

# JAPAN'S MONOZUKURI: *Creating Hidden Lifestyle Gems*

IN A WORLD SATURATED WITH DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS AND FAST FASHION, JAPAN IS REDEFINING MODERN CONSUMER GOODS WITH EXCEPTIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

**J**apan's *monozukuri* philosophy—"the art of making things"—elevates everyday items. Rooted in craftsmanship, quality and innovation, it seamlessly merges beauty and function. Whether camper van conversions or artisanal jewelry, every creation reflects quiet luxury and rich heritage. In a world dominated by mass production, these hidden gems invite us to rediscover artistry in life's simplest moments.

Japanese lifestyle companies, like SJ Jewelry, exemplify this dedication to excellence. Known for impeccable craftsmanship, SJ Jewelry sets a gold standard. As President Tadao Kawamura explains, "There's a mark inscribed on our Kihei chains proving that this has been certified as pure 18-karat gold. The mark is also accompanied by the Japanese flag as proof of the official guarantee by the Ministry of Finance." These quality assurances establish trust globally, setting SJ Jewelry apart from mass-produced alternatives.

Yet, Japanese lifestyle is more than just superior quality—it is an intricate blend of tradition and cultural exploration. Apparel company Seilin & Co. embodies this, weaving international

ideas with traditional crafts to create distinctive expressions of culture. "We value the way the intersection of cultures brings about a synergistic effect," says President Sohkoh Tarumi. This collaborative spirit not only preserves heritage but also pushes the boundaries of innovation.

This same spirit drives manufacturers like Toy Factory, a leading motorhome maker. By blending luxury manufacturing techniques with European partnerships, the company brings unique experiences to Japanese consumers. "We incorporate the essence of motorhomes from around the world, carefully selecting Europe's top luxury brands to introduce to the Japanese market," says President Akifumi Fujii. "We offer full support for newcomers to the imported motorhome lifestyle."

Similarly, home living goods manufacturer Oka is turning innovation into global success with its CARARACA bath mat. The firm's thoughtful design process ensures broad appeal, proving how Japanese ingenuity can resonate globally. "To overcome the challenges posed by Japan's changing demographics, we need to turn our attention to the international market," says President Yohei Oka.



1. X Plus: Jute bags 2. Gold Flag: Bust and Face Serum 3. MegaHouse logo

Capturing international customers is no easy feat, but companies like Fits Corporation, a cosmetics brand, are redefining the approach. Through creative collaborations with popular culture, Fits transforms fragrances into keepsakes. "These collaborations allow people who don't typically wear perfume to connect with fragrances in meaningful ways," explains President Yasuhiro Togashi.

Together, these companies represent the evolution of Japanese manufacturing—a new luxury combining domestic artistry with global inspiration, crafted with the care and skill that define Japan's enduring legacy.

## GOLD FLAG'S UNSEEN

### *Virtues of Fashion*

GOLD FLAG CO., LTD. REVOLUTIONIZES INNERWEAR WITH UNMATCHED CRAFTSMANSHIP, INNOVATIVE DESIGNS AND IMPECCABLE CUSTOMER SERVICE, DISTINGUISHING ITSELF IN AN AGE OF FAST FASHION.

*By Bernard Thompson, Sasha Lauture and Daniel de Bomford*



**S**ince the firm's founding in 1991, Gold Flag has set itself apart by providing unmatched care in the process of designing and fitting innerwear across all its brands, including Bradelis New York.

President Akiyo Hirakubo says the company's spirit is to pay attention to detail and place importance on the invisible, fostering appreciation of hidden virtues that are often overlooked.

"We train our staff in *omotenashi*, knowledge of our products and the fitting techniques. In fact, we spend 600 hours on training for new hires," Hirakubo says.

Furthermore, Gold Flag invests significant time facilitating its staff's continuous improvement through its "star program," in which it takes more than five years to earn three stars.

This attention to detail is also fundamental to the company's designs, with Gold Flag holding 15 patents for creations that are both stylish and comfortable, including a unique wireless shaping bra.

"Every product we design incorporates some level of shaping functions," Hirakubo says.

