

Inuyama Ware

At Urakuen, tea is served in fine ceramic bowls of Inuyama ware, a local ceramic lineage with over 200 years of history. In the early nineteenth century, the lords of Inuyama Castle supported the founding of local kilns and began to attract skilled potters to the area. Various styles and methods have evolved over the subsequent centuries, but three Inuyama kilns continue to produce tea bowls, cups, and vases using traditional techniques and traditional designs.

Early Modern Inuyama Ware

Pottery was first produced in the Imai area of Inuyama in the mid- to late eighteenth century. Okumura Denzaburō, the founder of the first kiln, used techniques he had learned in Mino Province (now southern Gifu Prefecture). His pottery—called Imai ware—consisted of simple pieces for daily use finished with a glossy brown glaze. Okumura’s successors maintained the Imai kiln until 1781, when the third owner died.

In 1810, a local merchant named Shimaya Sōkurō (dates unknown) worked to revitalize ceramic production in the area. He petitioned the lord of Inuyama Castle, Naruse Masanaga (1782–1838), and was granted permission to open a kiln in the Maruyama district. This marked the beginning of what is now called Inuyama ware.

There are few surviving records of the first decade, but it is known that in 1817 a new kiln master took over, and by 1822 potters had arrived from other regions, bringing techniques from the nearby areas of Seto and Shidami. By 1831, local artists had begun making both blue underglaze pottery (*sometsuke*) and red-enameled overglaze pottery (*aka-e*).

Lord Masanaga was pleased, and in 1836 he increased funding to the local kilns. Masanaga died two years later, but his successor, Naruse Masazumi (1812–1857), continued the patronage. He also requested the production of what would become one of Inuyama ware’s most popular and characteristic designs: the combination of cherry blossoms and red maple leaves known as *unkin-de* (cloud-brocade style).

Inuyama ware continued to thrive as new kilns were opened and ceramicists refined their painting methods and designs. However, production of ceramics came to a stop in the early 1870s, following the abolition of the samurai class and the transition to the Meiji era (1868–1912).

Modern Inuyama Ware

Despite this lull, the production of Inuyama ware resumed roughly a decade later. Many

of the same craftsmen took up their work (sometimes even at the same kilns) in 1883 under the auspices of the Inuyama Pottery Company. The company was dissolved when the kilns were severely damaged in the Nobi Earthquake of 1891, but several potters continued to produce Inuyama ware. During the early twentieth century, some kilns were forced to temporarily switch to making roof tiles to stay in business. However, a rise in the popularity of tea in the late twentieth century helped spark a renewed interest in fine ceramics.

Three kilns in Inuyama—Ozeki Sakujūrō Tōbō, Gotō Tōitsu Tōen, and Ōsawa Kyūjirō Tōen—continue to produce traditionally designed tea bowls, vases, teacups, wind chimes, and many other ceramic creations. Complex *aka-e* (red and green) designs and the *unkin-de* motif still feature prominently alongside pieces with highlights of gold, iridescent metallic swirls, or textured glazes. The shop at Urakuen offers a selection of fine Inuyama-ware tea bowls in a variety of designs, and a much broader range of pieces is sold at the kilns themselves.