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IMAEMON

TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Imaemon porcelain has been acknowledged as the highest quality Japanese porcelain for over 370 years. The porcelain is the result of exquisite craftsmanship proudly preserved and improved upon over multiple generations. The beauty of Imaemon porcelain lives in its ability to evolve over time and reflect the style of each period. Thus, it has a unique style that is "living in the present" yet rooted on its long history.



SYMBOL OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS



Imaemon XIV uses the traditional technique of “*Sumi-hajiki*” in a new way. In *Sumi-hajiki* (repelling ink technique), a pattern is first drawn with *sumi* (black ink); enamel is then applied on top of the pattern before firing. Due to *sumi*'s ability to repel pigment and disappear after firing, a reverse pattern emerges in white. The technique was traditionally used as a background for primary motifs on Nabeshima ware. But Imaemon XIV has taken this technique and utilized it as a main part of his designs.

The white color produced through this labor-intensive process gives an impression of additional quietness and softness. Extra time, care and effort is given to every aspect of production, including those aspects one cannot see. The traditional Japanese aesthetic expresses the beauty of shadows and shapes instead of being pragmatic, and emphasizes even the invisible. Imaemon porcelain's supreme dignity reflects the spirit of this aesthetic, and the skills required to produce it.

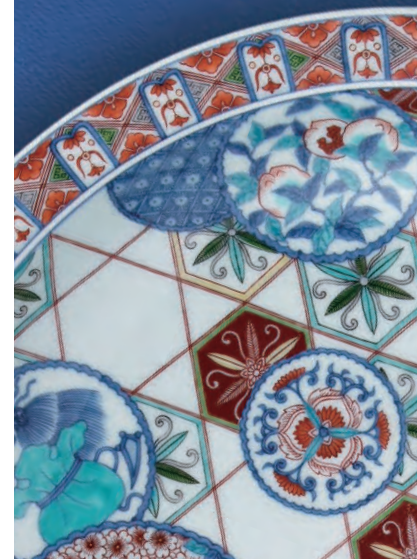




ORIGINALLY A GIFT FOR THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

“Iro-Nabeshima”, a style of porcelain with overglaze polychrome enamels produced by the Imaemon kiln, originated in the late 17th century. The feudal lord of Saga domain gathered highly skilled potters to produce the highest quality porcelain as diplomatic gifts for the Shogun as well as for household use within Saga castle. In those days, the Imaemon family was responsible for the process of *Akae-tsuke* (decorating overglaze polychrome enamels in red, yellow and green). In 1871, feudal domains were abolished and prefectures were established. With this reform of the political system, the Imaemon family expanded from merely applying the overglaze enamels to carrying out the whole porcelain production processes.

Primary motifs of Iro-Nabeshima include *Kissho Monyo* (patterns of auspicious omens that are based on historical events and that symbolize long life, wealth and prosperity of the family). These bold compositions of traditional patterns are universally recognizable within Japanese culture while at the same time utilize a contemporary style.





COMBINING THE SKILLS OF DIFFERENT CRAFTSMEN

Imaemon kiln, the production facility including a group of craftsmen headed by Imaemon XIV (Living National Treasure), has been designated an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan. The production process begins with kneading clay, which is then formed into a shape with a pottery wheel, followed by firing three times during the process of underglaze enameling, glazing, and overglaze enameling. This multi-faceted and entirely handmade process must be carried out by skilled craftsmen, each of whom specializes in their own segment of production. These technicians are like individual orchestra members playing their own instrument to create a sublime harmony. Thus, Imaemon porcelain is shaped by the skills and pride of the Imaemon craftsmen who expertly manipulate the unpredictable forces of clay and fire.



TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES AND PRIDE PASSED DOWN TO THE PRESENT

- c.1616 Porcelain stone is found in Arita, Saga Prefecture, and the first porcelain ware is made in Japan.
- c.1644 The technique of overglaze polychrome enamels on porcelain is transferred from China to Arita. Imaemon I begins decorating porcelain with overglaze polychrome enamels.
- 1672 Imaemon family becomes a patronized enameller for the Saga domain decorating Nabeshima ware with overglaze polychrome enamels.
- 1873 Due to a loss of patronage from Saga domain, Imaemon X starts his own kiln to produce an entire porcelain in addition to polychrome enameling.
- 1934 Appointed as a purveyor to the Imperial Household Ministry (the royal warrant).
- 1958 Imaemon XII is commissioned to produce a decorative dish for a room where the Emperor meets people in the Imperial Household Agency.
- 1989 Imaemon XIII is designated an Important Intangible Cultural Property (Living National Treasure) of Porcelain with overglaze polychrome enamels.
- 2014 Imaemon XIV is designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property (Living National Treasure) of Porcelain with overglaze polychrome enamels.



Izumiyama quarry:
The first porcelain stone material
is found in Japan.



1989



1958



late 1600s -
early 1700s



1934



Main firing kiln:
The porcelain is fired for 36 hours
in a kiln fueled by red pine woods.