The Gold Flag staff aren't just selling products; they provide a service, hospitality and counseling. The result is often a "wow" and always a happy customer.

"If a customer has any concerns, we can provide innerwear that can give her confidence," the president says.



**"All our products are born from the customers' voices."**

**Akiyo Hirakubo**

President, Gold Flag Co., Ltd.

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# MegaHouse: Toys that Play Big

**BANDAI NAMCO**

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MegaHouse reinvents toys and collectibles, blending precision, playfulness and global appeal.

*By Sasha Lautre and Bernard Thompson*



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MegaHouse Corporation isn't your average toy company; it's a powerhouse of creativity, innovation and global ambition. Founded in 1962, this Japanese juggernaut excels in figures, collectibles, toys and licensed merchandise, blending intricate craftsmanship with playful imagination.

Take MegaHouse's recent Mega Cat Project, a wildly popular figure line reimagining beloved characters like Naruto and One Piece as adorable feline companions. It's a concept so irresistible that it's sold out across borders. "The key is reflecting the entire world or concept of a character, not just creating precise figures," says Akihiro Sato, president and CEO of MegaHouse Corporation.

MegaHouse's collaborations with IP giants like Sanrio have birthed quirky gems, including a deformed Rubik's Cube. Or consider the world's smallest Rubik's Cube, which was sold as a limited-edition product for much of 2024—at just 5mm wide and fully functional, it's a marvel of Japanese microfabrication. "Our partners' high production technology allows us to push boundaries while maintaining exceptional quality," Sato explains.

The company is also tapping into the international e-commerce boom through its Megatrea Shop and Premium Bandai, serving fans from Japan to the U.S. "The kawaii [cute] concept resonates worldwide, even with unexpected demographics," notes Sato, referencing the Lookup figures that have charmed men and women alike.

With its eyes set on sustainability and global expansion, MegaHouse is building a future where passion drives every project—and every product tells a story.

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**"Passion drives every figure we create."**

**Akihiro Sato**  
President & CEO,  
MegaHouse Corporation



## BREAKING THE MOLD, One Toy at a Time

THE INNOVATIVE TOY AND GAME MAKER IS GOING GLOBAL WITH BIG DREAMS.  
*By Paul Mannion and Cian O'Neill*

**X** PLUS isn't just in the business of toys and games—it brings joy to people's lives and brightens their world. "Our mission is to be 'the company of the world, by the world, for the world,'" says Takao Ohashi, chairman and CEO. And nowhere is this mission clearer than in the company's passion for crafting products that resonate globally.

Originally an apparel company, X PLUS pivoted to focus on lifestyle goods and has since carved out a niche in the collectibles and gaming markets. The company's Shonen-RIC e-commerce platform is a treasure trove of beloved characters, including intricately designed Godzilla figures that delight fans worldwide. Meanwhile,

its foray into gaming, starting with Smelter, embraces simplicity and creativity, producing indie games that prioritize fun over flash.

"Gaming is evolving," Ohashi notes, "but we focus on creating leisure-time experiences. We want our games to help people relax."

With a subsidiary in Texas already importing products from beloved Japanese intellectual properties to the U.S. and its game development hub in Saga, Japan, X PLUS is growing fast. Not content to stop there, the company is investing in environmentally friendly jute-based products, cutting-edge 3D modeling and even artificial intelligence (AI) tech, including avatars.

"By 2036, I see X PLUS as a truly global player," Ohashi shares. "And maybe my AI avatar will handle 80 percent of my work!"



**"Our philosophy is honesty, sincerity and creativity."**

**Takao Ohashi**  
Chairman & CEO,  
X PLUS Company Limited



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# SEILIN: CRAFTING BEAUTY *Across Cultures*

FASHION FIRM SEILIN & Co. BLENDS TRADITIONAL JAPANESE ARTISTRY WITH GLOBAL INFLUENCES TO CREATE DESIGNS THAT CONNECT CULTURES AND EMPHASIZE BEAUTY.

By Cian O'Neill

**A**esthetic innovation is key in the fashion world, and Japan's Seilin & Co. is dedicated to improving people's lives through the beauty of its creations. At the heart of its philosophy lies a deep commitment to crafting designs that resonate with people on a personal level.

