Bamboo Artists of Eastern Japan (Kanto and Chubu Regions)
関東地方・中部地方の竹工芸家

The bamboo centers of eastern Japan are located primarily in Tochigi, Niigata, and Tokyo prefectures, in addition to scattered pockets in the Kanto and Chubu regions. Many important artists have been based in this region, including descendants of Kosuge Chikudo and Hayashi Shogetsusai. Perhaps the most influential was Iizuka Rokansai (1890–1958), whose artistic innovations have infused the work of other Iizuka-lineage artists as well as artists across Japan.

Rokansai, the sixth son of a family of highly respected bamboo artists, strove to transform the world of bamboo from an artisan’s craft into a respected art form. One way he did this was to classify bamboo baskets using the same categories that are applied to calligraphy, flower arrangement, and other Japanese art forms: shin (formal), gyo (semi-formal), and so (informal). A shin (formal) basket would be the most technically exacting, requiring careful preparation and fastidious execution. In contrast, the shape of a so (informal) basket might evolve as the artist makes it. In reality, the informal so baskets are often the most difficult because they demand the most vision on the part of the artist. Because of his enlightened philosophy (as well as his extraordinary technical abilities), Rokansai’s flower baskets and other vessels became recognized as works of art in their own right rather than as just functional objects. The Cotsen Collection contains several examples of this artist’s work, which are occasionally put on view; but his influence can be seen in the work of artists from across Japan.

One technique in particular distinguishes the work of bamboo artists from eastern Japan: the tendency to split bamboo radially (masawari) instead of using the flat or tangential split (hirawari) common in western Japan and Kyushu. Bamboo prepared in this way is well-suited to techniques associated with this region, such as the curvilinear bundled plaiting (tabane ami) perfected by Rokansai.

A lineage tree of bamboo artists of Eastern Japan can be seen on the other side of this placard.
Notes
Teacher-student relationships are indicated with solid lines; informal teacher-student relationships are indicated with dotted lines.

Multiple disciples of a single teacher are arranged in order of birth year. This order does not indicate their hierarchy within their respective lineages.

Living National Treasures (Holders of Intangible Cultural Properties) are shown in yellow.

These charts include only artists shown in the 2007 exhibition Masters of Bamboo and those who elucidate these artists’ lineages or interrelationships. They do not include all artists whose works are on view in the galleries, nor do they give a comprehensive overview of historical or contemporary bamboo artists.
Kyushu, Japan’s southernmost main island, has long been a center of bamboo art, especially in the area around the town of Beppu, Oita prefecture, which is famous for its hot-spring spas. The climate in this region is perfectly suited for growing bamboo that is both flexible and resilient—qualities highly desirable for making artworks. A large percentage of mass-produced baskets in Japan are made in Oita. Beppu has also been long associated with the large, sturdy jar-shaped pieces known as “Beppu luxury flower baskets,” which are different in sensibility from the more delicate Chinese-style baskets made in Kansai.

Shono Shounsai (1904–1974), Kyushu’s most famous bamboo artist, exerted the greatest influence on the expansion of Japanese bamboo art beyond the limitations of the vessel and into the realm of sculpture. Shounsai inspired numerous artists across the country to study bamboo. Kyushu remains a major center of bamboo art-making. Young hopefuls from across Japan travel to Beppu to undergo the comprehensive professional training course offered by the Oita Prefectural Bamboo Craft and Training Support Center, many of whose graduates are carrying the art of bamboo into the twenty-first century.

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Western Japan—especially the areas surrounding Osaka and Kyoto in the Kansai region—has long been noted for its fine bamboo craft. The region is especially known for producing flower baskets of the highest quality, which are used to hold arrangements displayed in the alcoves (tokonoma) of Japanese-style rooms floored with woven straw mats (tatami).

The centrality of Kyoto, Japan’s ancient capital and still a hub of culture and refined craft traditions, contributed to the region’s excellence in bamboo work. In addition, from the 1700s through the early 1900s, the Osaka area was a center for gatherings focused on the making, serving, and drinking of sencha, whole leaf green tea. Sencha gatherings required not only a variety of bamboo implements to make the tea but also baskets for the display of flowers, providing bamboo artists with a stable patronage base.

Bamboo artists first came into their own in the Kansai region. Because of the popularity of imported Chinese baskets for use in sencha gatherings, Japanese bamboo artisans of the Edo period (1615–1868) rarely signed their works: Wholesalers preferred to leave ambiguous the country in which these Chinese-style baskets had been produced. Perhaps the first bamboo artist to use his signature on his work was Hayakawa Shokosai I (1815–1897) of Osaka.

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**Bamboo Plaiting Techniques**

1. **Chrysanthemum Base Plaiting**
   *菊底編み* (kiku zoko ami)
   - Base made by layering strips in radiant arrangement and plaiting (usually mat plaiting or twining) around them in spiral pattern. Common on baskets dating from 1800s to early 1900s, especially from western Japan.

