

# Changing Wind to Sound



## EDO FURIN—WIND BELLS FROM THE EDO ERA

SHINPEI ANZAI

**T**AITO-KU, situated in the older part of Tokyo known as *shitamachi*, is famous as a tourist area thanks to Asakusa, Kaminarimon and Ueno Park. During the Edo Era, this area came to thrive as a center of commerce and culture.

In Taito-ku lives a family that has since the Edo Era continued the hand fabrication of *Edo furin*—wind bells made of glass. Shinohara Maruyoshi Furin is one of only two *Edo furin* shops in Japan. Masayoshi Shinohara, the head of the family, was trained in the proper art by his father, Yoshiharu Shinohara, who coined the term *Edo furin* and was officially recognized as a Preserver of Intangible Cultural Assets by Edogawa Ward and made an honorary citizen of Tokyo.

A visitor to Shinohara Maruyoshi Furin will first be drawn to the brightly colored *Edo furin* hanging in the shop's front display. A closer look reveals images painted on the insides of the glass bells. One drawing might be of a goldfish, often seen at summer festivals in Japan; another of a dragonfly, appearing at the end of summer in Japan; still another perhaps of fireworks, evoking a traditional part of summer in Japan.

One may think that these are simply images of summer, but according to Shinohara esoteric meanings also lie within the drawings. “For example,” he says, “in *feng shui* a goldfish symbolizes prosperity. At the time of its birth, the body of a goldfish is black, but as it matures it turns red. In *feng shui*, this means changing from *yin* to *yang*—negative to positive—a very good omen. A goldfish is thus not so much a gold-colored fish as it is a gold-laden fish.”

Shinohara currently makes about fourteen thousand *Edo furin* a year. Standing immediately in front of a hot crucible, he forms each object by blowing glass. To make the same object in large quantities requires considerable skill and speed, but then Shinohara has been making wind bells for many years ever since childhood. “My body knows what to do,” he says.

As one might expect, wind bells sell well in the summer, but attempting to make enough of them in the span of one summer for an entire year would be

impossible. From blowing the glass to painting the pictures, the entire family is kept busy all year.

*Edo furin* first came to be in an era that had no air conditioners or electric fans. There was a craftsman who made wind bells from glass instead of copper, which were originally created based on ideas from *feng shui*. People thought this suited summer very well, and the glass wind bells became popular in the Edo Era.

Shinohara says the allure of *Edo furin* is that they “change wind to sound.” *Edo furin* have a glass tube suspended within the glass bell so that, when the wind blows, the glass tube sways and a sound is emitted. The mouth of a wind bell is left rough so that each one has its own unique tone.

*Edo furin* have apparently become quite popular among foreign customers as well. A chance to blow glass or to paint a picture is a welcome option.

*Edo furin* are pretty to look at, and some customers say they use them as knickknacks without hanging them. “I guess that’s all right,” Shinohara says, “but in Japan we have the expression *kaze wo mederu*—to enjoy the wind. If you have one, I would want you to enjoy the wind with it.” And with that, he rings the one in his hand. **7**



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