The company's approach to fashion is influenced by Japan's history of cultural exchange. After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese society gravitated towards Western influences, blending these with traditional values. Seilin President Sohkoh Tarumi explains that just as the Sony Walkman redefined how people interacted with music, Japanese fashion designers have long enhanced Western concepts by creating unique interpretations that are often admired by the very cultures that inspired them. This is seen in Seilin's Hollywood Ranch Market brand of eco-friendly casual wear, which takes the best of American and Japanese style and craftsmanship. "We value the way the intersection of cultures brings about a synergistic effect, revitalizing both countries," Tarumi says.

This philosophy of cross-cultural creativity is embodied by the company's two signature brands, Blue Blue and Blue Blue Japan. Blue Blue reflects Japan's admiration for Western culture, offering casual everyday wear inspired by American aesthetics but reimagined through a Japanese lens. Meanwhile, Blue Blue Japan celebrates the country's traditional artistry and philosophy. It embraces the concept of *wabi-sabi*, a love for simplicity and tranquility, and the brand's store at Narita International Airport serves as a gateway for visitors seeking authentic Japanese fashion. As Tarumi says: "Our core spirit of manufacturing is the same for both brands, but the form of aesthetic expression is different."

The company has embraced global opportunities, launching cross-border e-commerce to allow its international customers to purchase its products with ease in a choice of languages and currencies. The expansion has also seen Seilin collaborate with well-known foreign brands such as Wild Things, Brooks Brothers and Lee. The company is always on the lookout for external sales partnerships and agents, especially for its Blue Blue Japan brand, which is easy for foreign customers to appreciate as it encompasses the Japanese essence in its aesthetic expression.

In addition to fashion, Seilin designs a range of care products, offering practical solutions such as an emergency stretcher and GEN refreshing glasses designed with acupuncture-inspired techniques to reduce eye strain. This holistic approach of blending external and internal beauty is key to the firm's mantra: "Never Change Life." "The spirit of 'Never Change Life' is a guiding principle that we value and apply to everything we do," Tarumi emphasizes, adding: "It's not only external beauty that you are trying to create with fashion. It's also the inner beauty that needs to be polished." Through this vision, Seilin hopes to inspire and connect across cultures worldwide with its designs.



**"The spirit of 'Never Change Life' is a guiding principle."**

**Sohkoh Tarumi**  
President, Seilin & Co.



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# OKA: CRAFTING QUALITY

## that Breeds Customer Loyalty

A JAPANESE COMPANY IMBUED WITH A DEDICATION TO INNOVATION AND A DEEP SENSITIVITY TO USERS' NEEDS, OKA CREATES PRODUCTS THAT ITS CUSTOMERS BUY TIME AND AGAIN. *By Sean McBride and Paul Mannion*

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 www.oka-kk.co.jp



**“Japan’s culture of quality manufacturing is our heart and soul—the thread connecting us to our customers.”**

**Yohei Oka**  
 President, Oka Co., Ltd.

**R**

eincorporated in 1972, Oka Co., Ltd.’s origins date back to 1934, when the company began selling hemp rope. Today, the firm prides itself on creating durable, long-lasting products that customers want to buy over and over again.

“Oka is not a big company, but we aim to be an integral part of people’s lives, not only for the happiness of their families, but also for the environment,” President Yohei Oka says.

The company’s flagship product, the kandoryoko bath mat, best embodies this approach. Since it was introduced in the early 1990s, it has sold more than 10 million units thanks to its superior water absorbency and quick-drying properties.

It has been more than 40 years since Oka took the industry by storm, when the company proposed that the bathroom and its contents, such as mats, toilet seat covers and cleaning products, should be in harmony.

This move helped Oka to penetrate the Japanese domestic market and is representative of a corporate culture focused on innovation that continues to this day.

Mr. Oka states: “In our discussions with customers, we realized that many people did not feel comfortable washing bath mats together with their clothing. Also, traditional bath mats were not suitable for use in the dryer because of their non-slip coating.”