2. **Circular Plaiting**
   *輪弧編み* (rinko ami), *阿弥陀光編み* (Amida ko ami), *蛇の目編み* (ja no me ami), *丸じんく編み* (maru jinku ami)
   - Sometimes translated “bull’s-eye plaiting” or “snake-eye plaiting.” Strips of bamboo arranged tangentially to create circular opening. Most frequently used to form ring at basket’s base but can also be used to finish rim.

3. **Clematis Plaiting**
   *鉄線編み* (tessen ami), *亀甲編み* (kikko ami)
   - Variation on hexagonal plaiting initiated by pressing six strips of hexagonal cells together tightly, creating radiant, almost floral arrangement, hence the name. Relatively opaque surface practical for basket bases or trays.

4. **Compound Lozenge Plaiting**
   *四つ目返し* (yotsume gaeshi)
   - Diagonally oriented square plaiting supplemented with vertical and horizontal elements. Commonly seen in Western Japan, where horizontal strips are often replaced with rows of twining.

5. **Diamond Twill Plaiting**
   *枡網代編み* (masu ajiro ami)
   - Variation on twill plaiting often used at center of basket’s base. Called floral twill plaiting (*花網代編み* hanaajiro ami) when used as repeated design over a large area.

6. **Hemp-Leaf Plaiting**
   *麻の葉編み* (asa no ha ami), *麻編み* (asa ami) (WJ), *鱗編み* (uroko ami) (WJ)
   - Triangular pattern incorporating three extra strips into each cell of basic hexagonal plaiting. Plaiting in six different directions from central hexagonal cell results in hexagonal star pattern resembling the shape of a hemp leaf.

7. **Hexagonal Plaiting**
   *六つ目編み* (mutsume ami), *籠目編み* (kagome ami), *亀甲編み* (kikko ami) (WJ)
   - Openwork pattern of hexagonal cells, each formed from six strips. Also the foundation for techniques such as hemp-leaf plaiting and clematis plaiting.

8. **Irregular Plaiting**
   *乱れ編み* (midare ami), *やたら編み* (yatara ami) (WJ), *氷裂編み* (hyoretsu ami) (WJ), *落松葉編み* (ochimatsuba ami) (SJ)
   - No set rules, though most artists work over hexagonally plaited armature. Often strips begin at the base, move up to the rim, then return to the base.
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Basketry Technique</th>
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| 9.  | Mat Plaiting                 | ごさ目編み gazame ami, ぬき編み nuki ami (WJ)  
Also called simple plaiting. One of the most common basketry techniques. Differs from square plaiting in that horizontal elements are narrower and more closely spaced than vertical elements, creating horizontally faced surface. |
| 10. | Octagonal Plaiting           | 八つ目編み yatsume ami  
Openwork pattern of octagonal cells each formed from eight strips—four creating square pattern and four creating lozenge pattern. As plaiting proceeds, each strip of the eight goes over one strip and under the next. |
| 11. | Pine-Needle Plaiting         | 松葉編み matsuba ami  
Variation on twining using three horizontal elements in 2:1 twill. Y-like arrangement reminiscent of pine needles created by changing orientation of pattern in alternate rows, giving a mirrored effect. Called “wave plaiting” (青海編み seikai ami) when same orientation used for every row. |
| 12. | Plover Plaiting              | 千鳥編み chidori ami, 千鳥掛け編み chidori gate ami, 編みすがり ami sugari  
Type of mat plaiting in which each row is supplemented by two fine strips that undulate and cross one another as they zigzag above and below horizontal strips. Creates delicate crosses resembling tiny bird tracks on sand, hence the name. |
| 13. | Square Plaiting              | 四つ目編み yatsume ami  
Type of simple plaiting with balanced vertical and horizontal elements. Often results in openwork because of stiffness of material. Can be used for base or walls of basket. Variation formed by changing width of vertical and/or horizontal strips. |
| 14. | Thousand-Line Construction   | 千筋組 sensui gumi, 椀目編み kushime ami  
Technically not plaiting. Involves placing stiff elements in parallel rows and securing them using any of a variety of methods. Also “parallel construction” (組 kumi). |
| 15. | Twill Plaiting               | 縄代編み qiro ami  
Diagonally oriented technique in which strips of one direction float over multiple strips of other direction in regular pattern. Variations made by changing orientation or length of floats, or width, color, or texture of strips. |
| 16. | Twining                      | 縄目編み nawame ami  
Literally “rope plaiting.” Fine strips—often three or four—are alternately lifted up and around all the others and inserted into vertical elements in staggered twill pattern. Distinctive diagonal rope-like effect. Stable, suitable for openwork. |