

PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

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Dear Tankokai Members:

The year 2011 was a very sad one for our Japanese friends. The great Tohoku earthquake and tsunami took many innocent lives and devastated vast areas of Japan. Americans expressed great sympathy for our Japanese friends, but we learned a great deal from the experience as we watched the unfolding disaster and the stoicism and strength of the Japanese people as they began to restore their lives.

We have much to be thankful for and proud of as we enter the year of the dragon. 2011 was a year of gratifying growth for our association. We welcomed many new and enthusiastic members. We celebrated our tenth anniversary at a beautiful tea ceremony and luncheon in November and we have announced the construction of a new *chashitsu* in the very near future.

In a time of much uncertainty around the world, including in the United States and Japan, the tea ceremony provides essential, though brief, respite from the tribulations of everyday life. It is in that sense that the Tankokai plays a very important role in our lives.

I look forward to further success for our association in 2012 and wish everyone a very happy new year.

Finally, I would like to thank the leadership of our Tankokai for their hard work, dedication, and imagination during the past year.

Sincerely,

President William T. Breer

## 10TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

BY MARGIE LINN



On November 13, 2011, the Association celebrated the tenth anniversary of its founding at a luncheon held at the 2941 Restaurant in Falls Church, Virginia. The setting was reminiscent of a beautiful fall day in Japan, complete with koi ponds, waterfall, and colorful fall foliage as a backdrop.

The festivities began with a tea service for our guests and members in the “Koi Room” under the expert guidance of Yumi Yamasaki. The *toko* displayed a hanging scroll, conceived of by Hounsai Daisosho, which read: 美 開萬国平和 (“Beauty opens the path for world peace”) and a single *sasanqua* (fall-blooming) camellia. Stacey Standridge served as *teishu* for the *ryurei*-style (立礼式) tea service. After the tea service, members and guests were invited to the “Waterfall Room” where they had an opportunity to visit prior to commencement

of the program and luncheon.

Masazaku Watanuki, the Association’s Vice President, opened the program by introducing our special guests, who included Madame Yoriko Fujisaki, representing the Embassy of Japan; Ms. Kayoko Soka Hirota, Chief of Administration for the North America Tankokai Head Office; Ambassador John Malott, President of Japan-America Society of Washington DC, and his wife Hiroko; Mr. Keiji Iwatake, Director of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA; Ms. Masako Soyu Miyahara, Director of the Urasenke Washington DC Branch; and Mr. Willi Singleton, our guest speaker. Following these introductions, William Breer, the Association’s president for the past ten years, and Ms. Hirota also presented their greetings to everyone. Finally, Mary Repass presented a brief chronicle of Urasenke’s activities in Washington, beginning in the late 1950s when Miyakawa Sensei started teaching tea ceremony classes. [See related article by Mary, “History of Washington, DC Urasenke”]

Following the luncheon, Willi Singleton spoke about his experiences as a potter in Japan and explained how he adapted traditional technologies to make his pottery using indigenous clay and glazes made from natural materials. Slides of Willi’s *noborigama* (登窯, chambered climbing kiln) and a variety of tea utensils crafted at his Hawk Mountain workshop illustrated the results of his application of traditional Japanese techniques. Our guests and members received a commemorative small plate individually crafted by Willi.



We hope that our members had a chance to renew friendships and that our guests were impressed by the breadth of our activities and the perpetuation of the Urasenke tradition in the Washington DC area through our community activities as we endeavor to spread Daisosho’s message of “peacefulness through a bowl of tea.”

## THE POTTERY OF WILLI SINGLETON

BY BENJAMIN HARTLEY



This article is the second of a series of articles covering the work of Willi Singleton Tsuchi(土), yaki(焼), waza(技)". In ceramics connoisseurship, they set out the hierarchy as tsuchi (clay), yaki (firing), waza (technique). Clay is the most important thing. Firing is the next important thing, and the technique is the next important thing. However you line them up, they're all important. Without technique, then even if you have good clay and good firing it's hard to do much. Without good clay, even with the other things it's always going to be a little bit off.

--Willi Singleton

Willi Singleton's work is uncommon, at least in America, for his reliance on local materials. He uses local plants to make the ash for his glazes; this provides a powerful connection to the land. He uses a combination of Chesapeake clay and Hawk Mountain clay, which he digs himself. He describes Hawk Mountain clay as far more difficult to work with than most other clays, and is much more prone to slump. However, this yields a very high quality result which shows most in *matchajawan* (抹茶碗, tea bowl) and *guinomi* (ぐい呑み, large size sake cup), which are 100% Hawk Mountain clay.

Willi has developed a distinct style which makes his work unique and recognizable. This is somewhat ironic, as he tries to be less visible. As he puts it,

*In making pottery – or anything else – then everybody thinks they have to have a style. They have to have a signature touch. When I was a young potter, I did that sort of thing, I had a certain kind of lip on my pots. Over the years, I've sort of tried to become more invisible. I rely more on the pots and the materials to make the pots what they are on my own.*

In spite of his attempts to become invisible, Willi's work is distinctive. He's unique in using Hawk Mountain clay, which of course can only be acquired in that area. Also, he works in a style which is uncommon, trying to "let the making process and the materials speak for themselves." In so doing, his work is unique for its lack of flourishes.

Willi's approach to applying glazes and coloring his work reflects his relationship with the land. He begins, of course, with plants around his workshop. He uses cornstalks, rice, and various other plants which he gathers himself to create the vegetable ash glazes he uses. When he applies them, he once again lets the piece speak for itself. He ladles the glazes onto the piece. He says that he used to try splashing the glaze in a free-form fashion, and later tried strips of glaze with some splashing. Because the glazes melt on the kiln, he saw that they were sliding into landscape forms. From there, he got a sense for how much glaze to put on. Because of the way the kiln works, each piece has a hot side and a cool side. The hot side became like the sky, and the cool side became the ground.



