

Copycat Commerce: Mino-Iga and Mino-Karatsu Ware (Early 17th Century)

Around the same time that Oribe ware was flourishing, two other ceramics styles could be found in the tea rooms of the capital at Kyoto: Iga ware, from what is now Mie Prefecture, and Karatsu ware, from Saga Prefecture. Spurred by this competition, potters in Mino found ways to mimic these popular styles using materials that could be found locally. These offshoots were called “Mino-Iga ware” and “Mino-Karatsu ware.” The ability of local potters to adapt their production to meet market demand in this way helped establish Mino as a leading ceramics production center.

Mino-Iga ware uses a grainy clay that contains large amounts of feldspar, the main ingredient in Shino ware glazes. In a high-temperature wood-fired kiln, the feldspar reacts with wood ash, creating a natural greenish glaze similar to Iga’s famous *vidro* glaze. The style was prized by tea practitioners for its asymmetry and natural roughness, as typified by this water jar. The etched lines and nubby handles, called “ears,” are also hallmarks of Mino-Iga ware.

Like the Karatsu ware it imitates, Mino-Karatsu ware uses an iron-rich clay that retains an earthy feel without being overly coarse. Various kinds of glazes were used. This bowl is a typical example of Mino-Karatsu ware: natural motifs, such as leaves and flowers, painted with a black iron pigment under a semitransparent gray glaze.