

# THE JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THINGS MADE TO LAST

FROM SLEEP AND STYLE TO WELLNESS AND DESIGN, JAPANESE COMPANIES SHOW HOW CRAFTSMANSHIP, RESTRAINT AND PURPOSE CAN TURN EVERYDAY PRODUCTS INTO LASTING EXPRESSIONS OF QUALITY, TRUST AND DAILY VALUE.

By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson



**I**n Japan, there is an emphasis on the quality and longevity of everyday products, things that some might consider to be mundane. From the weight of a well-balanced pen to the comfort of hand-shaped shoes, Japan values making the ordinary feel extraordinary. Every day, Japanese manufacturers and craftspeople strive to make daily rituals, sleep, clothing and wellness exceptional.

### Wellness, Comfort and the Care of the Body

Rest and comfort go hand in hand with health. Products that are thoughtfully designed can enhance overall well-being. “We deliver the quality of sleep,” Motokuni Takaoka, CEO of Airweave, said. The company emphasizes measurable well-being performance and has developed mattresses in conjunction with Olympic athletes who are more sensitive to small differences. The result of this scientific approach is mattresses that are comfortable and improve sleep quality.

While sleep is restorative, Japan has a long history of wellness through preventa-

tive care. Remedies used for centuries are increasingly being refined by modern science and are delivering tangible health outcomes. EGAO’s signature product, kurozu (black vinegar), is a heritage product used for generations and refined through scientific rigor. “We are able to offer products that feel both familiar and scientifically credible,” President Tadao Kitano said.

Everyday comfort is important for keeping people active. Spingle shoes are handcrafted with a focus on everyday wearability. President and CEO Takahisa Uchida said that comfort is the company’s eternal theme and challenge. “Our work is based on pursuing everyday comfort, continuously and thoughtfully,” he said. That work is based on preserving Japan’s shoemaking skills and fostering the next generation of craftsmen.

### Style That Deepens with Time

Japan’s focus on craftsmanship, continuity and meaning through use is a rejection of modern fast fashion and disposability in modern lifestyle trends.

Bshop focuses on timeless everyday items. Many of its clothing brands ▶

▶ have evolved from classic workwear, functional and reliable, while being stylish. “Our goal with our products is what I would describe as creating the best ordinary items,” President Takeshi Mori said. The company is built around its “Everyday Classic” philosophy, offering a broad range of best-in-class items. When considering international brands, the company asks a simple question: “Has it been loved for a long time?”

Mei Mikami, president of Maple International, points to the quality of Japanese cosmetics brands, which have stood the test of time, some operating for centuries. Mikami said Japanese products are designed for longterm use. “Over time, they improve health, skin and overall well-being,” she said. “This long-term, preventive approach is a major strength of Japanese products.”

### Objects, Spaces and Culture Made Tangible

Japan’s quality lies in an environment and culture that values function as much as aesthetics, seamlessly blending the two into higher-quality products.

HIGHTIDE uses Japanese design to elevate the small everyday tools. Representative Director Junsuke Takeno said that the company’s mission is to create products that are thoughtfully designed and enjoyable to use in everyday life. “Stationery is one of the objects closest to everyday life,” he said. “Because of that, we believe it has the power to enrich daily life in a very direct way.”

Perhaps one of the clearest expressions of Japanese heritage crafts in modern life is Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten. President Aya Sengoku distinguished Japanese craft by its continuity, refined over generations. “Craft must remain alive within contemporary life,” she said. Even something as simple as a dishcloth is a distillation of that philosophy, with its Hana-fukin dishcloth, made from traditional Nara fabric, winning the Good Design Award.

Beyond products, even the spaces in which commerce happens are considered. ONISI President Yutaka Onishi said design works alongside product and personnel. The company designs and fits out retail spaces to a higher standard, complementing the business and creating a competitive edge. “If we’re going to do it, let’s do it right or even better,” Onishi said.

What makes Japan distinctive is its refusal to separate beauty from function, or craftsmanship from daily life. The companies in this feature work in different sectors, but they are shaped by the same philosophy: that quality is built through discipline, restraint and respect for the user. Whether in sleep, fashion, wellness, stationery or retail design, their products are made not just to impress in the moment, but to remain useful and meaningful over time. In a world crowded with disposable goods and fleeting trends, Japan’s most enduring export may be the idea that the things we live with every day should make life better.



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## SPINGLE SHOES: JAPANESE CRAFT MEETS COMFORT

BRINGING CRAFTSMANSHIP AND COMFORT BACK TO SHOES. By Daniel de Bomford and Kyann Edouard

**T**he shoe market is dominated by a margin-first mindset. Shoes are designed for incremental performance gains and manufactured offshore for better investment returns. The spirit of comfort born from craftsmanship is becoming endangered.

