



"Because cats love Kawara, right?"



A cat house made with traditional Sansyu kawara techniques Presenting Kawara Neko



For further information, please contact us.

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So as roofing materials have diversified, you've been aiming to discover new possibilities for kawara, right?

There's a greater range of different roofing materials, along with a recent decrease in shipments of clay kawara. This project was a good opportunity to explore new kinds of kawara products. We want people to understand the feel, beauty, and superior quality of kawara materials, which is something we don't have much chance to experience in ordinary daily life. The best way to do that is with products that anyone can actually touch and feel. Once a kawara goes on the roof, it is basically out of reach, but we thought that having these cat houses inside homes would allow people to sense the charm of kawara on a daily basis.

And you launched the "Kawara Neko Project," making cat houses from kawara.

The core team of the Kawara Neko Project consisted of employees who love cats. These houses are made for cats, by people who like cats. They considered cats' preferences, such as how they like small, tight spaces and how many cats somehow like the color pink. The fact that kawara are cool in summer and warm in winter make them comfortable for cats as well. There's also a heart-warming scene in a popular Japanese anime with a cat basking in the sun on a kawara roof. At that point, we saw how much cats love kawara, which led to the project's slogan, "Because cats love kawara, right?" Kawara retain heat, which keeps their interior warm in winter. The design is also just like that of a kamakura, compacted snow hut. A major feature of the house is that the top is flat, allowing cats to climb up on the top and sleep curled up.



So you were able to come up with a kamakura-shaped cat house that's appealing to cats. Were any advanced techniques needed to make this design an actual product?

In Takahama City, which is also famous for Oni-kawara, there are craftsmen called "onishi." They are kawara manufacturing professionals with superb skills who hand-craft complex, three-dimensional kawara. You could say that Kawara Neko is a type of handicraft that exhibits the onishi's master skills as only kawara can. First, they chamfer through ground and mold it in a metal mold, then use a special knife to align the cross-sections and cut out the openings. It seems simple, but it's difficult to do. To craft something of this size by hand with that kind of precision requires the onishi's expert skills. Getting just the right amount of pressure on the clay to spread it evenly at every point requires experience and intuition. Applying too much force will cause the clay to crack or split. After this step, the piece is slowly dried for about ten days to prevent any deformation, and then it's fired in a kiln at the high temperature of 1150 degrees Celsius for an entire day and night.

Not only are these cat houses made from the same material as kawara, the uncompromising approach that the onishi take in handcrafting these works also conveys the sincere and authentic approach to manufacturing of this long-established company, a firm that has been in business for over a century.

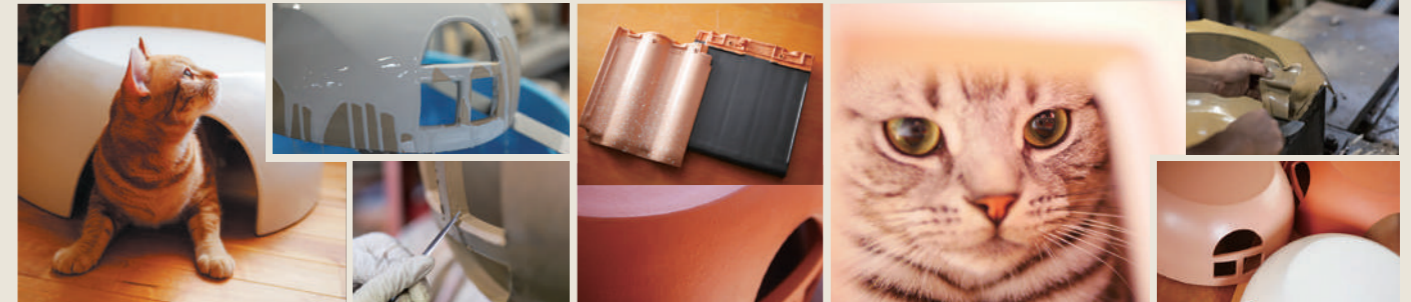
Kawara Neko comes in three colors: "Su," an unglazed color that highlights the texture and expression of the clay; "Shiro," a white color inspired by kamakura snow caves; and "Sakura," a soothing pale pink that cats are fond of. We use glazes with superior coloring made especially for use with kawara. Along with improvements to this glaze, we repeatedly make adjustments to the colorings and other elements to achieve a better match with the shape of the Kawara Neko. The onishi's careful craftsmanship, the high-quality natural materials, and the durability and hygienic properties uniquely particular to kawara, combined with a design exquisitely suited for interior use earned us a great reputation with increasingly high expectations at Japan's biggest pet-related exhibition.

