***Yakusugi* Crafts**

The tight grain, lustrous gloss, and distinct aroma of *yakusugi* cedar make crafts using the wood highly sought after. The wood is over 1,000 years old and is especially prized since logging the trees was banned in 2001. Products are crafted from fallen timber as well as remnants from logging that took place as much as several hundred years ago.

*A Precious Wood*

Yakushima’s logging industry peaked in the 1960s and decreased thereafter. The felling of trees was prohibited in 2001 to ensure their protection. Woodcraft now works mainly with timber remnants, stumps of logged trees, and naturally fallen timber, collectively known as *domaiboku*, or *yakusugi* remnants. In the Edo-period (1603–1867), when islanders paid taxes in the form of roof shingles, timber with a straight grain was needed, so loggers cut *yakusugi* about two meters or more above the ground to avoid the roots with their complex grain patterns. While they may appear unusable when covered in moss, *domaiboku* have remained intact thanks to their high content of anti-decay, anti-bacterial, insect-repelling resin, which protects them in the damp forest.

Since *domaiboku* are found deep in the mountains at altitudes of around 1,000 meters, they first have to be cut into manageable sections to haul them out. In the 1920s, four logging railroads were built to transport felled *yakusugi* to Anbo, Miyanoura, Nagata, and Kurio on the coast. All have terminated service, except for part of the Anbo railroad that continues to operate for power plant and dam maintenance. Helicopters were also used to transport *yakusugi*, but this, too, ended with the overall decline in *domaiboku* resources in 2015. Workshops used to bid on *domaiboku* that were brought to lumberyards and put up for auction in Yakushima and Kagoshima. However, tenders are no longer conducted due to the depletion of *domaiboku*, and only small quantities are now sold twice a year under negotiated contracts concluded between the Forestry Agency and four *yakusugi* joint cooperatives. The cooperatives in turn sell *domaiboku* to their member organizations under negotiated contracts.

Wood transported from the rainy and misty forest environment is not processed immediately, but allowed to dry naturally for a period ranging from months to years depending on the size of the log. Once the wood is dry, skilled artists use lathes to turn *yakusugi* into various products. *Kosugi—*younger Japanese cedars less than 1,000 years old—are also used to make less expensive crafts, so buyers may wish to confirm if they are buying an authentic *yakusugi* item or not.

*One-of-a-Kind Crafts*

It takes the eye of an experienced professional to discern wood quality when the *yakusugi* is still in log form. *Yakusugi* crafts range from large pieces of furniture to more affordable smaller pieces including chopsticks, drink coasters, and keychains, all popular items with tourists. The wood is fine-grained and amenable to coating, which helps create beautiful finishes and protects the wood from scratching and drying. The resin of the wood also gives off a shine that increases with use.