

Made in Japan /// Kayari

WORDS NAOMI POLLOCK
PHOTOGRAPH KAZUHIRO OKUMURA

In Japan, where summers are hot and houses were historically open to the elements, mosquitoes have it easy. So in the late 19th century, a produce exporter invented a simple solution to the problem of flying pests: a spiral of mosquito-repelling incense called *katori senko*. Inexpensive, easy to use and effective for an extended period of time, it's been popular ever since.

Keen to create an eye-pleasing container for these burning coils, designer Shinichiro Ogata of Simplicity Co. teamed up with cast-iron specialists Suzuki Morihisa Studio to produce Kayari. Characterized by Ogata's spare aesthetic, it consists of a saucer-shaped holder with a crescent window for the coil and a slender rod for hanging. "Whether hung on the wall or placed on the floor, it elegantly shows off both the mosquito coil and its smoke," explains Ogata.

A champion of Japan's traditional craft culture, Ogata collaborates with artisans around the country to create products suited to contemporary lifestyles. "Iron has excellent heat and fire resistance," he says. "Especially Nanbu iron." Nanbu, as Iwate Prefecture was known during the Edo period (1603–1867), was once a center of metal manufacturing, but today only two iron makers remain. And the Suzuki Morihisa Studio, founded in 1625, still casts its goods the old-fashioned way.

Kayari is based on techniques perfected and passed down through 15 generations of the Suzuki family. The process begins with pouring molten metal into a wooden mold, where it must be left for a couple of hours until cool enough to handle. It's then removed from the mold, and the surface is filed smooth by hand, coated with paint, and finished with a layer of the same dye that was once used in *ohaguro*, the traditional practice of Japanese nobles to blacken their teeth. When applied to cast iron, its chemical properties cause the metal's appearance to age gracefully—an essential feature of Kayari's timeless good looks.

Tokyo-based American architect Naomi Pollock writes on *Japanese design for the Financial Times, Wallpaper and Architectural Record. Her books include Modern Japanese House and Made in Japan: 100 New Products*

