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Kannazuki literally means "the godless month" because the Shinto deities are all attending a meeting in Izumo at this time.



UJŌBORI

Carving a name for Okayama

by Joel Ward

Ujōbori is one of Okayama's most recognized local specialties and is a popular souvenir and gift.

Okayama castle's black exterior earned it the nickname *Ujō*, literally "Crow Castle." *Ujōbori* is the name given to hand-crafted wood-carvings produced in Okayama. The carvings are not "sculptures," rather they are practical household items with decorative designs engraved into their timber. The size of the work and their engravings can range in size from those found on small wooden cups, to large, elaborate chests of drawers. Sometimes *Ujōbori* trophies are made, but perhaps the most popular *Ujōbori* souvenirs are large round trays, which can be used to carry cups of hot tea out to guests. The governor of Okayama is a well known *Ujōbori* user, and is rumored to often present it as a souvenir to important guests.

The first *Ujōbori* carvings were made by Mr. Kyūhō Kiguchi in the Taisho period (1912-1926). Later, Kiguchi began recruiting physically handicapped war veterans, and trained them at the *Ujōbori* Training Institute. The *Ujōbori* Association was established in 1953 as guild to support the craftsmen involved in the art.

Some of the more frequent and popular of the traditional *Ujōbori* designs are fruits and vegetables (especially persimmons, eggplants, citrus, cucumbers, strawberries, peppers and turnips), flowers (esp. camellias, lilies, magnolias and hydrangeas), and traditional Chinese designs taken from *feng shui* roof tiles.

The luster of the finished product comes from *urushi* lacquer. *Urushi* works can be found all over Japan, but unlike some other styles of *urushi* tableware, the grain of the underlying timber used in *Ujōbori* is still visible and enhances the pieces beauty. Numerous thin applications of lacquer mean *Ujōbori* pieces are less likely to be damaged by heat, water, acid and fire, making them extremely durable. In fact, the more often they are used, the more they shine.



Ujōbori can often be found most department stores around Okayama or at the local specialty store in Okayama Symphony Hall. For more information contact the Okayama *Ujōbori* Association on 086-225-4561 or check www.ujobori.or.jp (in Japanese).

Any questions? The Okayama Insider is here to help newcomers to Okayama. If you have seen or heard something you want explained, write to us! If it hasn't been covered elsewhere, we'll publish an article about it! Drop us an email at okayamainsider@hotmail.co.jp