

Mino Ceramics: 1,300 Years of History and Counting

The term “Mino ware” (*Mino-yaki*) refers broadly to ceramics produced in the Mino region of central Japan, which includes the modern-day towns of Tajimi, Toki, Mizunami, and Kani.

Three environmental factors have made this valley a center of ceramic production for over 1,300 years. The first is alluvial clay left behind by an ancient lake. As sediment from upstream was carried to the lake, larger pieces were broken down, creating a fine-grained silt that makes for high-quality clay. Second, the natural slopes of the low, rolling hills are well suited for kiln construction. These hills also provide the third key resource: abundant forests of red pine. Red pinewood is ideal for firing pottery, as it contains natural oils that make it burn hotter and produce a longer plume of fire than other types of wood.

Most ceramics-producing regions are associated with a single style or color of glaze. In contrast, the look and shape of Mino ware have changed dramatically as the local industry has adapted to sociopolitical changes and found new markets. Mino ware encompasses a broad spectrum of ceramics, from the unadorned, mass-produced *yamajawan* bowls used long ago by farmers and townspeople to gold-trimmed tea sets used more recently in the salons of Europe. As you move counterclockwise through the exhibit, you will see a broad overview of the evolution of Mino ware, starting with simple, unglazed eighth-century Sue ware and finishing with brightly colored modern masterworks of stoneware and porcelain produced by Living National Treasures.