

The Making of Urushi Lacquerware in Aizu



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The History of Aizu Lacquerware

Lacquerware craft was first established in Aizu as a local industry in 1590 by Ujisato Gamo, who was the feudal lord of Aizu. He brought in lathe and lacquer painting experts from his previous domain of Hino (currently Shiga Prefecture) to teach the skills of the craft to the people of Aizu. Lacquerware craft flourished in Aizu during this time with developments ranging from the creation of lacquer tree plantations to refinement in the decorative arts of lacquerware.

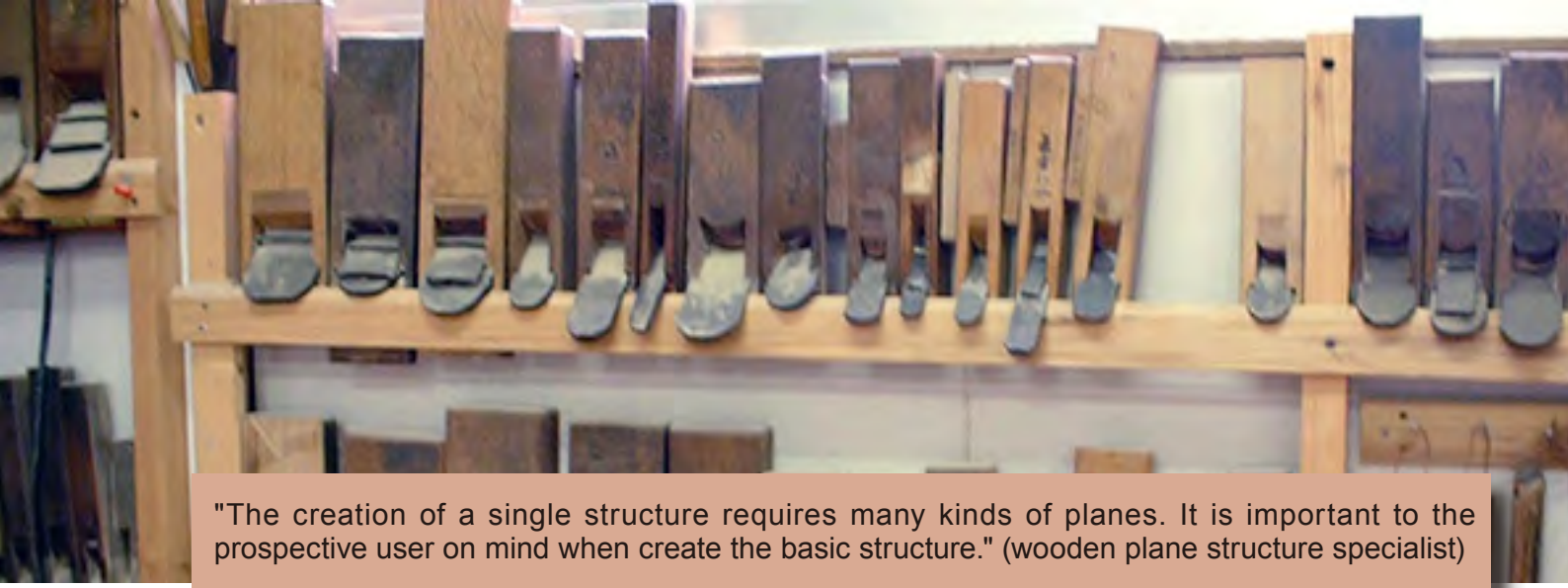
During the following Edo period, the successive Aizu lord, Masayuki Hoshina, made special efforts to protect and foster the lacquer trees. Each successive Aizu lord worked to advance lacquerware craft, with the height of the industry being marked by exports of lacquerware to China and Holland. However, during the end of the Edo period, the Boshin Civil War caused the almost complete destruction of Aizu and its lacquerware industry.

The Meiji period saw the rebuilding of the lacquerware industry go hand-in-hand with the rebuilding of Aizu. By the middle of the Meiji period, Aizu had earned the reputation as one of the most famous lacquerware-producing cities in the country. The art and industry continues to grow as new technology is integrated into the 400-year old lacquerware tradition.

The History of our company

Shirokiya Lacquerware Co., Ltd. was established during the Kyoho era (1716-1736). Since then we have been making beautiful and durable lacquerware, and we are making much effort to add some enhanced style to the traditional works.

Awards: Exposition Universelle 1900 Paris France bronze medal
Exposition Universelle 1904 Saint-Louis USA silver medal
Exposition Universelle 1905 Liège Belgium gold medal
etc.



"The creation of a single structure requires many kinds of planes. It is important to the prospective user on mind when create the basic structure." (wooden plane structure specialist)

Making the shape(box type)



Wood from the Ho tree (Magnolia family) and top-quality Shina plywood is evaluated and ried thoroughly. The parts to be used in the final product are cut out and planed.



The parts are assembled into a "Sumigi" (slender wooden stakes) are placed in the four corner in order to secure the structure. The box is planed to create rounded corners and edges.



A basic three-tiered box structure is completed and the bottom of each tier are fitted with "San" (slender wooden pieces) in order to keep all the pieces on top of each other.

Making the shape(bowl type)

Wood from Zelkova and Horse Chestnut trees is cut into the approximate shape of a bowl and dried thoroughly to prevent warping.



The dried bowl is shaved on a lathe.



Foundation layer



An undercoat of raw lacquer is applied to cover the grain. This process is called "Kigatame".

A paste of lacquer and special clay powder is applied in order to strengthen the structure. This process is called "Shitaji".

The box is carefully sanded to prepare for the next application of lacquer.

Urushi : lacquer, a naturally-occurring sap taken from the Urushi tree



Application layer



The first application layer called "Shita-nuri"
The next layer of lacquer is applied in a process called "Naka-nuri".
On each layer bowls and boxes are sanded and lacquer is applied onto the smooth surface.

Lacquer is applied for the third and final time ("Uwa-nuri").



"Dust is the worst enemy in the lacquer application procedure. We are very careful with dust control. Even our own family member aren't allow to enter the room." (bowl lacquer application specialist)

Makie



Patterns are painted with lacquer and then embossed with gold and silver powders as well as coloured powders such as red yellow and blue.

Kin-ji



Kin-ji is a type of ground decoration on urushi vessel, used to create a luxurious effect, has been developed by makie-craftsmen particularly in Aizu.

They use Keshi-fun which is very fine powder made by crushing a dried mixture of gold foil and glucose and then rinsing away the latter ingredient.

The powder is dusted over the semi-dry lacquer of the vessel. When this layer of lacquer has dried, another layer is applied to coat the golden powder.

Urushie



Chinkin

The surface is engraved with a fine edged knife and gold foil is embedded into the groove.



Various designs and patterns are painted using a brush and coloured lacquer (a mixture of lacquer and coloured powder)

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