You're also developing new products based on these Kawara Neko, such as kawara with a cat icon and in paw shapes. Coming from a unique, traditional industry, these products are attracting a lot of attention in the pet industry. On top of that, your collaborations with artists exhibits a new direction in your evolution.

We're fortunate to have had Kawara Neko been featured in various different media, and someone introduced me to Mr. Masataka Kurashina, a leading creator. Mr. Kurashina is an artist who custom paints all sorts of three-dimensional objects to order, from famous musicians' guitars and mountain bike racers' helmets to interiors and architecture. I was truly thrilled to hear that such an individual would paint our Kawara Neko. This further increased my desire to show the world Japan's superior craftsmanship, create in the fusion of one-of-a-kind art and our traditional techniques. In the future, I hope to continue with our "Kawara Collaboration," working with artists active in a variety of fields, coming up with unprecedented kawara designs, and create value with new kawara. We also aim to transcend the kawara industry, ceaselessly taking on the challenge of applying kawara techniques in different fields, while at the same time communicating the original good points of kawara.



Cat Houses Made Using Sansyu Kawara Techniques



Founded in 1913, Sansyu Noyasu Co., Ltd. is a 100-year-old company that has been manufacturing Sansyu kawara since the Edo period. Oni-kawara (decorative ridge-end roof tile) artisans make use of traditional techniques with the greatest attention to detail in individually crafting each authentic cat house. This is the origin story of the Kawara Neko cat house, born of the "Kawara Neko Project" under the direction of a cat-loving person.

Sansyu has been known as one of the three major roof tile production areas—Sansyu, Sekisyu, and Awaji—since the Edo period. Please start off by telling us about "Sansyu kawara."

Kawara made since the Edo period are said to have originated in the castles of the Azuchi-Momoyama period. Urbanization of castle towns in various places progressed after that period, and it was during the middle of the Edo period in the 1700s that kawara began to be used for ordinary houses. Sansyu's history as a kawara production area began about that time. As the kawara industry prospered with the development of Edo and other cities, Sansyu (Mikawa) saw especially rapid growth thanks to capability to transport goods by sea. In addition, large amounts of "Mikawa clay, a high-quality clay suitable for kawara, were excavated in Sansyu. This is one reason for Sansyu kawara's reputation for superior quality. There are about forty kinds of kawara in Japan and around fifty kawara production areas nationwide, but Sansyu has been recognized as roofing materials and received the "Regional Brand" designation by the Japan Patent Office. Sansyu kawara account for approximately 70% of the kawara shipped nationwide.

We know that geographically there is a layer of high-quality clay from Tokoname—one of Japan's "Six Ancient Kilns"—to Seto, Mino, and Tajimi. It is in this major region of flourishing ceramics activity that Sansyu Noyasu Co., Ltd. has a history of 100 years as a specialized kawara manufacturer. Among the various different roofing materials available today, what are the advantages of clay kawara?

Kawara have always been a reliable material, capable of helping to protect a house for over fifty years even without any special maintenance. Unfortunately, some may have the negative image kawara from film and video footage of houses destroyed in major earthquakes, but the data verify the safety of kawara that have been properly installed. Clay kawara are vastly less prone to discoloration and other kinds of deterioration than other roofing materials, and they required almost no repainting. Even if cracking or splitting does occur, replacing several tiles is usually sufficient, so there is no need to worry about major costly repairs. What's more, it is also an ideal roofing material with superior breathability, preventing condensation—a major cause of damage to objects—and enhancing homes' durability. The most significant advantage of clay kawara over other roofing materials is their superior heat insulation, blocking heat from the outside to keep homes cool in the summer, and heat retention to keep homes warm in the winter.



They certainly have that "cool in summer, warm in winter" image. Now you have launched a new project, one that leverages these characteristics of kawara. What brought this about?

It started during a meeting with a house builder, when we were asked, "With today's housing projects now allowing pets, might it be possible to create a house for pet dogs built with the same quality as a regular house?" A discussion about how it would be interesting to build a dog house with real kawara, just like human homes, led to talk about how cats sleep so comfortably on kawara, and the pet house project for dogs and cats began in 2019. We started out by getting backing from the prefectural government, which supports traditional businesses' manufacturing efforts, and collaborating with Daido University, which comes up with new and fresh ideas.