

### **Tsuji-seijisha History and Vision**

The Tsuji family enjoys the honor of being named the first official purveyor of Arita ware to the Imperial Household. In 1668, a dish of blue-and-white porcelain created by the third-generation head of the Tsuji family, Kiemon (dates unknown), was obtained by Date Tsunamune (1640–1711), the lord of Sendai Domain (modern Miyagi Prefecture). Date presented the dish to Emperor Reigen (1654–1732), who was greatly pleased. The emperor then ordered porcelain tableware created by the Tsuji family to be supplied to the Imperial Court. Over their centuries of service, the family was granted gifts in return, including *maku* (curtains), a *takaharijōchin* (large paper lantern on a pole) bearing the imperial chrysanthemum emblem, and a cushion bearing the chrysanthemum seal, prominently displayed in the receiving room today. The Tsuji family takes great pride and joy in their designation, improving and transforming their artistic skills over the centuries to remain worthy of their esteemed position. They remained the sole official purveyor of Arita ware until the Meiji era (1868–1912), when a handful of other kilns also received the official purveyor title.

In 1811, Kihei VIII (dates unknown) created a unique method of firing porcelain called *gokushin-yaki*. Ash residue from the embers of wood-fired kilns could stain pieces as they were fired. His innovation was to place the piece inside a container much like a lidded jar. The container protects the piece from the smoke of the kiln and the vacuum inside produces more vivid colors, resulting in the best possible quality and appearance. The container is made with the same porcelain clay and glaze as the piece inside, so both fire and expand at the same rate. However, to remove the piece within, the container must be broken open with an iron mallet. Any mistake risks shattering the item inside. Until the outer jar is opened, the craftsmen cannot tell if the finished product is successful. Because of its difficulty, the technique was abandoned for some time until it was revived in 1985 by Hitachi XIV (1909–2007). Hitachi XV (b. 1939), the current head of the family, considers this unveiling as one of the most exciting, and nerve-wracking, parts of the production process. Any flaws, or exceptional craftsmanship, are instantly recognizable.

Although the Tsuji kiln became famous for its blue-and-white porcelain, it also now produces gold-decorated tableware for the Imperial Household Agency, as well as porcelain decorated with overglazes. Hitachi XV works together with his son and approximately fifteen staff members to continue the traditions handed down over the generations. Before the passing of Hitachi XIV in 2007, three generations of Tsuji men were able to work together in the kiln for a few years. The presumptive heir to the legacy, Hitachi XV's son, spent some time away from the kiln before returning to the family business at the age of 30. Both men feel a sense of responsibility to continue the family business and allow the kiln's artisans to continue their livelihoods. Neither Tsuji wishes to be the last of such an illustrious line.