

茶碗



Chawan (tea bowl)

The humble tea bowl is designed to be used in a tea ceremony. Cupped in two hands you should feel the contrast between the rough, unpolished glaze (barium blue) on the outside, and the shiny, more tea friendly Snowflake Blue (made from a mixture of Tenmoku and Bright Blue) on the inside. The lip, running down the side is an overglaze of Ilmenite (titanium ore suspended in clear glaze). The Ilmenite chemically combines with the Barium blue to form all sorts of random colours. The lip of the pot should be smooth where it meets the lip of the drinker. On the bottom is a cartoon of myself and a unique number 17.21 which means this was the 21st pot I made in 2017. The bottom of the box is also numbered in a similar fashion, so this the 2nd box made in 2017.

The box is sealed with traditional red sealing wax. This reflects the Japanese red seal that is used on all documents and pottery boxes as an identifying mark. Only the owner of the box may break the seal

Tea ceremony is a blend of two principles, *sabi* and *wabi*. "Wabi" represents the inner, or spiritual, experiences of human lives. Its original meaning indicated quiet or sober refinement, or subdued taste "characterized by humility, restraint, simplicity, naturalism, profundity, imperfection, and asymmetry" and emphasizes simple, unadorned objects and architectural space, and celebrates the mellow beauty that time and care impart to materials. "Sabi," on the other hand, represents the outer, or material imperfection of life, also the original nature of things. Zen Buddhism has been an influence in the development of the tea ceremony. The Japanese tea ceremony is a harmony of nature and self-cultivation, and enjoying tea in a formal and informal setting. The Japanese tea ceremony developed as a "transformative practice", and began to evolve its own aesthetic, in

particular that of "sabi" and "wabi" principles. Understanding emptiness was considered the most effective means to spiritual awakening, while embracing imperfection was honoured as a healthy reminder to cherish our unpolished selves, here and now, just as we are – the first step to "satori" or enlightenment

An 11th-century resident of Fujian wrote about the Jian tea wares:

"Tea is of light colour and looks best in black cups. The cups made at Jianyang are bluish-black in colour, marked like the fur of a hare. Being of rather thick fabric they retain the heat, so that when once warmed through they cool very slowly, and they are additionally valued on this account. None of the cups produced at other places can rival these. Blue and white cups are not used by those who give tea-tasting parties."

Stoneware tea bowls of this type have been made in Japan for centuries, but became a national obsession from the beginning of the 20C. The Mingei movement was formed by Hamada and Yanagi Soetsu, and was meant to be a return to handmade crafts. Hamada believed there were only three important measures of a pot:

1. Function - a pot is not a sculpture, whose purpose is to be looked at, but it should serve a purpose, such as holding water, or supporting chop sticks.
2. Beauty - it should be beautiful to look at and to touch.
3. Repeatable - it should be possible and practical to make it again and again.

Needless to say, it is irrelevant who made the pot, and so, to this day, these pots do not bear the makers name on the bottom. Although Hamada died in 1998, his son, and grandson continue to make stoneware in the Mashiko pottery where it all started. In order to establish provenance, and to add to the ceremonial aspect of the tea ceremony, these pots now come in pine boxes. The name of the maker and the pottery are put on the box, often with a Japanese red seal to mark its authenticity. In Japan, much emphasis is put on the wrapping, and all presents are always wrapped. So the tea bowl comes in a box, which has a cord tie, then a cloth wrapper. All very elaborate.

Japanese is written in 4 scripts. Katakana and Hiragana are the two main ones used to represent syllables. My name Major is

メジャー

in Katakana (roughly "Mei Jah"). It would not be normal to write a name in Hiragana, but it can

be done. Then there is Kanji, or the traditional characters. 主要 is Major (as in Major General) in Kanji. Japanese also use the Romaji alphabet, so if they do not want to translate a western word, they will just use the Romaji version (for instance IBM will appear just as it does in the west). On 3 sides the box has "Major" in Katakana, Kanji, and Romaji.

Major Lester

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