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Sebastian Conran on Design & Japan

BY SEBASTIAN CONRAN

As human beings we perceive the world through our senses - life is a sensual activity. Designing the objects that we come across in our everyday is about much more than just joining the dots between usefulness, usability, functionality, appearance, finish, fabrication, materials, cost, brand, etcetera. It is also about providing a personality for objects and an experience for the user that will be pleasurable and satisfying. It is about imbuing our work with a sort of inanimate soul which expresses the thought that has gone into both designing and making the objects. This is a notion which I've found Japanese craftsmen inherently understand. exceptional craftsmanship.

IMAGE

This level of attention and thought is what makes working with Japanese companies so rewarding.

When I first started working in Japan in 1986, one of the myriad of delightful things that struck me about the country and its unique culture was the amount of meticulous thought that goes into almost everything. With food, this begins with the careful selection of ingredients, then the ingenuity and skill in preparation & cooking, and finally the thoughtful & aesthetic presentation on unique, carefully made, beautiful dishes.

This obsessiveness about one of the simplest things in life - human sustenance - typifies the attitude of Gifu makers and craftsmen to the products that they make. This is seen in the careful selection of materials, the meticulous planning & execution in fabrication, all the way through to the final presentation and packaging of the products. I think that this level of attention and thought is what makes working with Japanese companies so rewarding for me.

Gifu Prefecture and Craftsmanship

The first thing that strikes one about Gifu is its geography & geology. Gifu is mountainous and 80% forested with a great variety of tree species, from hardwoods to conifers; this is especially noticeable in early November when the leaves change from green to red, orange, gold and yellow, giving the landscape an amazing visual texture.

A lot of the craftsmanship in Gifu has evolved out of this natural environment. The mountains contain metal ores and provide the clean abundant water necessary for metal working, paper-making and pottery. The runoff from the rivers also creates huge clay basins in the many beautiful valleys.

All of the makers in the Gifu collection have a long history of producing beautiful, top quality products. It was our task as designers to conceive of, and collaboratively develop a range of products with International appeal that share a common, Gifu inspired aesthetic; we call it the Sebastien Conran Gifu Collection. Each item in the collection was designed to be sympathetic to the region and also to the makers, demonstrating their exceptional skills and celebrating the wonderful local materials that they use.

Working with 18 different manufacturers in another language, from our studios on the other side of the world, presented a significant challenge to our team. The amazing commitment and hard work on the part of the Gifu prefecture has not only made this project possible, but also incredibly enriching for us; we are incredibly grateful.

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JUSENGAMA

Crystalline Mug

The Crystalline series is characterised by its distinctive and colourful crystalline glazes which provide the pottery surface with a delicate pattern reminiscent of blooming flowers.

¥3,500

MAKE ENQUIREY



“Our inspiration for these comes from my love of the Japanese language”

IMAGE

Texture, colour, intricacy, ingenuity and quality all come to mind when I think of traditional Mino Washi paper. The paper has a very long history of application in the Mino area of Gifu. Traditionally made on a loom at a time using a frame sieve woven from mulberry, it is formed from hand-picked wood of the mulberry tree. Combined with the adhesive properties of the abiscus resin. Because of the purity of the water in which it is made, Mino Washi is now some of the most desirable paper in the world, notably used in the restoration of Leonardo Da Vinci's drawings by the British Museum.

For the collection we wanted to showcase the beauty of the Mino Washi paper in a range of playful and useful products. We created new books with traditional binding that feature so that they slip easily into a book. Inspiration for these comes from my love of the Japanese language which I believe to have a rather beautiful meaning as well as graphic nature. Another one of my favourite products is the wrapping paper, which is the most beautiful topography of the region for

