

Tokyo Yogasa (Tokyo Umbrella)

Hiroshi Ishiyama

In childhood, he watched his father work with umbrellas. Today, he creates them himself.

A lifetime of pursuing his ideal and the aspirations of his mentors

An umbrella gradually begins to take shape. The sewing machine's rhythmic sound is pleasing. Hiroshi Ishiyama, a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, dedicates himself daily to creating the ideal umbrella, looking to his mentor, Katsumi Sugawara, a master craftsman with over 70 years of experience.

"I had a rather late start as a craftsman," says Mr. Ishiyama, who decided to become an umbrella craftsman only at age 38. His father, Kiyoshi, worked in sales at Komiya Shoten, a specialty umbrella shop in Higashi-Nihonbashi, and their home was filled with umbrellas made by renowned Tokyo craftsmen. But he had never considered becoming a craftsman himself. "At my father's funeral, Komiya Shoten's President said he wished to 'nurture craftsmen who will take on the

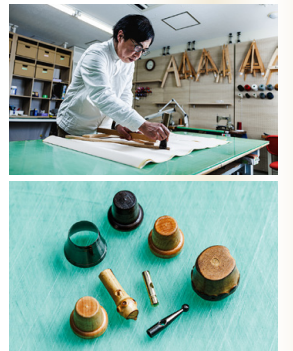
future of umbrellas for the company,' and he invited me to join the effort. I decided to take the plunge and join the shop where my father had worked for so long."

He'd grown up amidst umbrellas, but now he took on serious study under two umbrella industry "legends," Katsumi Sugawara and Shoichi Okunugi. He learned everything from scratch, from the names of the parts to how umbrellas are made. "Center stitching" the fabric to the ribs, "top stitching" the umbrella top to prevent leaking, cutting the fabric... so many skills are involved. But it was some months before he was even allowed to use a sewing machine.

In 2025, sixteen years after his start, Mr. Ishiyama was certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, like his two mentors. "I am very happy and grateful, but it is presumptuous to think I'm

on a par with them. I am still only halfway there. I want to continue to build on each day," he says, quietly expressing his determination.

Mr. Ishiyama now not only crafts umbrellas but is also on Komiya Shoten's staff, helping people with repair and maintenance. He says this has greatly benefited him. "I wouldn't encounter customers directly if I were confined to the workshop. It is truly invaluable for me as a craftsman. I learn how they use their umbrellas, and where the umbrellas break, and I see people's delight when they pick up their repaired items. Many share their thoughts about the umbrellas they cherish. We sell domestically made umbrellas that cost many times more than ordinary vinyl ones. I want to satisfy customers who hope to use their umbrellas for a long time and who bring them for



Top: Fabric cutting. Even a 1mm difference significantly affects the finished product. Bottom: An umbrella is more than just fabric and frame. Assorted small parts are combined to create a single umbrella.

repairs so that they can continue using them."

Mr. Ishiyama's ideal umbrella is one that is beautifully shaped, easy to open and close, and easy to fold. An umbrella that makes rainy days a joy. "I want," he says, "to adopt the outlook of my mentor, Mr. Sugawara, who is always striving to make still better umbrellas."

Inspired by his customers' delight to create umbrellas that make rainy days a joy



With his mentor, Mr. Sugawara. "He tells me 'not to hesitate to point out any flaws' in his work. That teaches me that learning is a lifelong process."

Inside Komiya Shoten. Amidst declining numbers of craftsmen, Komiya Shoten focuses on training the next generation.

