

Noren shop curtains, paper lanterns, banners

Daisuke Katogi

Tsukiji, till recently the home of Japan's world-famous fish market, is in the heart of old Edo-Tokyo. Tsutaya carries the torch of Edo commercial culture by crafting shop curtains and auspicious "beckoning tags" that embody the wish of all businesses to prosper.



Profile ● Born in 1959. Third-generation owner of Tsutaya Shoten
6-5-5 Tsukiji, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

In its third generation in Tsukiji, preserving Edo lettering for the future

Tsutaya Shoten designs and crafts *noren* shop curtains, paper lanterns, banners and streamers, traditional *hanten* (short coats), *noren* (fabric dividers), *tenugui* (hand towels), and *senshagaku*, or dedicatory nameplates, to offer at shrines and temples. Specialty dyers handle the *noren* and *tenugui*, and woodcarvers the *senshagaku* frames. But it is Daisuke Katogi who fashions the lettering and designs that give shape to customers' wishes.

Mr. Katogi does a form of lettering called "Edo calligraphy." The category includes the lettering used for entertainment venues such as revues, *kabuki*, and *sumo*. But Mr. Katogi's specialty is the lettering placed on daily-life items, such as lanterns, dyed fabrics and signs. This is not the usual calligraphy of a few, quick

brush strokes. It is more like a picture. Each size and shape is carefully calculated to embed certain meanings in the design. As Mr. Katogi explains, "Edo calligraphy has thick lines and no gaps. It expresses the wish for a theater to be filled to capacity — no white space that would represent empty seats. Such lettering is seen as auspicious."

Mr. Katogi's grandfather, from Ibaraki Prefecture, trained with a lantern maker in Tokyo's Ota-ku. In 1931, he opened his own store in Tsukiji, where his brother had a fish shop. For decades, orders came pouring in, because the fish wholesalers regularly gave *noren* and "beckoning tags" to the sushi shops and supermarkets that were their customers.

Mr. Katogi's grandparents always told him, "You're

the third generation." He was familiar with Edo writing as a child and helped out with the work by the time he was in junior high. After joining the family business, he developed his skills by studying the lettering of the craftsmen who frequented his shop and the sample books of Edo-calligraphy masters.

"Fewer shops hang *noren* these days," Mr. Katogi observes. "Fish wholesalers used to give their clients white *noren* in the summer, but businesses aren't attentive that way now. Shops no longer join together much to donate nameplates to temples and shrines either. It is sad to see a culture that lasted these hundreds of years being lost in just the past 20 to 30." Still, Mr. Katogi is passionate about passing on Edo culture to the next gen-



Mr. Katogi's smooth, freehand brushstrokes

eration through new projects - *tenugui* towels for the anniversary of his elementary school, T-shirts for music festivals. "I held a workshop at a local community center the other day. People wrote their own names and shop names. Some even wrote the names of their favorite actors!" He laughs, pleased at an instance of Edo culture still thriving in the present day.



"You have to consider the balance among all the letters, so simple ones like the character for 'heart' (心) and 'mountain' (山) are actually more difficult."

Ensuring good luck, to attract lots of customers



Left: These *tenugui* hand towels for Inaricho in Kisarazu City reflect Mr. Katogi's design prowess. The "Ki (キ)" of Kisarazu covers the entire surface, while hidden in the center of the three big letters that say Inaricho is a little fox, referring to Inaricho's namesake fox deity. Right: T-shirt and apron for a music festival