Spingle is challenging the status quo with artisan-crafted shoes made in Hiroshima and designed for comfort. Since launching its own brand in 2002, President Takahisa Uchida said the company has intentionally

preserved traditional shoemaking techniques, evolving alongside the market rather than constantly reinventing. “We are not a sports brand,” he said. “Our mission is to carry forward Japanese shoemaking traditions.”

Its sneakers pair Japanese artisan shoemaking with all-day ease. Hand-finished uppers in

supple kangaroo leather, carefully shaped to avoid pressure points, meet durable vulcanized soles that wrap the shoe for flexibility and grip. The result feels polished and comfortable: a sneaker you reach for on commutes, travel days and weekends.

**“Our mission is to carry forward Japanese shoemaking traditions.”**

**Takahisa Uchida**  
President and CEO, Spingle Company



## HIGHTIDE SHARES JAPANESE CULTURE THROUGH STATIONERY

By Daniel de Bomford



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**A**t a moment when people are rediscovering the value of pen, paper and slower forms of creativity, HIGHTIDE sees stationery as a revolution in an increasingly digital world. It is a doorway into Japanese design, rituals and the pleasure of well-made objects.

Representative Director Junsuke Takeno says the company’s stores were built to introduce handwritten culture while offering a broader encounter with Japan through tools people can use every day. This idea is gaining momentum as stationery com-

munities and festivals grow in cities such as New York, reflecting a wider appetite for writing, journaling and tactile self-expression.

For Takeno, the appeal begins with quality and design, hallmarks long associated with Japanese stationery, but it extends further. A notebook, pen case or desktop object can add character to ordinary routines. In that way, the company’s stores invite customers to discover Japanese culture not as spectacle, but as something personal, practical and lasting.



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Bshop Hannam Flagship Store

# Bshop BLENDS COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND COMMERCE

BSHOP ENRICHES DAILY LIFE WITH HIGH-QUALITY EVERYDAY FASHION AND LIFESTYLE GOODS, FINDING THE “BEST OF THE ORDINARY,” AUTHENTIC ITEMS THAT CARRY UNIVERSAL VALUE.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Kyann Edouard

**F**inding joy in the mundane, day-to-day activities is a powerful force for wellness. The softness of your favorite sweater and the confidence that comes with your favorite outfit as you step into another day can enrich your life like a good night’s sleep or a perfect cup of coffee. This is the foundation of Bshop and its concept, “everyday classic.” Founded in Kobe in 1993, Bshop supplies apparel and lifestyle goods that embody “the best of the ordinary,” emphasizing simplicity and functionality and being entwined with daily life.

It’s this humble philosophy and authenticity that President Takeshi Mori said is responsible for the brand’s timeless appeal. “We focus on items that are not heavily influenced by short-term fashion trends,” he said. To Bshop, clothes are a practical tool that support everyday living.

“When we consider whether an international brand fits our Everyday Classic philosophy, one important criterion is whether it is something that has been loved for a long time,” Mori said. Brands like DANTON and ORCIVAL from France, and LABOUR AND WAIT, Gymphlex and Brady from the United Kingdom, carry decades of legacy and have become part of everyday life. Within Bshop stores, these brands offer a variety of styles, from functional sportswear to casual European chic and heritage workwear. Bshop’s group company, BOY’S CO., LTD, acts as a distributor and maintains licensing agreements with several international labels and develops and produces products tailored to emerging needs.

Beyond fashion, Bshop aims to enrich life, as embodied by its HOLIDAY HOME, a community consisting of a hotel, THE NORTH FACE and Bshop stores, and restaurants nestled along the wooded banks of Kumihama Bay in Kyoto Prefecture. Tranquil nature surrounds a place where guests can relax, enrich their lives and find their center. It serves as an expression of the group’s vision of an ideal lifestyle, encompassing food, clothing and living.

Bshop operates 43 stores that span the breadth of Japan. The company is using its brands to explore new retail formats, drawing on each brand’s distinct identity in concept stores like DANTON TOKYO. Its ambitions don’t stop at Japan’s shores, though. In 2025, the company opened its first overseas store in South Korea, a move that Mori said the company had been preparing for some time. “Over the past ten years, we have closely watched the South Korean fashion market, and we felt that it was growing significantly,” he said.

Pushing forward, the company is giving back to the community. In 2024, to celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the company hosted a music festival at Kobe’s Meriken Park. The company also partners with J-League club Vissel Kobe. Through its community work and retail brands, the company continues to pursue “the best of the ordinary,” enriching everyday life.



