



**JOURNEY
AROUND
LAKE BIWA**

ISSUE 7 (May 2019)

**Treasure Chest of
Japanese culture**

**Cover: Shiratani-sō Museum of
History and Folklore / Kayabuki-
no-sato (thatched-house village),
Shiratani-sō**

**The Living Wooden
Culture of Lake Biwa**

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Editor's Letter

Masashi Harada

In this issue, we interviewed six people on the theme "Living Wooden Culture of Lake Biwa" and presented articles that delved into the vibrant scene there. We featured six experts are those who are familiar with wooden and culture around Lake Biwa and are active in their respective fields.

The area around Lake Biwa is rich in nature. In particular, forest areas make up half of Shiga Prefecture. Since ancient times, Japanese people have lived and worked on the heavily forested mountains, made wooden tools, and lived with wooden items in their lives. From woodcarving and woodturning to old and new Japanese-style houses, and gardens, both old and new, we can see that wood has always been an essential part of Japanese life. This time, we talked with the experts about Japanese wood culture that closely relates to our life. From these interviews, I hope that you can feel the rich life of Japanese woods through photographs.

In Shiga, there is a region where people involved in traditional woodcarving crafts have gathered to form an artisan community. It is Kaminyu district of the city of Maibara, located in the depths of the mountains in the northeastern part of Lake Biwa. We interviewed several artisans keeping the woodcarving tradition alive at Mori Sculpture House (Mori Chokoku-jo). It is these dedicated craftspeople who have supported the traditional culture that exists in Japan, such as Buddhist altars, shrine and temple buildings, and folk art.

Additionally, a type of craft called *kiji* (woodturning) has been developed since the middle of ninth century. Typical *kiji* products are wooden trays and *chawan* (tea bowls). They are indispensable items at the Japanese dining table. This woodturning culture is said to have begun after Imperial Prince Koretaka taught the techniques to local people in the foothill villages of Higashi-Omi city. In these sacred places of woodworking culture, people

have protected the art for more than 1150 years. I interviewed Tsutsui Rokuro, a woodturner at the studio. In addition, I also interviewed a curator at the Woodturning Craft Museum, which is open to the public to preserve the historical materials of *kijishi* (wood turners) for future generations.

Japanese houses have long been built by cutting local trees, transporting the logs via waterways, and building by skilled carpenters. In this issue, we introduced the business of Sakata Construction Co., Ltd., located in Otsu City, which was built on houses using wood from around Lake Biwa. Sakata Construction Co., Ltd. maintains and rebuilds local houses. In this article, we interviewed a representative director, Mr. Sakata. In addition, a designer, Ms. Ichikawa, showed us a house built with wood from an area upstream of the Ado River.



The woodcarving village, Kaminyu district

A house that has built a long time ago is called *kominka* (literally, “old house”), and in recent years the cultural value of *kominka* has received new recognition. Traditional wooden houses have served as a gathering place for families for generations. Households in Takashima City use huts called *kabata* that make use of spring water. In some houses, the *kabata* is outside the main building, and for others it is in the main building. The *kabata* draws spring water into the rooms in the house, and people use it as drinking water or for daily use. Takashima’s scenic beauty is comparable to tourism spots such as Miyama of Kyoto prefecture and Hida of Gifu prefecture. There, old folk houses with their own unique architectural style still exist and traces of old-fashioned living can be glimpsed around those houses. Shiratani-sō boasts a museum, opening their old houses and giving people a taste of the old-fashioned atmosphere. We asked the director about what it takes to maintain these houses.

Japanese houses often have a traditional garden. What does it mean to use trees and create a good garden? I visited Omi Hanakatsu Landscaping Corporation (Omi Hanakatsu Zoen Kabushikigaisha), a company with a 250-year history. Omi Hanakatsu Landscaping Corporation is not only a landscaping business, but also operates an affiliated company related to biotope. Trees and water abound in the area around Lake Biwa, and protecting the natural environment has become an important local issue in recent years. The representative director told us about natural environment around Lake Biwa, and the creation process for gardens.

We hope that through this article, you will be interested in the Japanese wooden culture and lifestyle. Thank you for reading!

**The family woodcarving tradition in the
artisan community
Mori Sculpture House (Mori Chokoku-jo)**



Mr. Tesso Mori putting his heart into his work