

PRESS RELEASE

We are Open! - A revitalized community of Japanese artisans
“Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival” Exhibition
 in SHARING DESIGN by Milano Makers at Milan Design Week 2014
 Tuesday, April 8th to Sunday, April 13th, 2014



The Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival is an event in which factories in the Tsubame-Sanjo area of Niigata open their doors to the public once a year. This year, the festival has been invited to exhibit at SHARING DESIGN by Milano Makers, an event which will be held during Milano Salone in April 2014. Thirteen factories will take part in the exhibition and officials from Sanjo City will join the city's artisans in traveling to Milano to present the Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival and showcase the skills and products of the area, which is renowned in Japan for manufacturing quality metal products.

“Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival” Exhibition in SHARING DESIGN by Milano Makers

Dates: Tuesday, April 8th to Sunday, April 13th, 2014

11:00am-24:00pm

Venue: La Fabbrica del Vapore (<http://www.fabbricadelvapore.org/>)

Address: Via Giulio Procaccini, 4, 20154 Milano, Italy

Map: <http://goo.gl/maps/YqWXs> (Google Maps)

Organized by Milano Makers in cooperation with Milano City Council

Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival Official Website:

website: <http://kouba-fes.jp>

facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/koubafes>

twitter: <https://twitter.com/koubafes>

Organized and Hosted by the Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival Committee,

Sanjo City Hall, Department of Economy - Commerce Division

2-3-1 Asahimachi, Sanjo, Niigata

TEL. +81-256-34-5511

Participating Companies:

BAISHINSHI Co.,Ltd.

GYOKUSENDO Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.gyokusendo.com/>)

HINOURA HAMONO KOBO (<http://www.ginzado.ne.jp/~avec/hinoura/>)

IMAI NOMI SEISAKUJO

MARUNAO Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.marunao.com>)

MARUTO HASEGAWA KOSAKUJO Inc. (<http://www.keiba-tool.com/>)

SAITOU INDUSTRIAL Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.saitow.co.jp/>)

SANJO SEISAKUJO

SHINKO HASAMI SEISAKUJO

SUWADA BLACKSMITH WORKS,Inc. (<http://www.suwada.co.jp/>)

TADAFUSA Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.tadafusa.com/>)

TAKEDA KANAGATA SEISAKUSHO Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.tkd-mgn.com/>)

YAMAZAKI KINZOKU KOGYO Co.,Ltd. (<http://www.yamacold.jp/>)

*In alphabetical order

Event Direction: method (<http://wearemethod.com/>)

Art Direction/Design: SPREAD (<http://www.spread-web.jp/>)

Booklet Editor: BACH (<http://www.bach-inc.com/>)

Press: HOW INC (<http://how-pr.co.jp/>)

Event Coordinator (Milan): Yuko Noguchi

For press inquiries

HOW INC. Attn: Miki Koike, Mie Aizawa

TEL. +81-3-5414-6405 / FAX. +81-3-5414-6406 / EMAIL. info@how-pr.co.jp

Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival

The Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival is an event in which the factories in the Tsubame-Sanjo area - renowned for producing quality products such as knives, cooking tools, farm equipment and carpentry tools - open their doors to the public. Whilst visitors are not usually allowed to enter the factories during operating hours, the festival will offer an opportunity to get a close up view of the artisans at work. Visitors will also be able to make products by participating in various workshops.

As the Japanese population continues to congregate in the Tokyo metropolitan area, cities in regional areas face serious problems due to a declining number of residents. The Tsubame-Sanjo area, which includes the cities of Tsubame and Sanjo, is no exception: as young people have continued to leave the area, the average age of residents has increased, resulting in labour shortages and a lack of successors at many of the factories. This problem has been further intensified by the area's lack of tourist attractions. For some time, events have been organised with the intention of revitalizing the area, yet results were limited due partly to the events failing to reach beyond the local region. In order to make a breakthrough, an artisan from Sanjo and his Tokyo based advisor came up with an idea of holding a 'factory field trip,' as the area has a large number of factories with incredibly skilled artisans that could represent the country's artisanship.

