Birch Bark Craft



Semboku City
(Kakunodate Town)

History and Characteristics

Kabazōgi is said to have originated approximately 230 years ago, during the An'ei to Tenmei eras, when the Satake Kita clan—which governed Kakunodate—brought the technique from the Ani region to Kakunodate. It was cultivated as a side occupation for samurai.
It is said to have begun with the production of inro (medicine cases) and doran (belly wraps), and today, a wide range of products are produced, including tea canisters and boxes, as well as daily necessities and accessories that reflect modern lifestyles.
Birch bark craft products have the unique property of wicking away moisture and preventing dryness; this characteristic is utilized as a major distinguishing feature in products such as tea canisters.

Techniques and Artisanal Skills

The bark of the mountain cherry tree is carefully peeled from the trunk and air-dried in the shade for over a year to remove moisture.
This bark is then carefully shaved with a knife to bring out its natural color.

About the Techniques

"Mold-Made"
A core is created using tsuki-kawa (birch bark) or kyogi (thin wooden strips) to fit a wooden or metal mold, and birch bark is then applied to it to form a cylindrical product. This technique is used for representative products such as tea canisters.

"Wood-Base"
This technique uses a wooden board as a base to create items such as boxes.

"Layered Pieces"
A technique in which polished birch bark is layered—about several dozen sheets—and then carved; this technique is applied to items such as brooches and pendants.

Brochure produced by: Akita Prefecture

Kawatsure Lacquerware



Yuzawa City
(formerly Kawatsure, Inagawa Town)

History and Characteristics

It is said to have originated when Lord Michinori, the younger brother of Lord Shigemichi Onodera—who governed this region during the Kamakura period—had farmers apply lacquer to armor as a form of home-based work.
Thanks to a favorable environment, including abundant forest resources and water transport along the Minase River, the area developed into a center for lacquerware production.
The durability that characterizes Kawatsure lacquerware stems from the meticulous preparatory process known as "ji-sumi-zuke," in which a mixture of persimmon tannin and charcoal powder is applied, dried, and polished; followed by "kaki-keni," where persimmon tannin is applied and polished again; and finally, "ji-nuri," the application of raw lacquer.
The finishing coat employs an advanced technique called "hana-nuri," in which the lacquer is applied with a brush and left to dry as is, without polishing after drying, giving the finished product a soft and gentle texture.

Techniques and Artisanal Skills

The production of Kawatsure lacquerware is divided into specialized tasks for each stage of the process.
For the wooden bases of lacquerware, beech and horse chestnut are used for round items such as bowls and dishes, while Japanese white pine, Chinese fir, Japanese cedar, and Japanese cypress are used for square items like tiered boxes and curved items such as round trays. Artisans who craft the wooden bases for round items are called "hikishi," while those who craft the bases for square and curved items are called "shimonomi."
The lacquering process is broadly divided into four stages: base preparation, undercoating, intermediate coating, and topcoating. The "hana-nuri" technique used for the topcoat not only requires a high level of skill but also demands meticulous care; for example, since dust must be avoided, no one except the lacquer artist is allowed to enter the lacquering room.
Decorative techniques include "chinkin," in which lines are carved into the lacquered surface and gold leaf is inlaid into the grooves, and "maki-e," in which gold powder or other materials are sprinkled onto the lacquered surface and set in place.

Brochure produced by: Akita Prefecture

Odate Magewappa



Odate City

History and Characteristics

Magewappa has a very long history, with examples even discovered at archaeological sites dating back to the Heian period.
During the feudal era, the Satake Nishi clan, which governed Odate, utilized the region's abundant forest resources and encouraged samurai to produce these items as a side occupation; this technique was passed down until modern times.
In modern times, the industry was impacted by the proliferation of plastic products; however, demand has been gradually increasing due to a recent trend toward authentic, high-quality goods and the development of products that reflect contemporary lifestyles.
Mage-wappa products make the most of the wood's natural scent, moisture-absorbing properties, thermal insulation, and light weight. In addition to classic items such as bento boxes and serving trays, a variety of products designed for modern lifestyles—including coffee cups—have been developed and are now available for purchase.

Techniques and Artisanal Skills

Cedar is milled to reveal the straight-grained pattern, and then cut into individual components.
The components, cut to a thickness of approximately 5–7 mm, are boiled in hot water to soften them and make them less prone to breaking, after which they are wrapped around molds or jigs for shaping.
After drying for about two days, the bent components are sewn together along the joints using cherry bark. The product is then completed through processes such as bottom insertion, wood finishing, and lacquering.

Brochure produced by: Akita Prefecture

Akita Cedar Buckets and Barrels



Odate City, Noshiro City, Kitaakita City

History and Characteristics

Cedar buckets and barrels have a long history, as evidenced by the discovery of fragments of a bucket believed to date back to the Sengoku period at the Akita Castle ruins.
During the Edo period, production centers began to form under the patronage of the Satake clan.
The most significant difference between buckets and barrels is the presence or absence of a fixed lid. A bucket is one without a fixed lid, while a barrel has one. Additionally, straight-grained wood is used for buckets, whereas flat-grained wood is used for barrels.
In addition to various traditional buckets and barrels, products tailored to modern lifestyles—such as rice storage boxes, beer mugs, and cups—that utilize the techniques and characteristics of Akita cedar buckets and barrels are also available for purchase.

Techniques and Artisanal Skills

Cedar logs are cut into strips to create “kure” (wooden strips) with both straight-grain and flat-grain patterns. These strips are then shaped on the outside using a tool called an “otori” and on the inside using a tool called an “uchitori.”
The number of “kure” strips is determined based on the circumference of the bucket being made. They are arranged in a circular pattern, bound with “taga” (hoops), and fitted with a bottom board and lid. Finally, the wood is polished, coated, and otherwise finished to complete the product.

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