He continues: “So we developed CARARACA, a dryer-safe bath mat that uses the same materials as our flagship product, kandoryoko, with a few improvements.”

Oka has announced plans to expand the company and believes CARARACA will be key to the firm’s push to enter the market in the United States. For a long time, the U.S. has been dominated by washer-dryer combinations.

“Clearly, in order to overcome the challenges posed by Japan’s changing demographics, we need to turn our attention to the international market. It is important to find new sales channels for our existing products,” says Mr. Oka. “Through our own factory in Shanghai, we hope to cover all of Asia.”

Furthermore, Oka is eager to develop new businesses. “We believe it is important to diversify our product line,” Mr. Oka says. “There are possibilities in pet and nursing care products, and in the B2B field, there are opportunities in hot spring facilities and Japanese-style hotels.”



# Toy Factory: Innovative Motorhome Solutions

A company known for luxury, eco-friendliness and innovative multi-purpose designs, Toy Factory has become one of Japan's most prominent manufacturers and distributors of motorhomes and campervans. *By Cian O'Neill*



"Our mission is to provide our customers with a comfortable space—not just a means of transportation."

Akifumi Fujii, President, Toy Factory Co., Ltd.

Founded in 1995 as a business specializing in campervan conversions, Toy Factory has grown into one of Japan's leading manufacturers and distributors of motorhomes and campers. Despite operating in a competitive industry, the company has built a solid reputation and gained the trust of an ever-growing customer base.

## Pursuit of Comfort in Manufacturing

Toy Factory's motorhomes and campervans are characterized by their luxurious interiors. Incorporating locally sourced materials such as tiles and fabrics, the vehicles are designed to create a warm and

comfortable space. They boast excellent insulation and soundproofing, showcasing the meticulous craftsmanship for which Japan is known. Toy Factory's products are available at over 400 Toyota dealerships nationwide, offering a new way to enjoy life on the road.

## Continuous Improvement and Customer-Centric Approach

One reason why Toy Factory is so highly regarded in the industry is its commitment to constant improvement. President Akifumi Fujii test drives the company's vehicles himself to identify areas for enhancement. "It's important to address even small issues, improving one step at a time," he says, reflecting his passion for craftsmanship.



Winners of the Camper of the Year Grand Prize with local materials

## Commitment to Environmental Sustainability

Toy Factory places great emphasis on eco-friendly initiatives. From incorporating solar panels to using insulation and coatings employed in Japanese space technology, the company is advancing vehicle design with the future in mind.



FIAT Ducato-based model by Toy Factory



FIAT Ducato luxury interior



LAIKA luxury interior



Donation of multi-mobility vehicles to disaster-affected areas

## Learning from European Camping Culture

Through its "EURO-TOY" brand, the firm introduces iconic European motorhome and campervan brands to Japan, such as HYMER, Etrusco and LAIKA, as well as exclusive Fiat-based models made by Toy Factory. President Fujii views Europe as the leading region for camping culture and aims to incorporate not only the continent's technology and vehicles, but also its lifestyle and cultures. By diversifying its product lineup, Toy Factory offers Japanese customers new ways to enjoy travel.



Spray coating achieving superior insulation

## Supporting Society with Multi-Purpose Mobility

Inspired by the January 2024 earthquake in Japan's Ishikawa prefecture, Toy Factory began exploring new possibilities for its vehicles. For example, a community bus that typically seats six to 10 people can be transformed during emergencies into a mobile clinic, temporary housing or a portable restroom. As part of this effort, the company is promoting its Multi-Mobility Partnership Agreement, which involves lending out vehicles for disaster relief across the country.

## A Dream Collaboration with Disney

Recently, Toy Factory partnered with The Walt Disney

Company to produce Disney-themed campervans. This project began after Fujii emphasized the importance of listening to customer feedback during a Japanese media interview—words which caught the attention of the world-renowned entertainment conglomerate. Plans for additional Disney-themed models are underway.

## Challenges Abroad and Future Prospects

Toy Factory is also actively expanding into overseas markets and forming new partnerships. The firm is particularly focused on the Australian market, where large motorhomes dominate. Toy Factory aims to introduce its innovative van conversion technology to explore new possibilities in the region.



