



THE STORY OF

Deco Pro

“Deco Pro,” a design collaboration project, launched in commemoration of **the 100th anniversary (2033) of Tohoku Kogei in Japan**

Tohoku Kogei, established in 1933 and inheritors of the traditional craft of **Tamamushi lacquerware** made in **Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture**, announces the design collaboration project **“Deco Pro”**. Kick-started on the company’s 90th anniversary (2023), the project is a work in progress in commemoration of Tohoku Kogei’s 100th anniversary (2033). **“Deco Pro”** aims to **create new value by integrating traditional techniques with local culture** through collaborations with designers and businesses both at home and abroad.

In each segment of **“Deco Pro”**, we will nurture mutual **respect for the local histories and cultures of ourselves, partnered designers and companies**, while developing products based on the motif of **“history”**. This is not only a fusion of product designs, but also an endeavor to develop an in-depth understanding of different cultures and histories, and create new works together.

This project is a product of **the strong will of our company, Tohoku Kogei, which is only a decade away from being in business for a century**, to pass on traditional techniques to the future generations and develop in new ways. Since reaching the major milestone of 90th anniversary in 2023, we have been taking on **new challenges through “Deco Pro”** in order to further explore the possibilities of Tamamushi lacquerware.

Please look forward to **the fusion of time-honored techniques and innovation, and the future of Tamamushi lacquerware**, a traditional craft that is the pride of Japan.



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DECO PRO FIRST PROJECT

COLLABORATOR:

YO ZEN (CITY OF OULU, FINLAND)

Sharing our proud local history and culture that we cherish, YO ZEN was inspired by Japanese feudal lord and **founder of Sendai, “Date Masamune”**, and our products are designed with him as the motif.

OULU:

THE PARTNER DESIGNERS’ BASE IN FINLAND

Oulu City in North Finland, where the partner designers live, has been affiliated with Sendai City, where Tohoku Kogei is located, **as friendship cities since 2005**. The timing of establishment and history of the two cities are similar; Oulu was founded in 1605, whereas Sendai was founded in 1600. Nowadays, Oulu city is known worldwide as an innovative high-tech hub, with the city’s foundation being based on its wireless technologies as well as the rich nature nearby. Likewise, Sendai city is also a perfect combination between technology and greenery.

The many similarities in the two cities’ history, culture, and people allow trust and empathy to be nurtured between Oulu and Sendai, and we learned many things from collaborating with our kind and loving partnered designers.

DATE MASAMUNE

1. Japanese feudal lord & founder of Sendai city
2. Legacy lives onto this day as part of the local culture and identity of Sendai
3. Local festivals and events centered on Date Masamune (cultural symbol)
4. Establishment of the Date brand that is deeply rooted in Sendai and its spread to other regions of Japan
5. Proud and beloved person amongst locals



©SENDAI CITY



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DESIGNER PROFILE



INTRODUCTION OF THE DESIGNER

Paula Kouri and Kate Salminen are **architects** who were looking for new horizons in the design industry. They both had a love for fashion and they decided to start their own design brand **YO ZEN**.

The founders' strong background and education in architecture is shown in the clean lined designs and well thought out concepts.

COMPANY INTRODUCTION & CONCEPT

YO ZEN is a women's clothing and accessories brand from **Oulu, Finland**. YO ZEN **designs timeless fashion that brings joy to people**. YO ZEN's origin story takes place by the shore of the frozen Oulu river.

Paula and Kate, who worked as architects, noticed a lonely swan gliding in the Oulu River. The friends decided to take care of the injured swan and feed it over the winter. During the spring, the swan strengthened and rose on its wings on a sunny morning. The swan's survival story left behind a beautiful memory and a name for the newly created company as the name sounds like the Finnish word for swan, joutsen.

THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATION FROM THIS COLLABORATION

We loved how we could bring a new perspective and appreciation to the founding story of Sendai. It was a very interesting challenge to think what motifs and designs would interest both the Japanese audience and also tourists looking for a souvenir. The final product **combines modern design with a traditional age old techniques.**

<https://www.yozendesign.com/>



PAULA & KATE





ABOUT US

PHILOSOPHY OF TOHOKU KOGEI

TOHOKU KOGEI Co., Ltd is a lacquerware manufacturer founded in Sendai city, Miyagi in 1933. Since its inauguration, TOHOKU KOGEI has valued its unique spirit of manufacturing which is to make “not only ornamental but useful craftwork”. Our craftwork is not “ornament”, its quality lies in its “usefulness”.

As the only maker that succeeds the lacquering skills of Sendai-born “Tamamushi lacquerware”, we have developed products considering the colours, designs and price ranges that meet the current lifestyles. “Tamamushi lacquerware” was designated as the “traditional craftwork” of Miyagi prefecture in 1985. But we had not worked for the “traditional” title since the beginning. Rather, we have come this far diligently seeking for the current needs of the people in Sendai, sticking to handwork and down to earth business. That, as a result, lead to the recognition of “traditional craftwork”.

TAMAMUSHI LACQUERWARE

“Tamamushi lacquerware” is a Sendai-born urushi lacquerware that features captivating colours and gloss that reflects light.

It was named “Tamamushi (jewel beetle)” since the beautiful colours that change its tones according to the degree of light resembles the wings of the jewel beetle. TOHOKU KOGEI currently produces a wide range of products such as stationary and tableware handy for use in various places and situations, while producing gifts, souvenirs and articles presented to the Japanese Imperial royal family representing the traditional craftwork

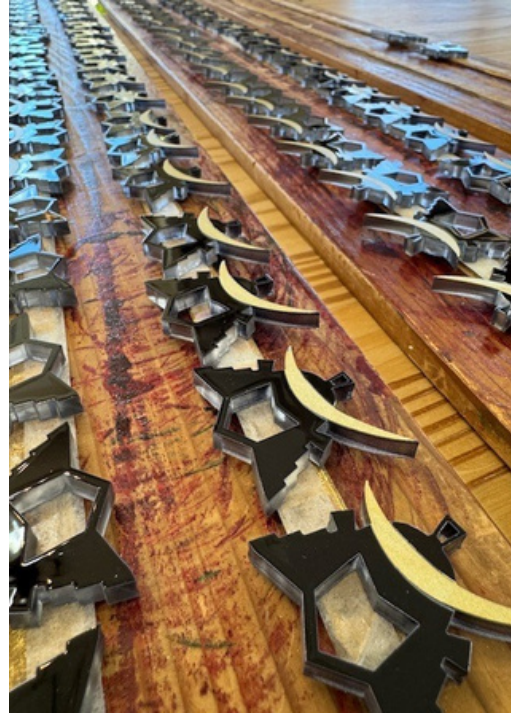


YASUHIRO SAURA



Shogun-Masamune pin badge

UPCYCLED PRODUCTS



Pro Pro

This is an upcycled product made from coating acrylic partitions that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic with Tamamushi lacquering.



Deco Pro Credit

First project: Tohoku Kogei (Sendai, Japan) x YO ZEN (Oulu, Finland)

Product partner designer: Paula (YO ZEN), Kate (YO ZEN)

Project led by: Tohoku Kogei

Product creator: All staffs (Tohoku Kogei)

Chief coordinator: Midori SAURA (Tohoku Kogei)

Coordinator & Advisor: Takako UCHIDA (BusienssOulu)

Communication supporter: Maki SHIBATA (ANMITU)

Technical cooperator: Katsutoshi ITO, Toshinori ITO, Keisuke SHINOTSUKA Kana MASUDA (Industrial Technology Institute, Miyagi Prefectural Government), National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) Tohoku

Supporter: City of Sendai (Japan), City of Oulu (Finland), BusinessOulu (Finland)

Deco-Pro initiator: Miori SEKI (office ayumitairo), Maki SHIBATA (ANMITU), Takako UCHIDA (BusinessOulu), Midori SAURA (Tohoku Kogei)

Special thanks with LOVE: Miori, Maki and Takako