By opening the factories to the public and allowing visitors such as professional buyers to see and experience the artisans' work through a series of workshops, they could showcase the charm of the local artisans. Their proposal was accepted by the government of Sanjo, and selected for promotion as one of the city's enterprises. With the aim of making Tsubame-Sanjo a mecca for Japanese artisanship, the city government and festival organisers enthusiastically promoted the event, resulting in many passionate producers, designers, publicists and editors taking part in the first Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival, which was held in Autumn 2013.

Running from October 2-6, the five-day festival involved 54 of Tsubame-Sanjo's renowned factories and attracted approximately 10,000 visitors to the area. As a result, the event and local artisans were featured in television programs, newspapers, radio, magazines and web media, and attracted tremendous attention from all over the country.

Through the dedication of the city government and the artisans themselves, the factories attracted new customers and followers, and proved to be the tourist attractions that the region lacked, overthrowing the common perception of a factory being a mere place of production.

After the festival had concluded, one factory received a job application from a young person, and a number of visitors ended up moving to Sanjo to become artisans. Such events led to the city receiving a special award in March 2014 from the committee at the 18th Hometown Event Awards, organized by the Japan Center for Regional Development. The second Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival is scheduled to be held from Thursday, October 2nd to Sunday, October 5th, 2014.



* Factory Festival 2013

Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival: <http://kouba-fes.jp>

SHARING DESIGN by Milano Makers

Led by Cesare Castelli, Milano Makers is an Italian organization that supports the works and activities by artisans, designers, artists and other types of creators. Their mission is to present such works to wider society.

Organized by Milano Makers, SHARING DESIGN will be held at La Fabbrica del Vapore, a city-owned venue housed in a former steam engine factory. At the event, the rich relationship between Milano Makers and the Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival will unfold.



Milano Makers: <http://www.milanomakers.com/>

Participating Factories [1/2]



BAISHINSHI Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1750 during the Edo Period. The factory has been producing small knives and chisels for more than 250 years. By 1860, their small knives had become renowned in markets throughout the country. Around that time, the son of the owner studied quenching techniques with a sword maker, which led to them being able to make more durable knives. Even today, their professional knives and chisels are manufactured only when an order is received. Aside from producing tools for professional use, they also manufacture cutlery for hobby sculptors.



GYOKUSENDO Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1816. For centuries, they have been making hand-hammered copperware, a specialty craft product that Tsubame City is famous for. After starting with kettles, they expanded their range of products to include teaware, barware and flower vases. Throughout their long history, they have produced more than 300 hand-hammering artisans and in 2010, Norio Tamagawa (the second son of the 5th master of GYOKUSENDO) was chosen as a living national treasure. Their tableware is made by hand-hammering a single sheet of copper; with the finished product shining and fitting one's hand better with age.



HINOURA HAMONO

Founded in 1905. After initially producing sickles, they later began to produce axes, hatchets, and various knives. Since their foundation, they have been dedicated to making quality cutlery through the progression of the traditional Japanese technique of mixing iron and steel, and paying utmost attention to every step of the production, from steel covering to finishing. Renowned internationally for their quality, usability and functionality, their products are chip resistant, durable and easy to sharpen.



IMAI NOMI

The factory has been making Japanese chisels since 1974. All processes, from steel covering through finishing are completed by hand. Today, most of their chisels are exported and sold in America, where they are popular with professional carpenters and furniture makers, as well as with hobbyists who use them for building log houses. The artisans remain committed to creating the sharpest and most durable steel products.



MARUNAO Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1939. Prior to founding the company, the owner made wooden sculptures for temples; and by combining those skills with newly acquired wood carving machines, they began creating innovative tools such as sumitsubos, traditional Japanese ink pots made of ebony. Today, they mainly produce chopsticks that are renowned for their soft feel, as well as making products such as ebony spoons, fountain pens and other stationery items.



