

Bizenyaki in English!

By H. Hara

Japanese people often consider autumn as the season for art creation and appreciation. For this autumn special edition, the Okayama Insider visited Kasaoka, in the southwest of Okayama Prefecture, to meet British born Bizenyaki pottery artist Nick Jennings. We hope this article helps readers to better understand Japanese art.

Born in England and raised in South Australia, Nick Jennings came to Japan in 1992. That year, he started learning how to make Bizenyaki pottery with a Japanese teacher. After 5 years training he became a Bizenyaki artist and now he often has exhibitions in Kurashiki and in Fukuyama. Last year, he opened a new studio in Kasaoka city, which is a beautifully reformed Japanese house.



Insider: Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. Can I start by asking, why Bizenyaki?

Nick: I think Bizenyaki is very interesting because the traditional wood firing is uncontrolled. What happens to the pottery inside the kiln is unpredictable. The colors and patterns produced depend on the condition of the wood and the location of the pottery in the kiln and the direction it faces. The final stage of producing the artwork is not done by hand, but by the workings of nature.

Insider: Looking at your works, some are black, some are red, some white. You make plates, teacups, beer mugs, vases, and many other things. Some look fragile and some look strong and heavy. What is your concept of making pottery?

Nick: I am always trying to balance yin and yang. I try to make both soft, warm pottery and very strong, masculine works, too.

Insider: Some people say Bizenyaki is too simple and they say they cannot understand its value. What do you think?

Nick: When I first came to Japan, someone handed a teacup used for the tea ceremony and said "ii kanji desune." He was asking me to approve of its "nice feeling", but I couldn't understand what he meant. It is a cup, but a "nice feeling cup?" Now I make my own wood fired pottery and understand. An example might be a nice *guiomi* cup for sake. If the sake inside is clear, you can see the bottom of the cup and the beautiful colors. It has a nice texture and feel to it, so your fingers are relaxed when you hold it. It fits into your hand very naturally. I think that is what "ii kanji" is all about.

Insider: I think I get that feeling from holding your work in my hand, too. Thank you and all the best in the future.

Nick: Thank you.