

beShoes

BY GIAN SANDRO CANTORI





IN THIS ARTICLE WE TELL THE STORY OF MASTER MASARU OKUYAMA WHO, AS WELL AS WORKING FROM HONG KONG FOR AN EXACTING CLIENTELE, STILL HAS A DREAM - TO OPEN RETAIL POINTS ALL OVER THE WORLD BUT STILL MAKE THE SHOES WITH HIS VERY OWN HANDS.

Masaru Okuyama, zen and macaron

The Japanese are certainly well educated, talented, patient and they often have a special talent for manual tasks. Just look at origami, bonsai, the making of katana swords - all of these are produced only in Japan using that extraordinary technique tied to craftwork activities taken to the highest artistic levels.

Masaru Okuyama belongs to this artisan tradition. There is a new fashion at the moment, almost a new wave which I would call atypical, of shoemakers who do not come from the Mittel-European classical school but rather from Asia, talented artisans who come from Japan above all. Masaru is Japanese by birth but he lives in Hong Kong. It was in Paris, however, that he learnt his trade. Born in 1976, and thus still young to be a master, his professional journey is one that I would call bold.

He worked for a Japanese jewellery brand and was sent to Hong Kong for training for a few

years. There he saw the light. He realised that he didn't want to work in an office all his life, his love for shoes sparked off a new life and love to pursue. All this lead him to decide to learn how to make made to measure shoes, by hand.

At the age of 29 he knocked on the door of a Tokyo shoemaking school and in two years of hard training he became a made to measure cobbler. As a perfectionist as he is Masaru decided to sharpen his skills in the best place in order to be able to answer the question: "where did you learn your trade"? He thus took up his weapons once more together with his luggage and went to France. Paris was well worth the effort and here he met some of the capital's most famous cobblers, John Lobb, Corthay, Massaro, Dimitri Gomez, Berluti and Aubercy. These were great experiences but there was still one more person he had to meet and thus he went to Milan where he met my dear friend





MASARU OKUYAMA'S HEADQUARTERS ARE IN HONG KONG BUT HE WAS BORN IN JAPAN. HE TRAINED IN TOKYO, PARIS AND MILAN. HIS TEACHERS INCLUDED JOHN LOBB, CORTHAY, MASSARO, DIMITRI GOMEZ, ANTHONY DELOS, BERLUTI, XAVIER AUBERCY AND FRECCIA BESTETTI.

Freccia Bestetti whose professional journey had been somewhat similar. Riccardo advised him to return to Tokyo and gain his experience there working for families and friends who would be able to understand his talent. In the meantime he married a woman from Hong Kong and soon returned to his starting point. The new challenge was to make made to measure shoes in Hong Kong. After a few years of pure start up, in 2010 he opened his first laboratory-shop with two trainee cobbler employees to pass

the Okuyama thinking to. His public of fans is varied but it is mainly Asian businessmen and Englishmen who know the made to measure shoe tradition well. The combination of French elegance and the simplicity, dignity and rigour of the English is the key to his special shoes for truly special clients. For some of these he has made a few really creative shoes which have given him the chance to open up the way to experimentation. But Masaru still had another dream - to open up





HE OPENED HIS FIRST
LABORATORY IN 2010.
TODAY HE HAS TWO TRAINEE
COBBLERS WORKING FOR HIM.





retail points all over the world whilst still making the shoes with his very own hands. Such statements are music to our ears at Bespoke and we are sure that the firmament of great cobblers

will add his name to its hall of fame alongside those of people like Xavier Aubercy, Dimitri Gomez and Anthony Delos.
www.masaruokuyama.com

