In our day-to-day lives, ordinary objects carry meaning beyond their function. A restored gemstone inset in a ring evokes the memory of a loved one; a character on a bag and a book on the shelf are small slices of self-expression. Worldwide, people are seeking out objects and items that resonate emotionally. Unicharm Corporation Representative Director, CEO and President Takahisa Takahara has identified the transformation of products away from commodities as the most important change affecting the market. "Going forward, companies will increasingly be required to deliver a three-dimensional combination of 'functional value,' 'emotional value,' and 'self-expression value,'" he said. From childcare products that incorporate features to help parents bond with children to care products that enable seniors to live with dignity, the company creates value beyond function.

For cosmetics, packaging is the first step to creating a connection between person and product. Ci FLAVORS gives its independently managed Japanese brands access to packaging, distribution and overseas expertise, allowing brands to scale without becoming generic. "Our core strategy and our core capability lie in developing premium products rather than traditional mass products," Yoshiaki Okura, representative director and CEO, said. But value isn't found in the new and novel alone. Kishun Inc. restores gemstones to their original luster, giving old pieces new life. "They are pieces that have already belonged to someone, been worn, appreciated, and passed through different lives and experiences," Shun Tsuji, president and CEO, said. "That history itself creates emotional and cultural value." Specialist knowledge allows the company to connect overlooked stones with buyers in markets where their aesthetic or cultural value may be better recognized.

Japanese Companies Bring Meaning to Everyday Products

Japanese companies combine quality, craftsmanship and culture to create everyday products that support well-being, self-expression and lasting emotional connections worldwide.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD AND BERNARD THOMPSON

MaruzenJunkudo Bookstores Co., Ltd. has reversed its role, from importer of foreign books to exporter of culture. The company is taking Japanese IP and literature abroad and turning its locations into cultural hubs. "We prioritize IP that has a strong affinity with our core products, namely books and stationery," President Hitoshi Nishikawa said. By combining IP with its natural strengths, it differentiates itself in a crowded market. SAC'S BAR HOLDINGS INC. applies the same principle to bags and accessories, where craftsmanship and design become expressions of personal taste. Its private brands serve distinct styles and price points, while collaborations with Japanese characters connect products with memories and fandom. "We want to create a continuous relationship with those customers," CEO and Representative Director Takeshi Kiyama said. By connecting its stores, digital channels and overseas partnerships, SAC'S BAR aims to carry those relationships across markets.

Clothing provides perhaps the most immediate form of self-expression. C.A.B. CLOTHING INC. supplies durable blank apparel that gives brands, designers and individuals a foundation for their own ideas. Its standards reflect a history rooted in military apparel and workwear, with careful attention paid to fabric, dyeing, stitching and finishing. "We believe that details are extremely important, and that mindset continues to guide us," President and COO Yuji Teramoto said. The product's reliability provides the canvas, while the customer supplies its identity. AlphaTheta Corporation brings self-expression into the realm of music. Building on its legacy in DJ technology, the company develops equipment and digital services that make creative performance more accessible while preserving its emotional and intuitive qualities. "The goal is not to replace the artist. The goal is to provide better tools that allow artists to become better versions of themselves," President Yoshinori Kataoka said. By combining new technology with tactile design and human creativity, AlphaTheta helps people create, share and connect through music. Together, these companies show how Japanese consumer products can satisfy practical needs while forming deeper connections with the people who use them. Whether supporting well-being, restoring a treasured object, sharing a story or helping someone express an identity, each places human experience at the center of value. As they expand abroad, they are carrying a broader proposition to international consumers: that the objects used every day can be functional, dependable and personally meaningful.

Kishun Brings Colored Gemstones Back to Life

Through specialist appraisal, restoration and global distribution, Kishun recovers the hidden value of colored gemstones, advancing jewelry reuse in Japan while building international demand for once-overlooked stones worldwide.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, JANANI SAMPATH AND BERNARD THOMPSON

As he buckles the clasp behind her neck and looks over her shoulder in the mirror, he is struck by how the light catching in the garnet brings out the sparkle in her brown eyes. What was meant as an anniversary gift, an old piece refashioned into something new, transcends its life as an accessory and becomes a moment that is the culmination of all the glances they have ever shared, one he will never forget.

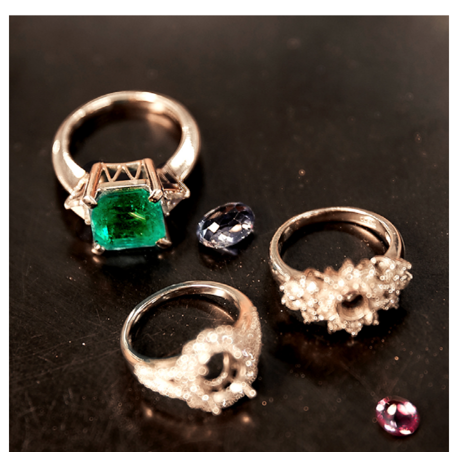
For Shun Tsuji, president and CEO of Kishun Inc., jewelry is an emotional thing. It's in its own category because it can evolve, change and have its own history. "A gemstone can be reset into a completely different design," Tsuji said. "A piece can be polished, restored, repaired, or transformed into something that feels entirely new again." That is where Kishun positions itself: refining, redesigning and giving old pieces new life. This isn't done at the expense of the pieces' history; instead, Kishun adds to their story. "They are pieces that have already belonged to someone, been worn, appreciated, and passed through different lives and experiences," he said. "That history itself creates emotional and cultural value."