ITEM DETAILS ▾

MEET THE MAKER

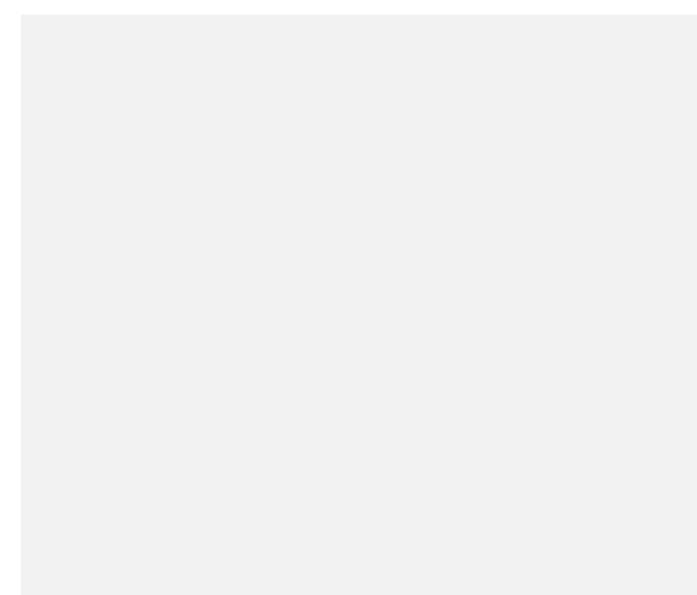
Jusengama

Crafted in the Tajimi region of Gifu, the Crystalline series is characterised by its distinctive and colourful crystalline glazes which provide the pottery surface with a delicate pattern reminiscent of blooming flowers. The random nature of the glazes gives individuality to each item, the cups were crafted with the intention of making modern customs of tea and coffee drinking more joyful, while the bowl creates a vivid centre piece for the table. The Hinoki Wood Masu saucer / coaster-lids provide a new use for an object originally used as a measuring cup for rice and other grains.

Jusengama's products are characterized by their unique crystalline glazes, which provide the pottery surface with delicate brilliance. Many variables such as the mixture of crystalline elements in the glaze and the temperature in the kiln influence the shape of the individual crystals so that each piece comes out differently, creating a 'product of chance' made with clay and flame. The beauty of Jusengama original pottery has been highly acclaimed both domestically and internationally.



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COLLECTION

Sebastian Conran Gifu Collection

ABOUT

A unique collaboration between Sebastian Conran's London design studio and 16 traditional makers.

The Sebastian Conran Gifu Collection is the result of a unique and ongoing collaboration between Sebastian Conran's London design studio and 16 traditional makers based in the beautiful, natural surroundings of Gifu, Japan. The collection celebrates a rich and diverse craft heritage that dates back 1,300 years, combining traditional Japanese techniques with an original and contemporary international design ethos. Inspired by Gifu past and present, the collection features hand-glazed ceramics, finger-jointed woods, washi papers and sharpened steel.

READ MORE

HIDA

Live & Work Furniture

Inspired by the traditional architecture and woodworking native to the Hida-Takayama region; an area heavily influenced by cultures of Kyoto and Tokyo in the Edo period.

VIEW THE COLLECTION

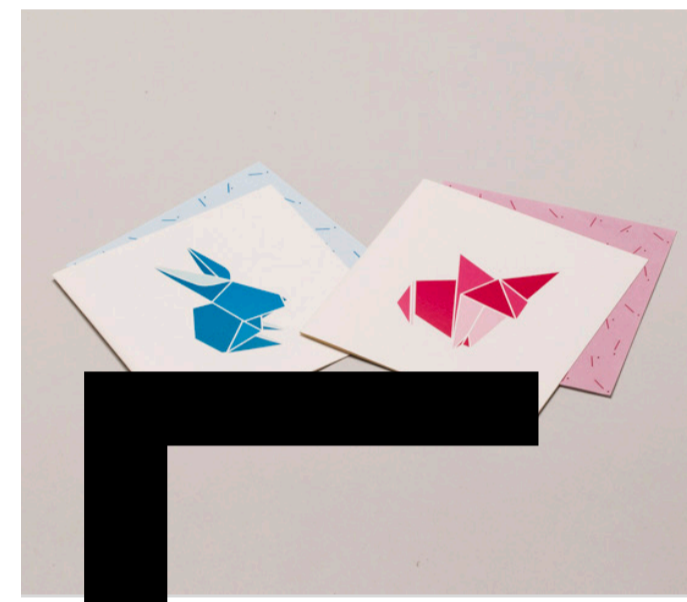


KAMINOSHIGOTO

Oboeru Collection

The collection features Mino Washi papers, greetings cards and screen-printed notebooks, combined with traditional binding techniques and gold leafing.

