# KAMAKURABORI

# A Traditional Craft of Timeless Beauty

Kamakurabori is known for its rich, lustrous finish and hardy, durable characteristics, making these products as practical and esthetically pleasing to use today as they were centuries ago. The craft has its birth in the Kamakura Period, when Buddhist sculptors attempted to imitate the carving and lacquering techniques of Chinese artisans. Over the centuries the craft has been perfected to reflect uniquely Japanese sensibilities and has become a useful and esthetically pleasing art form enjoyed by people everywhere.

## THE ANCIENT CRAFT OF KAMAKURABORI

### Preparing the materials

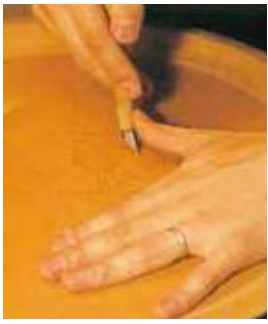
The wood used to make Kamakurabori comes from the katsura tree. After harvesting, it is cured and then line inking, cut, coarse lathed, weathered, and finally, carved and lacquered.

### Many raw wood materials are used

A wide variety of wood materials are lathed, joined, hollowed and rooted and other cutting techniques are applied to create this versatile art form.

### Line-inking

Designs and patterns that will later be carved are sketched in ink onto translucent sheets of Japanese paper and then the traced images are transferred onto dampened wood surfaces by rubbing.



### Preliminary carving

The artist begins the formation of the piece by carving along the base lines of the patterns that have been transferred onto the wood surface, creating dimension, angle and perspective.

# THE HISTORY OF KAMAKURABORI

## Kamakura Period

### Zen and the Origins of Kamakurabori

During the Kamakura period (1185-1333), with the migration of Zen Buddhism to Japan came many kinds of art and crafts from China, and particularly, plates and bowls and incense boxes created using a technique known as “Tsuishu”. These intricately carved wooden pieces were lacquered with many coats of raw tree sap and were highly prized for their beauty and their durability. Buddhist sculptors of the period attempted to duplicate the technique by carving and lacquering Japanese wood plates and bowls and through their efforts, the art of Kamakurabori was born.

Maezukue [table]
Kencho-ji Temple

Shumidan [altar]
Kencho-ji Temple

## Muromachi Period

### Kamakurabori made as a Buddhist Altar Equipment

Many masterpieces were created during the Muromachi period (1333-1573). Representative examples are Gurimon-daikogo [incense case] from Engaku-ji Temple (in Kanagawa), Shishibotanmon-kendai [inkstone box] from Kamakura Kokuhoukan Museum(in Kanagawa), and Tsubakimon-oi [baggage carrier] from Chuson-ji Temple (in Iwate).
Perhaps the first use of Kamakura-mono, literally “things made in Kamakura” to refer to this particular art form, comes from the diary of Sanetaka, an imperial court noble at the time.

Gurimon-daikogo
[incense case]
Engaku-ji Temple

Shishibotanmon-kendai
[inkstone box]
Kamakura Kokuhoukan Museum

### Rough carving

Special, flat-headed knives are used to chip away portions of the surface to create a relief pattern, exposing the designs to be created by the artist.

### Finish carving

Finish carving is added to the design to produce the trademark gouging effect known only to Kamakurabori art pieces.

### Lacquering (foundation coating)

A raw sap "Urushi" base lacquer coat is applied to the freshly carved piece, where it soaks into the wood and forms a rich undercoating for the final lustrous finish.

### Lacquering

Following repeated coatings of the base lacquer coat, the surface is polished using fine-grained charcoal or other abrasive that creates a smooth surface.

## Edo Period

### Generalization of the Tea Ceremony and Kamakurabori

During the Edo period (1603-1868), with the spread of the tea ceremony, tea containers, incense containers, and incense trays became more in demand.
Around this time, highly elaborate Makie (gold lacquerware) was developed, but the elegant Kamakurabori was also loved by people, and the name of Kamakurabori was clearly mentioned in the guide book for tea utensils called “Manpou Zensho” published in 1694.
During this period, Kamakurabori works with the taste of Edo culture, such as “wabi”, “sabi”, and “iki”, were created.

