



Company Backgrounder

Founded in 1920, Hida Sangyo is one of Japan's oldest and most esteemed furniture ateliers. Since the introduction of "Western-style" furniture in Japan, Hida Sangyo has been at the forefront of furniture design, manufacturing and distribution. Each Hida Sangyo product, therefore, is infused with the company's long, rich heritage and history of innovation.

The company is nestled in a region of the Japanese Alps called Hida-Takayama. Hida-Takayama is one of the most famous regions in Japan for furniture production and Hida Sangyo's products are made from local Japanese materials by local Japanese artisans. Japanese wood craftsmen and artisans are widely regarded as the best in the world and Hida-Takayama craftsmen are widely considered to be the best in Japan. Interestingly, the wood craftsmen employed by Hida Sangyo are direct descendants of the artisans and craftsmen responsible for building the imperial cities of Nara and Kyoto, more than 1,000 years ago.

Over the past ninety years the company has gone through a myriad of changes that have made Hida Sangyo into what it is today.

1920s and 30s

Hida Sangyo was founded by Masanosuke Shirakawa. Mr. Shirakawa was a true visionary, incorporating ancient woodworking skills from Japan's past with intricate new techniques from Germany for wood bending, curving, grinding and wheeling. Mr. Shirakawa also used raw, sustainable materials, such as the beech tree, from the forests of Japan. Many of Mr. Shirakawa's methodologies and practices would later be included in Hida Sangyo's modern processes. For example, Hida Sangyo today remains unsurpassed in its wood bending techniques and continues to take advantage of its surrounding sustainable resources. In the 1920's Hida Sangyo began exporting its products to China and in 1937 started exporting to the United States.

1950s

Following the Second World War, Hida Sangyo resumed exportation of its product to the United States. By 1958, Hida Sangyo's exportation to the United States represented more than 80 percent of its entire export business.

1960s

Throughout the decade, Hida Sangyo began to shift its business towards domestic sales in accordance with Japan's economic growth the 1960s. By the end of the decade, Hida Sangyo practically became a household name in Japan and Hida-Takayama craftsmen were once again responsible for helping to build an Imperial Palace, having delivered a set of chairs for the new Imperial Palace in 1968 (the chairs still reside in the Palace today). By 1969, the company began producing the 'HODAKA' series furniture for the Japanese people, utilizing the technical know-how of furniture manufacturing studied from the West.

1980s

In 1983, the company debuted more contemporary designs with the 'PROVINCIAL' series. This collection maintained aspects of the country-style furniture, with blended details that reflected styles from the original collections of Hida Sangyo.

Early 2000s

Hida Sangyo entered an exciting new period of innovation and design in 2000 when they appointed Sanzo Okada as managing director of Hida Sangyo. Mr. Okada, already a successful Japanese entrepreneur responsible for building one of Japan's most successful big box home store chains, was the grandson of one of Hida Sangyo's earliest investors. For Mr. Okada, taking over the reigns of Hida Sangyo was both a matter of personal desire and familial obligation. Some might even say that it was fate. One of Mr. Okada's first undertakings for Hida Sangyo was to utilize more of the actual lumber for furniture production. Most manufacturers use a significantly small percent of each tree for furniture production, but Mr. Okada demanded that Hida Sangyo use more to avoid waste. It was during this time that Mr. Okada formed a true appreciation for wood in its natural form, and specifically embraced the knotting details of wood. He found them to be beautifully unique. Under Mr. Okada's direction, Hida Sangyo began developing furniture with the knotted wood, a feature which up until then had been considered taboo in furniture production. As a result of incorporating knots into the furniture, Hida Sangyo managed to use a greater percentage of each tree, a significant achievement.

Equally important, the knotted style furniture that came to define modern Hida Sangyo became an instant sensation, incorporating more innovation into a line that in the past had been so ingrained in tradition and heritage. Hida Sangyo's first knotted series, 'MORI NO KOTOBA' (words of the woods) portrayed the company's futuristic vision, and publicly marked its transition toward "eco-friendly", as well as "human-friendly" Japanese furniture.

In his further attempts to create a more sustainable product, Mr. Okada decided to significantly lessen Hida Sangyo's dependence on imported lumber for its production. In accordance with his plan, the company began to primarily rely on Sugi for its lumber, a sustainable resource that was local to Hida-Takayama. But in order to make Sugi an appropriate material for furniture, Hida Sangyo had to develop and incorporate a unique and innovative compression technology into the production process to increase its durability. The result was a brand new furniture material that was at once strong and durable yet feels soft, supple, warm and luxurious.

2004 – 2007

In 2004, Hida Sangyo began a revolutionary collaboration with internationally renowned industrial designer, Enzo Mari. Hida Sangyo and Mari decided to join forces to create a beautiful yet utilitarian furniture collection that is both gentle on the environment and on the people manufacturing it.

In 2005, after more than a year of preparatory work, 20 prototypes for the collection were displayed at the Triennale of Milan in an exhibition called "Enzo Mari and Ten Thousand Million Sugi Trees". The prototypes were critically acclaimed by the design community.

In 2007, the entire collection debuted at The International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York City (ICFF), where it received the highly coveted 'Editors Award for Craftsmanship'.

2008

The Hida Sangyo/Enzo Mari furniture collection, called HIDA is made available in the United States through the distributor AMEICO for fall 2008. At first the collection will be available to consumers through architects and designers. The collection consists of a range of furniture and décor pieces that include couches, chairs, tables, dressers, bowls, etc.

Together, both Enzo Mari and Hida Sangyo begin to actively spread Hida Sangyo's message of sustainable furniture design and "human ecology" throughout the world.

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