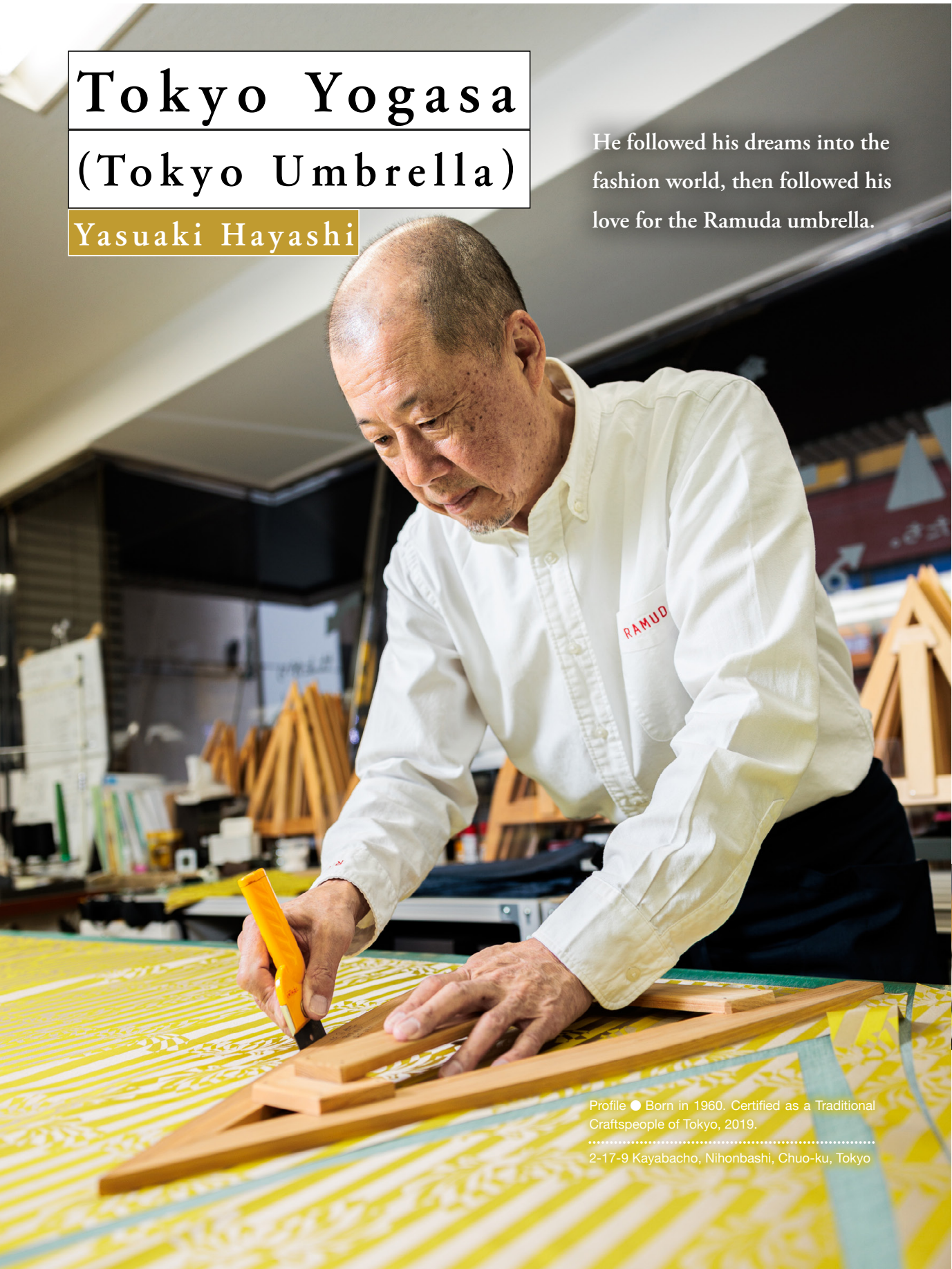


# Tokyo Yogasa (Tokyo Umbrella)

Yasuaki Hayashi

He followed his dreams into the fashion world, then followed his love for the Ramuda umbrella.



Profile ● Born in 1960. Certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, 2019.  
2-17-9 Kayabacho, Nihonbashi, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

## A sense of mission led him on the path to becoming an umbrella craftsman

The Ichihara shop, founded in 1946, sells a wide range of men's fashion accessories and was one of Japan's first producers of fashionable umbrellas for men. Yasuaki Hayashi, the company's director of umbrella making, spoke to us about his career. In sales since he joined the company in 1985, he visited department stores and men's goods stores all over Japan, from Omiya and Yokohama near Tokyo, to Sapporo and Sendai in the north, to Kanazawa on the Japan Sea coast, and westward to Osaka, Kobe, and Hakata.

Mr. Hayashi says that he was crazy about fashion ever since he was a young teen in Ehime Prefecture, when he was enthralled with the Ivy League and European styles that were all the rage across Japan. "I pored over the fashion magazine, MEN'S CLUB, and in high school, I spent every penny from my

part-time job visiting shops in Matsuyama and Imabari. I became good friends with the managers -- fashion was my life."

He was 52 when he left the sales job he loved to pursue a craftsman's career, after one of the makers of Ichihara's Ramuda-brand umbrellas fell ill. "The craftsman was already almost 80. I felt a great sense of crisis about what would become of our umbrellas in another decade. I'd always been good with my hands, so when the company's chairman asked me if I wanted to become a craftsman, I decided to go for it. Really, I just wanted to save Ramuda umbrellas."

His devotion must have come across. At the factory where he spent two months training, the manager himself taught him the entire process of umbrella making. "I don't usually show

anyone this," he said at our interview, bringing out the notebook he used back then. It was filled with small handwriting that seemed to leap from the page with his enthusiasm.

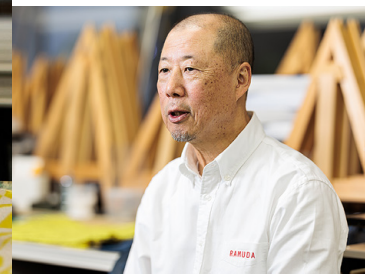
He has continued honing his skills and researching and prototyping umbrellas. The Ramuda umbrella is his ideal. "Our umbrellas feature the *taniochibari* technique, indenting the fabric between the ribs and stretching it to create a valley. The unique curve adds character to the umbrella's silhouette. This requires more fabric than the usual methods, and the fabric's stretch has to be gauged precisely because creating the 'valley' applies tension to the ribs and fabric. This is quite difficult. At first, after a sample I'd made had sat awhile, the fabric would stretch and change the shape of the umbrella." He smiles wryly.



Before making a wood mold, Mr. Hayashi makes many prototypes out of thick cardboard. He writes both the previous and the current measurements on them, so that he can see the process of revision at a glance.

To achieve the ideal silhouette, Mr. Hayashi adjusts the mold to the millimeter, five or six times, and then cuts the fabric, one section at a time to ensure fabric patterns will match. "Umbrella-making is the culmination of my life's work. At the beginning, I felt considerable stress about whether I could make an umbrella worthy of the Ramuda name, but I think I'm finally getting closer to the skills I imagined back then," Mr. Hayashi says with a shy smile.

## Umbrella crafting is a labor of love



"Many of our patterned umbrellas have a feel similar to neckties, don't they? I picture people enjoying them as fashion for rainy days," says Hayashi.



Left: The cut pieces of fabric are sewn together so that the patterns connect. Right: The fabric is sewn together to form a circle, then sewn to the ribs by hand.