Botanmon-chaire[tea caddy]
Kamakurabori Museum

Mizudorigata-kogo[incense case]
Kamakurabori Museum

## Meiji and Taisho Period

### Kamakurabori as a daily life craft

In 1868, the first year of Meiji, due to the anti-Buddhist movement that expanded under the new government's policy to separate Buddhism and Shintoism, Buddhist sculptors lost their jobs.With this as a turning point, Itsuki Goto and Kenzan Mitsuhashi were the only two Buddhist sculptors who found the way to survive by making Kamakurabori for daily use crafts. In 1889, with the opening of the Yokosuka railway line, Kamakura flourished as a holiday resort. Kamakurabori began to be made for daily necessities and souvenirs, and developed into the modern style.

Rengemon-kumotsuzara [plate]
Private collection

Arisugawa-kikumon-kobako [small box]
Private collection

### Lacquering

A black lacquer is then applied in two coats followed by polishing with fine abrasives.

### Lacquering

A vermilion lacquer is then applied to create the outer layer, a reddish, highly translucent finish unique to Kamakurabori.

### Lacquering

To temper the finish of Kamakurabori lacquer ware, powdered wet oat material is applied to give the finish a unique patina.

### Lacquering (final polishing)

At the final stage, a thin layer of lacquer is applied and then wiped off, followed by a final polishing with powdered oat material. This process is repeated until the perfect finish is achieved.

## And to the Mode

During the Showa period (1926-1989), life has become more comfortable after a period of high economic growth. Kamakurabori became to be loved by many people as the warmth of handwork was sought in contrast to mass-produced industrial products.
It was also popular in hobby culture classes, and enthusiasts were spreading nationwide. In 1979, it was designated as a production area for a traditional craft by the Minister of International Trade and Industry at the time. Since then, training successors and creating new products have been actively carrying out mainly by Traditional Kamakurabori Business Cooperative Association.

# Wishes for the Future of Kamakurabori

Japan has many wonderful classic works of Kamakurabori.
The works created by craftspeople of each era and intended to be passed on to future generations have a strong appeal to the audiences.
However, we should not just be satisfied with such works. Unless today's craftspeople living in tradition read the trends of the times and evolve to suit them, the long-lasting history is doomed to disappear.
We have a strong desire to seriously consider the originality and techniques of our predecessors and pass on the tradition of Kamakurabori to future generations.
We believe that creating new products in line with the times is the path to the future.

## 1 Kamakurabori Kougeikan
managed by Traditional Kamakurabori Business Cooperative Association

Kamakurabori Kougeikan sells Kamakurabori, offers custom-made & lacquered Kamakurabori, sells tools and materials, and offers hands-on Kamakurabori workshops (reservations required).
A Kamakurabori craftsperson is available at the Kougeikan every Saturday afternoon to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact for more information.

- Address : 3-4-7, Yuigahama, Kamakura, 248-0014
- TEL : 0467-23-0154 (FAX:0467-23-9816)
- Access : 10 min walk from JR Kamakura Sta./ 1 min walk towards the sea from Enoden Wadazuka Sta.

## 2 Kamakurabori Assembly Hall

This is a comprehensive facility for Kamakurabori built along the Wakamiya-oji Avenue.
Shop, Cafe and Gallery on 1F,
Kamakurabori Class on 2F and 4F,
Kamakurabori Museum on 3F.

- Address : 2-15-13 Komachi, Kamakura, 248-0006
- Access : 5 min walk from JR Kamakura Sta. / Enoden Kamakura Sta.

### ☐ Kamakurabori Museum

This museum introduces Kamakurabori, a traditional craft with 800 years of history. You can see approximately 50 works from the Muromachi period to the present day, as well as videos of the production process.Hands-on workshops (no reservation required) are held on the first and fourth Saturday of every month.

- TEL : 0467-25-1502

### ☐ Kamakurabori Class

Kamakurabori classes are held every day. Even a beginner can enjoy learning carving with careful instruction.

- TEL : 0467-25-1500

### ☐ Shop & Cafe "Guri"

The shop sells original desing vessels and Kamakurabori products made by craftspeople, and the cafe serves meals using Kamakurabori vessels.

- TEL : 0467-33-5751 ( Cafe reservation TEL: 070-8977-5751 )

# KAMAKURABORI

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This logo is used to indicate Japanese traditional crafts designated by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan.

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