**“Our curation is built around items that have already stood the test of time, and items that will become long-lasting classics.”**

**Takeshi Mori**  
President, Bshop Co., Ltd.



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# WHERE RECOVERY MEETS INNOVATION

AIRWEAVE IS TAKING SLEEP GLOBAL, POSITIONING RESTORATIVE REST AS A MEASURABLE PILLAR OF HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE. *By Daniel de Bomford*



**“In the Olympic environment, sleep is not a luxury. It is a critical part of performance.”**

**Motokuni Takaoka**  
CEO, Airweave Co. Ltd.

**H**ow do you fall asleep? Counting backward from 100? Breathing exercises? Perhaps you just fall into bed, body aching after a long, hard day. Following conventional wisdom, a person should spend about a third of their life sleeping, but what that equation leaves out is just as important: the quality of sleep.

Sleep quality is often overlooked, but it is vital for recuperation, and the foundation of restorative sleep is the right mattress. Airweave is rethinking how we sleep with its science-backed, athlete-approved mattresses and taking it global. Airweave has developed its innovative “airfiber®,” a unique, quick-rebound material unlike conventional coils and urethane, delivering proper body support and high breathability, which are essential to restful sleep. The material is also fully washable and recyclable, enhancing cleanliness and environmental sustainability. CEO Motokuni Takaoka said that consumers are beginning to treat sleep in the same way they treat nutrition and wellness.

The company’s argument is simple: A mattress should do more than feel comfortable for a few minutes in a showroom. It should support the body throughout the night, helping with movement, pressure distribution and temperature control, contributing to higher recovery through sleep.

That belief has shaped the company’s rise in elite sport. Airweave treats ultimate environments and situations that require high-performance, including the Olympics, as proving grounds for sleep technology. The feedback from Olympians helped Airweave bring personalization to bedding and refine its modular, three-block mattress design, which allows firmness to be adjusted by body shape and physical issues for each individual. Airweave’s support of top athletes at Tokyo 2020, Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026 shows how far that strategy has expanded beyond Japan.



Now the company is working to turn the trust gained through these efforts into global consumer growth. Recent moves in the United States point to a brand positioning itself at the intersection of wellness, hospitality and performance. Airweave opened a flagship store and boutique in Santa Monica, a natural fit for a market closely associated with health-conscious living. The company supports top professionals, such as its global ambassador Nobu Matsuhisa, who dedicate themselves to excellence every day. The renowned chef and hospitality visionary, and Airweave, are aligned in their philosophy of innovation supporting well-being. Airweave mattresses have been introduced in all guest rooms at Nobu Ryokan Malibu in conjunction with this partnership.

For Takaoka, the broader ambition extends to the penetration of the innovative “air fiber®” technology beyond traditional coil and urethane. “I want to deliver quality sleep to all people who aim to make tomorrow better.”

# airweave

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# BOOSTING JAPAN BEAUTY ABROAD

MAPLE INTERNATIONAL HELPS JAPANESE BEAUTY BRANDS PURSUE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. *By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Quentin Lange*

As Korean and Chinese beauty, skincare and cosmetics dominate algorithms around the world with trendy novelty, Japan offers something more timeless and refined. Mei Mikami, president of beauty champion Maple International, acknowledged that social media and advertising are important, but many Japanese companies don't fully leverage them. "Japanese brands, which are known for quality and craftsmanship, tend to be less focused on advertising and marketing," she said.

Maple has built a strong network in Japan's domestic market and helps brands promote their products overseas. The company supports companies across the J-beauty sector, with a core focus on skin care, hair care, cosmetics, food, drinks and baby products. The goal is to help Japanese brands build awareness, strengthen their branding and achieve sustainable growth in overseas markets.

The company also has a strong focus on local distribution. "We closely monitor market trends and maintain long-term relationships with our clients, which allows us to propose products suited to specific sales channels," Mikami said.



**Mei Mikami**  
President, Maple International



**Maple International**

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# HERITAGE CRAFTS FROM JAPAN

WITH OVER 500 YEARS OF HISTORY, THE COMPANY IS BRINGING JAPANESE FINE CRAFTS BEYOND ITS TRADITIONAL BORDERS TO A NEW GENERATION OF ADMIRERS OF CULTURE. *By Daniel de Bomford*

Japan is renowned for its culture of craftsmanship. From the Heian era to the modern day, the country's artisans and the quality of its goods represent the pinnacle of technique. Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten introduces the world to the once exclusive world of fine crafts.

After the success of the company's London pop-up store, President Aya Sengoku said that the city is both an opportunity and a responsibility for further cultural exchange. "We must enter thoughtfully," she said. "It must respond to the rhythms, behaviors, and cultural diversity of the city itself."

