museum near JR Kamakura Station (admission ¥200; 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., closed Mondays). If you wish to try the craft yourself, visit Kamakurabori Kaikan.



Above: Ozono Hiroshi carves a round tray, first drawing a rough sketch and then carving along the outline.

Right: Finished works. Above: Decorative mural. Below: Selection of knick-knack containers.



Engakuji— This temple with its lovely ancient cedars was erected by Hojo Tokimune in 1282 in memory of the soldiers who died during the Mongol invasion. All of the spacious temple grounds, approximately 60 m<sup>2</sup> in area, have been designated a historic site.



Some classes are available for beginners (membership ¥3,000, monthly fee ¥5,000; phone 0467-25-1500).

Kamakura, where the traditional craft was born, is also very attractively situated among shady mountains and the sea. It is one of the few places you can see beautiful flowers—plum, camellia, magnolia, Japanese iris, peony, hydrangeas, bush clover, and ginkgo—throughout the year. Although the city is not as spectacular as Kyoto or Nara, it enchants visitors with its rich history and matured culture. As proof, this city of old temples and green has been immortalized by

many novelists. *Mon* by Natsume Soseki takes place in Engaku-ji Temple, as does *Kikyo (Back Home)* by Nobel prize winner Kawabata Yasunari. A casual walk on a sunny day can transport you back in time.

**JR Yokosuka Line :** Tokyo to Kita-Kamakura Sta., 52 minutes (¥760), or to Kamakura Sta., 55 minutes (¥880); departs every 5 to 15 minutes.

**Kamakura City Tourist Association:** 0467-23-3000

**Kamakura City Tourist Bureau:** 0467-22-3350

**Kamakura City Office, Tourism, Commerce and Industry Section:** 0467-23-3000

**Traditional Kamakurabori Business Cooperative:** 0467-23-0154

**Kencho-ji Temple:** 15-minute walk from JR Kita-Kamakura Sta.; ¥300, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**Engaku-ji Temple:** 3-minute walk from JR Kita-Kamakura Sta., or 10 minutes by bus from Kamakura Sta. (get off at Kencho-ji mae), ¥200, 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

*Haruguchi Yoko*  
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## TABLE TALK

### A Taste of Italy



On Chichukai-dori (Mediterranean Sea Street), where many restaurants can be found, a famous Italian restaurant named Cibrè opened three and a half years ago. In 1979 in Florence, Italy, the head restaurant opened amid favorable reviews. The restaurant takes its name from an antique Florentine dish called Cibrè, chicken liver cooked in clam sauce. In Florence, under the influence of nouvelle cuisine, cooking trends have changed. But the chief chef, Fabio Picchi, continues to protect the traditional tastes of the Tuscany area. In Tokyo, the chief chef, Fuki Yasushi, actually went to Italy and studied under Picchi.

Cibrè Tokyo goes to great lengths to preserve the authenticity and tradition of its Florentine parent. Italian

herbs and vegetables, such as basil, black cabbage and arugula, not always easy to obtain in the Orient, are grown in Cibrè Tokyo's own Italian garden. Other special ingredients are imported—dried pasta, extra-virgin olive oil, ricotta and real pungent parmigiana cheese. A variety of real Italian bread is baked on the premises daily by the pastry chef, who also whips up celebrated Italian desserts.

I recommend the antipasto misto which consists of two different appetizers (¥2,000); chicken liver pâté (¥500); Cibrè's special crispy pizza (from ¥1,700); homemade taglioloni with cheese and butter (¥1,800); veal and ricotta cheese meatballs (¥3,200); toasted seabream stuffed with potato mousse (¥3,500); and daily fresh fish, served grilled with herbs or baked in paper casing, is another delight (from ¥2,800).

One of the hottest restaurants in Tokyo, Cibrè is also one of the sleekest and most sophisticated, situated in The Wall, a five-story fortress-like structure in Nishi-Azabu designed by British architect Nigel Coates. The most spectacular sight is the blue and white stained glass wall that

stretches the full length and height of the main dining room—the work of British artist Brian Clarke. The other dining room is one level up; the balcony seating comes with a view of the Tokyo skyline which may not include the Arno River from the Ponte Vecchio, but one meal at Cibrè is enough to bring into sharp remembrance the rolling hills of Tuscany once again.

In addition, from Monday through Saturday you will be able to enjoy Paolo Tomarino perform canzone, while dining.

*Hori Yoshimichi*  
Editor-in-chief

**Cibrè**  
The Wall, 4F  
4-2-4 Nishi-Azabu, Minato-ku  
(03) 3409-2700  
Reservations necessary  
Hours: Every day from 5:00 to 11:00 p.m. for dinner; Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. for brunch