MARUTO HASEGAWA KOSAKUJO Inc.

Founded in 1924. Initially, carpentry clamps were the main product they manufactured. The factory was the first to introduce spring hammers into production; which led them to commence production of pliers. Today, aside from carpentry tools, they create beauty products such as nail cutters. The trained artisans make products one by one without compromise; as a result their products are sold in more than 20 countries around the world and are known for their impeccable sharpness and durability.



SAITOU INDUSTRIAL Co.,Ltd.

Since their foundation in 1959, they have produced western style stainless steel tableware. In more recent times, they modernised their equipment and began to produce cutlery to be enjoyed by a variety of people, and incorporating universal designs. Utilizing their 50-year expertise in metal forging and cutlery making, they bring universal cutlery such as spoons and knives to dinner tables around the world.

Participating Factories [2/2]



SANJO SEISAKUSHO

Since their foundation in 1947, the factory have strived to make cutlery that exceeds the quality of those made in Solingen, Germany, a famous cutlery manufacturing area. The company was founded by Kosuke Iwasaki, a respected authority on metallurgy who had conducted scientific research on Japanese edged tools, especially swords. In 1954, they produced western-style razors using tamahagane, traditional Japanese iron used for producing swords. They are equally sharp as those made in Solingen. In addition to western-style razors, their Japanese razors, small knives and pointed knives are renowned in various parts of the world for their sharpness.



SHINKO HASAMI SEISAKUSHO

Founded circa 1935. Since their foundation they have been dedicated to making spring scissors. Working entirely with his hands, their artisan makes scissors without using machines. Today, there are less than five artisans in Japan who possess such skills. As the only artisan in Sanjo dedicated to producing spring scissors, he produces a number of variations: Morimachi (sharp-edged), Nagaha (for cutting fabrics), Kengata (for knitting) and Amikiri (for cutting nets), which are sought after by fashion designers and other professionals.



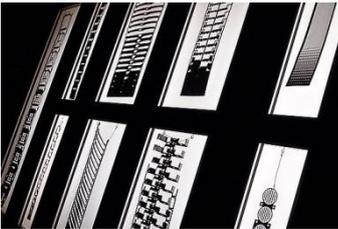
SUWADA BLACKSMITH WORKS,Inc.

Founded in 1926, they originally produced kuirikis, end-cutting pliers that are used to trim metal wires. Since then they have created various products including nail clippers, chestnut openers and scissors for maintaining bonsai arrangements. Recently, their newly designed nail clippers received numerous awards in Japan and abroad. In order to produce the best product, their nail clippers are designed in a shape of nippers, and this considered yet unlikely form maximizes their function - a manifestation of the artisans' incredible amount of expertise.



TADAFUSA Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1948, originally as a manufacturer of metal measuring tools. Using their knowledge of metal production, they began to make sickles, small knives and cooking knives, before starting to produce fishing tools and more recently, domestic and professional cutlery such as sobakiris, specialized knives for making soba noodles. Throughout this evolution, they have remained dedicated to producing the best quality products for their customers, with all processes are done by hand. Every product they produce is a manifestation of their passion.



TAKEDA KANAGATA SEISAKUSHO Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1978. Since their foundation the factory have produced metallic molds that are easy to use, high quality and quick to be delivered. In 2005 they launched their own brand, "mgn", and having developed specialised skills as part of the Tsubame-Sanjo's metal industry, they now fuse fashion and lifestyle design into their production. Centered on the theme of "Artistry+a," the brand makes products not commonly produced by metal workers, such as card cases.



YAMAZAKI KINZOKU KOGYO Co.,Ltd.

Founded in 1918. Since their foundation, they have been devoted to the production of tableware. They have received OEM orders from renowned brands in the United States and Europe, with their tableware used at the 90th Nobel Prize ceremony dinner in 1991. Upholding "the art of dining" as their concept, the artisans put their passion into making cutlery, with their beautiful products chosen by many customers around the world.