The ability to identify, refurbish or restore colored gemstones and the pieces in which they are embedded is a highly specialized skill. Unlike diamonds, there is no global standard by which colored gemstones can be appraised. When Kishun entered the market, Tsuji said that colored gemstones were often discarded as worthless, since few could effectively appraise them.

Japan is the natural fit for Kishun. The country's culture of mottainai, a sense of regret over waste, respect for objects and the use of objects for a long time, is perfect for a business model built around reuse. Furthermore, during the bubble economy years, Japanese consumers brought large amounts of jewelry into the country, resulting in substantial reserves, only a small portion of which is currently circulating in the reuse market.

Kishun controls the journey from discovery to redistribution, combining appraisal, craftsmanship and global sales to extract the full potential of jewelry that the conventional market might overlook. The process begins with Iroishi Bank, through which Kishun acquires used jewelry, colored stones, diamonds and precious metals from individuals and businesses across Japan. Its domestic network gives the company access to jewelry accumulated over a decade, including pieces that conventional buyers may value primarily for their metal content. Its specialist appraisal capabilities are central to the model. Kishun's appraisers evaluate characteristics such as authenticity, treatments, color, clarity, rarity and recutting potential. This enables the company to identify stones that might otherwise be

underestimated or discarded. Kishun then selects the most suitable route to market. Its channels include international trade fairs, sales to domestic and overseas jewelry businesses, its POCKET BY KISHUN consumer brand and the members-only KISHUN AUCTION marketplace. Its growing



overseas network is intended to connect the gemstones sourced by Kishun with markets where tastes and perceptions of value differ from those in Japan.

The principal advantage of this integration is that Kishun can capture value at multiple stages. A conventional buyer might acquire a piece, extract its precious metal and sell the stone onward. Kishun can instead determine the stone's potential, improve it physically, reframe it commercially and sell it to the market most likely to appreciate it.

Now, with rapid demand from inbound travelers and interest from international markets such as Taiwan, Dubai and the United States, Kishun is looking to internationalize. "Our long-term vision is to build a truly global network for reused jewelry and colored stones," Tsuji said. "We want to connect markets across Asia, the Middle East, the United States, and eventually Europe as well."

Cultural expectations around jewelry vary around the world. For example, Dubai's market centers on gold and bullion, whereas Taipei already has a well-developed business ecosystem. "There are many jewelers, wholesalers, and related businesses concentrated in the same area, which creates strong opportunities for B2B relationships and collaboration," Tsuji said.

The United States is becoming one of Kishun's most important markets. Kishun has exhibited three times at JCK Las Vegas, a major international gathering for jewelry buyers, sellers and luxury businesses. "Each year, we are seeing stronger customer response and growing recognition in the American market," he said. "That is very encouraging for us." But Tsuji won't limit his targets to a handful of markets, saying that the entire world is the company's target. Ultimately, Kishun's mission is to eliminate the concept of worthlessness. By taking precious items and giving them new life, the company is building a business model around waste reduction and the creation of new memories.

As precious stones become increasingly scarce, the company creates new channels for existing materials to reenter the market. Tsuji said global perceptions are shifting and people are recognizing the value in older pieces. "Whether it is a gemstone that was overlooked, a piece of jewelry that had been discarded, or value that society failed to recognize, we believe those things can be rediscovered and appreciated again."

"Whether it is a gemstone that was overlooked, a piece of jewelry that had been discarded, or value that society failed to recognize, we believe those things can be rediscovered and appreciated again."

Shun Tsuji
President and CEO, Kishun Inc.

KISHUN

https://kishun.co.jp/

Ci FLAVORS Builds a Global J-Beauty Platform

Ci FLAVORS gives independently managed Japanese beauty brands shared access to packaging, distribution and overseas expertise as the group pursues international growth.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, KYANN EDOUARD AND CIAN O'NEILL.

Every day, people entrust personal care products with their hair and skin. The scent and texture may be immediately noticeable, but consistent quality is what earns a place in their routines. Japan is famous for scrutinizing each of those details, making the country a demanding proving ground for beauty brands with international ambitions. Within this rigorous environment, Ci FLAVORS has established itself as a leading player in Japan's premium hair care market.

Ci FLAVORS works with local distributors and retail buyers to understand consumer preferences, regulations and sales channels. "We are a new challenger in the beauty industry," Representative Director and CEO Yoshiaki Okura said. It complements this with digital platforms that provide another source of market insight. Its Overseas Business Division then helps its brands turn that knowledge into market strategies, giving subsidiaries access to international expertise that would be difficult to build independently. The company is testing opportunities across several regions, with North America and Europe among its areas of interest. Its strategy is to enter markets through partnerships and often starts with established brands such as &honey, which already has some recognition outside Japan.

