



The Pipe Companion



A Connoisseur's Guide
by David Wright



Japan

Pipes from Japan reflect several design influences. Of particular importance is the Danish penchant for clean lines, simple elegance, and smallness in size. The Japanese marriage of bamboo and briar is a masterful stroke and some of the bowls and stems resemble the kiseru (pipes) of earlier times.

Shizuo Arita

Shizuo Arita is a retired company executive who carves pipes as a pastime. In 1975, Arita received a pipe carving kit from his wife as a birthday gift, and two years later, he won first place in a pipe-carving contest. Buoyed by this success, he began selling his pipes at Kagaya Shop in Tokyo.

A self-taught artisan, Arita has learned carving by trial and error. He designs his pipes to bring out the best in the grain and provides visual interest with flowing curves and intriguing stem designs. His shapes are classical with a bit of a Danish feel.

Arita begins a pipe by drawing a sketch and then matches the design to a block of briar. He cuts out the outline of the pipe with a bandsaw and shapes the pipe on a lathe and with metal files. He does not use an electric sander. He feels that the use of a



Arita's pipes have a Danish appearance. From the lines and curves of the shank and the bowl to the final finish, they reflect nuances of Danish makers.

metal file is the only way to create the gentle curves found in his pipes. He uses a variety of materials as inserts and rings on his pipes including water buffalo horn, staghorn, whale teeth, coral, shells, bamboo roots, boxwood, ebony, mahogany, rosewood, maple, and stainless steel.

Arita "designs the pipe to the taste of the smoker." Arita makes between 70 and 100 pipes each year and they retail from \$250 to \$850.

Jun'ichiro Higuchi

Jun'ichiro Higuchi began carving pipes in 1974 when he purchased a pipe kit. He had always admired woodcarving, and during the 1970s he visited with other pipe carvers in coffee shops in Tokyo to exchange ideas.

Today, Higuchi makes about fifty pipes a year. His designs incorporate a natural harmony and balance. Once he decides on a design, he finds a piece of briar that will yield the pipe he wants. He follows the grain as he shapes the pipe on a lathe. He bores tobacco and air holes and then refines the shape with a belt sander, files, and carving knives he has designed himself. His stems are hand-crafted from ebonite and water oxen horn, and he crafts inserts from ivory, horn, and boxwood.

Higuchi makes pipes that have a conservative Danish appearance and resemble S. Bang and Lars Ivarsson pipes. In each pipe, he beautifully presents the straight grain of his plateau briar, again very much like the Danish masters. Average retail prices start at \$250 and can reach up to \$600.



Higuchi gracefully combines the flavor of Eastern and Western cultures into his pipes. His use of bamboo stems and small bowls reiterates the feeling of earlier Japanese pipes or kiseru.

Tsuge Pipe Company

For at least two centuries, the Tsuges has been a family of highly skilled and elite craftsmen. Originally, the Tsuge family fashioned swords for samurai and their craft earned them status in Japanese society.

Kyoichiro Tsuge, head of the Tsuge Company, was born in 1910. His father managed the cigarette plant of Towa Tobacco Company in Seoul, Korea. At age thirteen, Kyoichiro was orphaned. He returned to Japan and lived with an uncle. He became an apprentice at a cigarette holder manufacturer where he learned to craft ivory cigarette holders. When Tsuge turned twenty-six, he married and started his own cigarette holder making business, specializing in ivory. After World War II, Tsuge returned to Tokyo and resumed his business. Since Japan had no cigarettes, he began making pipes. Briarwood was not available in Japan following the war, but high-quality cherrywood was common. His company also made ivory souvenirs and tobacco accessories.

Today, the Tsuge Company has branched out and Tsuge's three sons assist him in running the company. Tsuge has two factories that produce machine-made pipes and a workshop that produces the "Ikebana" line of very fine hand-crafted pipes. Tsuge pipe production reached its peak in the mid-1970s before the price of the yen began climbing.

The Tsuge handmade pipe is meticulously crafted. Tra-



The simplistic forms of these Tsuge pipes add to the serene beauty and superb craftsmanship found in the Ikebana line.

ditional means are still practiced but the machinery has changed a little, as a computer-driven lathe turns the Tsuge bowl with an accuracy of two one-thousandths of a millimeter. Only one to two pipes are made each day.

Tsuge makes very traditional classic pipes and freehands with a Danish appearance. The pipes are available in a variety of shapes and finishes (including sandblast), and many have bamboo inserts. Both the classic shapes and freehands are beautifully made and balanced. The briar is carved to bring out the best in the grain. To glance at the pipes, you would think S. Bang, Lars Ivarsson or Jess Chonowitsch carved them. Retail prices for the Ikebana line are \$200 to \$8,400.