*In alphabetical order

Niigata Prefecture

Niigata Prefecture is located on the Sea of Japan coast in central Japan, with a population of 2.33 million people spread over 12,500 km². The area is known for the heavy snowfalls it receives each winter, with the melting snow supplying many rivers including the Shinano River, the longest in Japan. With fertile soil and an ample supply of water, the area is known for its agricultural produce: vegetables, fruit and rice. A staple of the Japanese diet, rice grown in Niigata is considered to be among the best in the country.

Whilst numerous manufacturers of automobiles, home appliances and heavy construction equipment are concentrated in industrial areas along the Pacific coast, Niigata, located on the other side of the country, has many small factories who continue their traditional artisanship. Out of the 215 traditional crafts officially recognized by the Japanese government, 16 are based in Niigata, which results in the second largest population of artisans in the country.



A : Niigata Prefecture



A : Sanjo City

History of Sanjo and its Artistry

The city of Sanjo is located along the Shinano River in central Niigata, with an area of 430km² and a population of 100,000. Sanjo is regarded as having the largest number of company owners in the country, with tremendous numbers of small companies and factories, often family-run, manufacturing a variety of products. As a result of the owners' love for having business meetings over drinks, the city has the highest number of bars per capita in the country.

Around the early 14th century, markets prospered along the Shinano River, and a city was established in Sanjo area. The city was an important military base in the era of the samurai, before in the comparatively peaceful 17th century, the Tokugawa shogunate took down Sanjo castle, and the samurai left the city. As the need for weapons diminished, some blacksmiths began to create farm tools, while others produced nails to fulfill the vast quantity of orders from Edo (present day Tokyo), which was experiencing regular fires and undergoing constant reconstruction.

As the number of blacksmiths and artisans increased, they began to form a district of their own. Additionally, as merchants traveled to and from the city, they brought new products with them and informed artisans of the demands of other areas. It was through this active exchange of information that they started to make edged tools such as cooking knives and scissors, and Sanjo prospered for a long time, with artisans and merchants driving its economy.

Today, many techniques have been modernized, with factories in urban areas using casting and pressing machines to make car parts or office equipment. Despite this, there are still many artisans who continue their tradition crafts: for example creating cutlery by mixing soft iron and hard steel. Such artisans are not merely following tradition: through the knowledge they have acquired through scientific research, they have renewed their techniques over time, constantly updating their products to meet the needs of the present day.

Role of Design

Design played a major part in the Tsubame-Sanjo Factory Festival being able to establish a new relationship between the artisans and visitors to their factories. For the majority of people, the inside of a factory had remained a mystery and so whilst having an interest in visiting, they were uncertain if it was even possible. For the artisans, their factories were a part of their daily lives, and accordingly it was hard for them to see their true value. Design proved to be the mediator that connected the two parties; transforming everyday factory scenes into something new and exciting - a bridge between the artisans and visitors.

The festival's logo shows an open door, representing the opening of the otherwise private factory and of the often-reticent artisans' hearts. For a long time, the factories had used black (metal) and red (fire) to represent their manufacturing; but we saw silver in the material and inside the factories. The pink of the fire also caught our attention, and so we came to replace red and black with silver and pink. Upon entering the factories, which were not accustomed to visitors, dangerous areas were marked with diagonal stripes. People instinctively recognised the need for caution, even though we had replaced the standard colours of black and yellow with pink.

Additionally, we printed graphics on cardboard and stickers – materials often used in factories - and distributed them to the factories to decorate their interiors in accordance with simple guidelines such as diagonal lines had to be at an angle of 45 degrees, and they had to put up a sign showing their designated factory number. The artisans themselves decorated the entrance and interior of their factories and put markers and information boards in the street to welcome visitors.

The event was an exciting and fruitful experience for both artisans and visitors; planning for the second edition is already underway and the festival will also be presented overseas. Throughout the process, design has connected society and their surrounds; and played an important role in the creation of a small revolution.