"We want to become one of the leading global beauty groups representing the 21st century."

Yoshiaki Okura
Representative Director and CEO, Ci FLAVORS.

The company supports this strategy by designing its organizational model around speed. Ci FLAVORS operates as a holding company, but each brand subsidiary has its own brand president and considerable autonomy. Brand presidents can make decisions with the freedom expected of business owners, rather than waiting for instructions from a central management team. At the group level, Ci FLAVORS provides shared services that support the subsidiaries' independence. These include accounting, overseas operations and packaging development. Anker Create, an internal packaging company, helps brands produce decorative packaging at lower cost and in less time. The structure allows creative leaders to concentrate on building their businesses while drawing on the resources of the wider group. To strengthen its platform, Ci FLAVORS is pursuing acquisitions and alliances. Its strategy includes acquiring brands as well as capabilities that could benefit the full portfolio, such as digital marketing expertise. Acquired companies can retain entrepreneurial leadership while gaining access to packaging support, operational functions and international networks. The company is proceeding carefully. Future deals could help Ci FLAVORS expand beyond its current strength in hair care into skin care, body care, fabric care (including fabric softeners) and other categories. "We want to become one of the leading global beauty groups representing the 21st century," Okura said.

Offering Japanese salon-quality care with weightless results, HONEYQUE strengthens hair from the core using honey protein.

Recognized as Japan's No. 1 honey cosmetic brand, &honey provides ultimate hydration through its unique honey beauty care.

*Based on a market survey regarding 2025 'honey-based cosmetics (brands)' conducted from October 6 to October 15, 2025, by Trending Future Research Institute, inc. (Sales share from January to December 2024, based on the &honey series.)

An award-winning Japanese skincare brand, unlabel provides gentle yet highly effective solutions for various skin concerns.

Embracing the concept of "Function with Entertainment," AHRES is an innovative lifestyle beauty brand offering high-performance products with a playful spirit.

Born from the desire to make effective skincare a daily habit, dr365 is a dermatologist-supervised Japanese brand combining advanced technology with gentle formulas.

Japanese Bag Culture Goes Global

SAC'S BAR brings Japanese craftsmanship, private brands and character collaborations to growing international markets worldwide. BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, LISA KAYASTHA AND BERNARD THOMPSON

Fashion is an expression of one's inner self. Quality and thoughtful design are as loud as words spoken, and even a bag can tell the world a little about you. From refined, design-led pieces to your favorite Japanese characters, SAC'S BAR HOLDINGS INC. creates pieces that aim to turn storytelling through accessories into global demand by introducing Japanese bag culture to customers beyond its home market. The company has built an integrated business spanning product planning, manufacturing, wholesale, e-commerce and a nationwide retail network.

Because SAC'S BAR began as a retailer, customer feedback remains central to its approach. Insights gathered in stores help shape products that reflect changing preferences in style, price and function. Its private-brand portfolio includes premium labels ETiAM, kissora and WHITEAGE, alongside HINOMOTO HANPU and effy.

Each occupies a distinct market position, from contemporary leather goods to practical, accessible designs. ETiAM, which has exhibited at Pitti Uomo in Italy, is expected to lead the company's premium international push. SAC'S BAR is also combining bags and travel goods with Japan's globally popular character properties. CharaTra Station stores and collections featuring recognizable characters create new points of entry for overseas consumers while expanding the company's appeal beyond conventional bag retail. Asia is the first priority for physical expansion. A Taiwan office and a distribution partnership in South Korea provide foundations for broader regional growth, while Southeast Asia offers opportunities through established retailers and local distributors. "Our goal is to build sustainable businesses in each market by choosing the right partners," CEO and Representative Director Takeshi Kiyama said.

Through those partnerships, SAC'S BAR intends to promote not only its own brands but the quality and diversity of Japan's wider bag industry.

SAC'S BAR HOLDINGS

https://www.sacs-bar.co.jp/

MaruzenJunkudo Takes Japanese Books Global

MaruzenJunkudo is turning bookstores into cultural hubs, carrying Japanese books, characters and retail expertise across Asia and beyond.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD AND KYANN EDOUARD

From novels by Murakami to manga that is capturing imaginations around the world, Japan's literary culture runs deep. Wandering the aisles of MaruzenJunkudo, the rich stories practically jump from the page with tales of the fantastic and the dramatic. President Hitoshi Nishikawa said that the company traces its history to 1869, when it began importing Western books and goods into Japan.

"The company introduced overseas books and Western cultural goods, contributing to Japan's modernization, particularly among intellectuals," he said. Today, the company is looking in the opposite direction, outward, to introduce foreign audiences to Japanese culture through books and intellectual property. Beginning in Taiwan, which already has a strong affinity with Japanese culture, Japanese IP goods like Jump and Chiikawa give the company merchandise that conventional booksellers struggle to match.

MaruzenJunkudo has taken its model, proven in Taiwan, and is continuing outward to ASEAN, Europe and North America. The company is seeking partners who are familiar with local markets for this next stage of its mission, creating spaces for those who love books.