

Tokyo Yogasa (Tokyo Umbrella)

Masako Okuda

Captivated by craftsmanship since childhood, She found her way to the world of umbrella-making. She brings a rich imagination and sensibility to creating original pieces.



Profile ● Born in 1947. Chairman and CEO of Ichihara Co., Ltd. Certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, 2019.

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Drawn to the craft by the desire to preserve traditional techniques

Ichihara Co., Ltd., of Tokyo's Nihonbashi Kayabacho district, is the producer of the Ramuda umbrella brand and a manufacturer and wholesaler of suspenders, belts, leather wallets, and other fashion accessories. Masako Okuda is Chairman and CEO. She is also a craftsperson making Western-style umbrellas.

Ichihara, founded by Ms. Okuda's father, Masayasu, was one of Japan's first stores to stock the coveted European fashion accessories of the 1960s. It also became known for producing well-designed fashion umbrellas for men.

Ms. Okuda has loved fashion since childhood, when she began making her own clothes on a sewing machine. She attended fashion school and then did design and production for a knitting-machine manufacturer. It was at 38, while designing

knitwear and working in the Ichihara office, that she began crafting umbrellas. The industry was facing the aging and loss of its craftspeople, and she resolved to carry on their legacy. She visited artisans daily to study their techniques. "Umbrella-making was a new world to me," says Okuda, "but I'm good with sewing machines, so I understood the key points as soon I was shown them. Craftsmen usually make umbrellas with wooden molds they inherit from their mentors, but I very quickly intuited how to make molds for the umbrella ribs because I'd worked many years in 3D knit design. If you love something, you become good at it, right?" Ms. Okuda smiles.

Ms. Okuda, certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo in 2019, makes one-of-a-kind bespoke umbrellas. She uses a variety of

fabrics, including prized Japanese textiles like *chirimen* (silk crepe) and Oshima *tsu-mugi* (slub-woven silk). "Our molds are of cardboard. Each umbrella has its own shape, and the stretch rate of the cloth naturally depends on the fabric, so it can be challenging," she explains. "But it is a joy to be able to start each day with a fresh spirit. I am very grateful for the support for Ramuda umbrella-making by those around me, including our production manager, Mr. Hayashi."

Ms. Okuda says her goal for the future is "to convey the joy of making things." She explains that "we of course welcome young craftspeople aspiring to become umbrella makers, but we also have classes for children and the general public. We sell umbrella-making kits, and you can make your own sun parasols using recycled hand towels. You



"Ramuda" umbrellas line the shelves. The color and pattern of the fabric, the handle design, and other elements all add a touch of style to any outfit.

can even repurpose plastic umbrellas into table mats. People tend to see plastic umbrellas as cheap and disposable. But if you make something with your own hands, you develop a sense of attachment to it. Even an umbrella can be a catalyst for a feeling of enrichment. We want to convey how."

One-of-a-kind umbrellas to fulfill customers' wishes



Ms. Okuda carries on the traditional techniques of making Western-style umbrellas and teaches classes so as to foster craftsmanship in the next generation.



Left: *Dabo-maki*: sewing the fabric in place to decorate and protect the rib joints. Right: *Rokuro-tsutsumi*: wrapping fabric around the runner that opens and closes the umbrella.