London is a multicultural city, and Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten is looking for curious, culturally engaged people who appreciate thoughtful design. As Japanese cultural touchstones like matcha gain global prominence, the crafts surrounding them, such as the vessels and utensils, are sought out by those drawn to the culture rather than passing trends. "This growing curiosity creates opportunities for authentic craftsmanship," Sengoku said.



**Aya Sengoku**  
President, Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten



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# EGAO: TRADITION MEETS SCIENCE

WITH INGREDIENTS TRUSTED FOR GENERATIONS AND BACKED BY RESEARCH, EGAO IS SUPPORTING WORLDWIDE PREVENTIVE MEDICINE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Neill*

**T**rust is earned over time, not given. For health, the bar is high and the standards exacting. EGAO has spent decades building that trust, using natural, traditional ingredients backed by science that people rely on for daily health. President Tadao Kitano outlined the company's key strengths: quality, breadth of products and the fusion of tradition with science.

Its signature product, kurozu, or black vinegar, is the perfect example of EGAO's strengths. Kurozu is both a heritage product and a modern supplement, refined through research and customer feedback.

"This integration of heritage and innovation is, in my view, what truly differentiates us in a highly competitive industry," Kitano said. Products like Same-dama shark liver oil contain important natural components such as squalene, which helps support overall energy and vitality by circulating throughout the body, as well as alkylglycerols, which support the immune system.

As societies worldwide age, EGAO presents preventive health care as a necessity. In Japan, kurozu was consumed for generations before preventive health care became a common idea, and that heritage still shapes the company's approach. As Kitano put it, "the national focus will naturally shift from treating illness to preventing it."

EGAO will be instrumental in this shift, creating trusted products from ingredients used for centuries, refining them through research, and delivering them with consistent quality. Japan's aging society gives EGAO practical insight into longevity and daily wellness, and the kind of preventive care that will matter far beyond Japan.



**"We can offer products that feel both familiar and scientifically credible."**

**Tadao Kitano**  
President, EGAO

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# DESIGNING JAPAN'S RETAIL RENAISSANCE

CREATING SPACES WHERE FUNCTION MEETS AESTHETIC INNOVATION. *By Daniel de Bomford*

**I**n a retail landscape shaped by disruption, demographic change and shifting consumer expectations, ONISI Group offers a case study in how Japanese companies adapt without losing their core identity. With roots in apparel wholesale and a business history spanning nearly a century, the group has steadily transformed itself into a diversified platform that connects products, spaces, people and the digital systems that power modern retail.

At the center of that evolution is a distinctly Japanese philosophy. President Yutaka Onishi describes it as the "douse nara" mindset, a belief that if something is worth doing, it should be done better. "If we're going to help a customer, why not make sure they leave with a smile?" he said.

That thinking underpins ONISI's approach to retail today. Rather than viewing merchandise, store design and staff as separate functions, the group treats them as an integrated system. Product quality, spatial design, personnel and supporting IT systems are developed in tandem, creating consistency across customer touchpoints and reducing execution risk for partners.

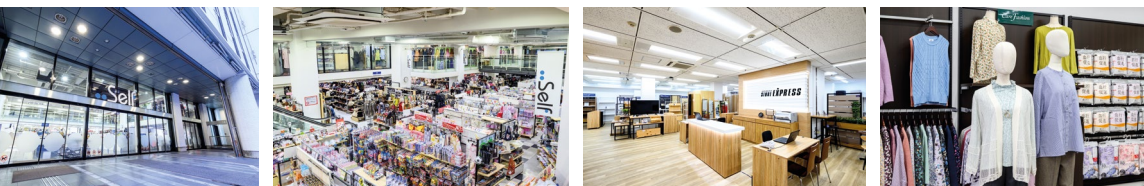
This framework has allowed ONISI to pivot as Japan's domestic market contracts. The launch of TENKENSOU!, its store design and construction arm responsible for fixture design and production, transformed a wholesale-centric business into a national retail infrastructure provider. The same logic now drives growth in furniture, senior apparel, original product development and retail IT services, all designed to meet evolving lifestyle and operational needs.

Looking ahead, ONISI is preparing a vertically integrated SPA model and selective overseas expansion, with an emphasis on partnerships rather than asset-heavy manufacturing. For foreign investors and collaborators, the appeal lies in the combination of operational discipline, cost efficiency and a culture of continuous improvement that positions ONISI as a reliable long-term partner in Japan and beyond.



**"Whether through a store's layout, materials, or data network, design is no longer just visual—it's functional. We see beauty and efficiency as two sides of the same value."**

**Yutaka Onishi**  
President, Onisi



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