Limited-edition Walt Disney Company 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary model

By proposing new ways of traveling both domestically and internationally, Toy Factory continues to redefine mobility for the future. Its endeavors will undoubtedly inspire many people for years to come.



<https://toy-factory.jp>

# SJ Jewelry: Crafting Global Luxury

SJ Jewelry blends Japanese tradition and modern design to redefine global craftsmanship, leveraging premium materials and expanding internationally with innovative brands like Rugged Mind. *By Paul Mannion and Sean McBride*



"We hope to speed the expansion overseas and create a new era of Japanese jewelry."

Tadao Kawamura,  
President, SJ Jewelry Co., Ltd.

Japan's jewelry industry, celebrated for its meticulous craftsmanship and innovative design techniques like *mokume-gane* and *kintsugi*, represents the nation's enduring dedication to *monozukuri*—the art of manufacturing precision and passion. At the heart of this industry lies SJ Jewelry, which blends tradition with modernity to produce timeless pieces that resonate globally.

A member of the Nagahori Group, Japan's leading jewelry business group, SJ Jewelry traces its origins to the historic Ueno Okachimachi area, known for its long legacy of jewelry-making. President Tadao Kawamura says

that during the Edo Period in Ueno Okachimachi, craftsmen made traditional ornamental jewelry for hair and clothing accessories. "Since then, the tradition has been passed down and has now evolved into Western-style jewelry," he says.

This deep cultural heritage informs the modern artistry of SJ Jewelry, which skillfully merges traditional Japanese aesthetics with contemporary designs.

SJ Jewelry's collection spans a range of luxury brands, each with distinct identities. Nina Ricci Prestige reflects refined bridal elegance inspired by haute couture techniques, while Rugged Mind offers versatile designs tailored to a global audience.



Nina Ricci Prestige

Romantic Blue, another standout, draws on Western traditions, embedding blue sapphires into bridal jewelry to symbolize happiness and love.

Kawamura notes that Rugged Mind has a design that appeals to



Rugged Mind

both men and women. "In Japan, men have conventionally been hesitant to wear jewelry, but with the younger generation, the mindset is now changing. There are also many women who want to wear more of a masculine style of jewelry," he says.

A key advantage for SJ Jewelry lies in its access to high-quality raw materials, made possible by its ties to Sojitz Corporation, which founded the firm. As a *sogo shosha* or comprehensive trading company, Sojitz ensures a steady supply of gold, platinum and other precious metals, even amid market fluctuations. "Our company was initially established as a precious metals department of Sojitz," the president explains. "Recently, the price of gold has risen considerably, but the advantage we have is that Sojitz sources it. As such a large trading firm, they can mitigate the price impact and secure an abundant amount of materials needed for our production."

This material advantage underpins the company's production of Kihei chains, a hallmark of Japanese jewelry known for their durability and sleek design. "All of our Kihei chains have received the 18k gold purity certification mark," Kawamura says. "These quality assurance measures are another reason we are chosen, especially by foreign countries like the Philippines, who make big orders from us."

SJ Jewelry's global ambitions are taking shape as it expands into markets across Asia, including China, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. Kawamura empha-

sizes the appeal of Japanese craftsmanship abroad: "Filipinos have a strong preference for gold chains, and they appreciate the quality of products made in Japan, which is our biggest overseas market. That is followed by Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia."



Nina Ricci

As the company looks to expand further internationally, it sees Rugged Mind as a brand offering huge potential. "Currently, we have been showcasing it in men's magazines, featuring famous models such as Girolamo Panzetta, who is an Italian celebrity popular in Japan," Kawamura says.

Since Kawamura assumed the presidency; SJ Jewelry's sales have grown 2.5 times. This success stems from diversification and a strategic focus on overseas expansion. "When I became the president, I never imagined that our jewelry would be supplied overseas," he says. "But now we hope to speed the expansion overseas and create a new era of Japanese jewelry."



Coin & medal jewelry



Nina Ricci



Romantic Blue

## SJ Jewelry

[www.sj.co.jp/english](http://www.sj.co.jp/english)

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