VIEW THE COLLECTION

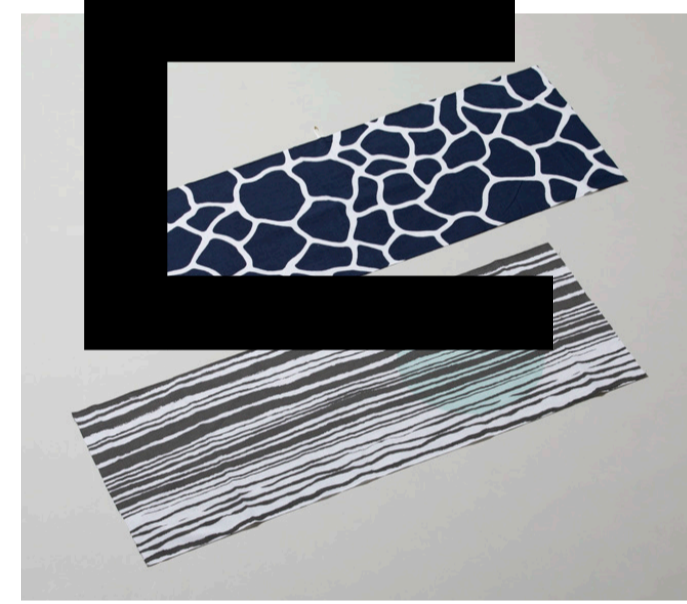
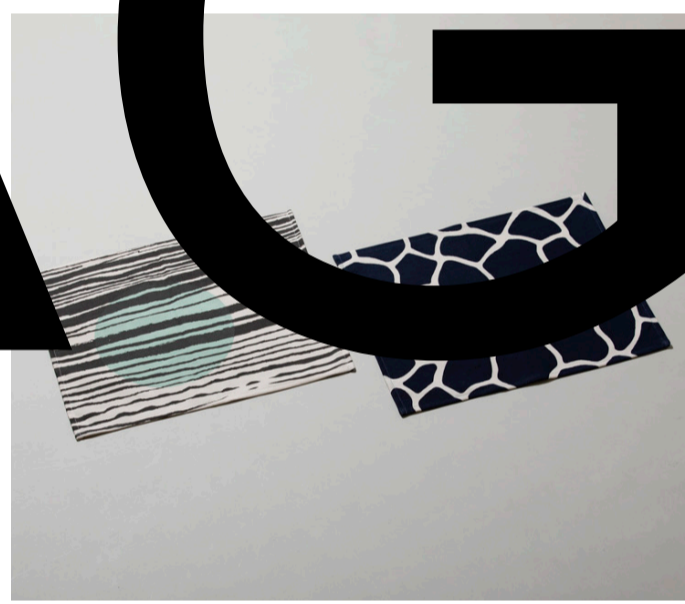
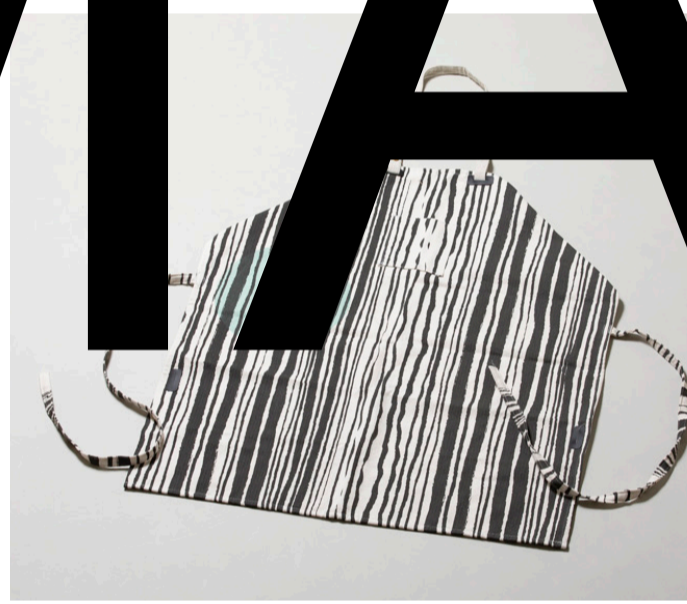


NAGARA

Nagara Collection

Products which pay homage to both the Hida and Gifu Nagara river, as well as the Amida waterfalls which inspired the famous Hokusai painting of the same name.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



KANEKO KOHYO

Porcelain Serveware

Highly tactile ceramics with a playful paper-like pattern and crystalline texture encapsulate the essence of pure Japanese porcelain.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



NISSIN

Ginkgo Collection

Part inspired by the grand ginkgo tree in Hida Takayama that is over 1,200 years old, the Ginkgo Collection features a distinctive 3-sided shape.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



OHASHI RYOKI

Hinoki Storage Collection

Inspired by the history of the Japanese Masu finger-jointed box the Hinoki Storage collection offers a flexible range of interconnecting storage.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



SHIZU HAMONO

Kitchen Knives

Constructed from Damascus steel and carved hardwood handles, the knives feature a faceted ergonomic angled profile, inspired by the folded paper forms of origami.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



SUGIYAMA

Kanji Collection

The 'Kanji collection is a celebration of the beautiful graphic nature of bent iron rod.

VIEW THE COLLECTION



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