Willi oversees a firing at his kiln

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## THE POTTERY OF WILLI SINGLETON (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

*It's not exactly like painting; you don't take all your glazes outside. You take things from the landscape, and make the glazes from them. In an uncanny way, the glazes in the kiln start looking like the landscape... I think of them more as pictures, but useful for putting food on. I try to make them so people will read them as pictures.*

The results are what he calls "pots of a place." The pottery Willi makes is unique to his kiln, his techniques, and the place where he's doing his work. He feels that the place where he's working is very important. In a subtle way, he strives to make each piece reflect the landscape around his workshop. Every aspect makes a difference – the way the glaze runs down the sides of the pots, the changes in temperature in the kiln, the wood used, the way the ash accumulates. With all of these factors coming together, the landscape seems to appear in the work.

Willi gives special care to his *matchajawan*. First of all, as mentioned earlier, for *matchajawan* he uses entirely Hawk Mountain clay. Hawk Mountain clay is rich in iron and very sandy, which makes it much harder to throw and fire than the half Chesapeake clay he uses for most work. However, it's very important that the clay has a strong character which Hawk Mountain clay provides. With *matchajawan*, shape is very important. Willi makes the bowls roughly the same size, a size compatible with use, but doesn't make them as sets. Instead, his focus is on touching the clay as little as possible. Since the number of times the clay is drawn up affects the surface of the clay, multiple passes can lose the spontaneity of the piece. Willi tries to keep this to a minimum, keeping the piece from seeming manufactured. In addition, Willi has special places in his kiln for such pieces. Unlike a gas kiln, which is mostly uniform, a wood-burning kiln like his has very good, and not so good, places. He reserves special places for the *matchajawan*, places with good ash accumulation, places which give good effects. Willi's combination of clay, firing, and technique result in excellent and unique art. Association members have all had a chance to enjoy some of Willi's work, but more can be found on his website (<http://www.willisingleton.com/>) or at his exhibitions.



Large jar with corn stalk ash glazes and creek clay glaze

## MISONODANA REHEARSAL WORKSHOP

BY TAKAKO DICKINSON

Saturday afternoon on October 1, 2011, several of the members gathered at a room in the McLean Community Center to rehearse the whole sequence of the Autumn Tea Gathering at Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens. (See “Autumn Chakai” by Stacey Standridge.) Those who were assigned to make tea reviewed tea making procedures seated on a stool at *Misono-dana*(御園棚). The guests, servers, and a commentator walked through their assigned parts.

To conclude the rehearsal Yumi Yamasaki, the organizer of the event, gave a brief presentation on *Chado no Gen'i* 茶道の源意 (The Fundamental Intent of the Way of Tea), petitioned in 1872 by Gengensai. Gengensai created *ryuureishiki* (立礼式) method of chanoyu using tables and stools. *Misono-dana* is one of *ryuurei* methods favored by Tantsansai, and it was developed in 1952 for the investiture of the Crown Prince.

## AUTUMN CHAKAI

BY STACEY STANDRIDGE

A bright autumn sky and beautiful fall foliage set the scene for the Tankokai DC Association's 2011 Autumn *Chakai* at Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens in northwest DC. The guests admired the scroll in the waiting room before they walked through the seasonal gardens to the *dacha* (a traditional Russian log cabin) where the tea was served. The guests were treated to a delicious homemade sweet in autumnal colors and a bowl of tea while they watched the *teishu* prepare tea at a *misonodana*. After the tea service, everyone posed for a photo, and it was clear from the cheerful conversation and laughter that they enjoyed themselves.

Following the *chakai*, tea demonstrations were performed for Hillwood guests in three separate *seki* (sessions). Guests at the demonstrations were served a small dry sweet and a bowl of tea. The audience at each *seki* seemed very interested, and they asked many thoughtful questions. Each demonstration in the afternoon was well attended, with the attendance twice the expectations for the last *seki*. It was nice to see so many people take time out of their busy schedules to share a bowl of tea.



## OTSUKIMI

BY MIKA HIROTSUNE

*Jugoya* (十五夜) is the fifteenth night of the eighth lunar month (September in the solar calendar). It is well known as the most beautiful full moon of the year; in the United States it is called the Harvest Moon. But have you heard about *Jusanya* (十三夜), the thirteenth night of the ninth lunar month (October in the solar calendar)?

These two days, in two separate lunar months, are connected. The reason is unclear, but traditionally in Japan if a moon viewing is held on *Jugoya*, it also has to be held on *Jusanya*.

This year's *Otsukimi* (お月見, moon-viewing) tea demonstration just happened to fall on *Jusanya*. I wonder how many of you managed to see the full moon in both lunar cycles? Let's hope it's not bad luck to hold just the one moon viewing!

*Jusanya* was October 8 and our demonstration was held at The Textile Museum as part of the Japan-America Society of Washington DC's *Otsukimi-Moon Viewing Festival*.

A room with a fireplace in the museum was transformed into a place suitable for tea. A *misonodana* (御園棚) and *shoji* screen were brought in, and a scroll was carefully hung on the screen. The scroll's inscription read "*Ichigo Ichie*" (一期一会) which literally means "one time, one meeting." In this case we can say it was "one time, one moon."

As in previous years this demonstration proved to be a very popular event, and this year was no different. Tickets for the forty seats went very quickly. Three lucky people who received the ticket with a moon mark were served tea; everyone enjoyed the event greatly.

I thought it oddly more appropriate to have tea on *Jusanya*, rather than the festive, better known *Jugoya*. Somehow it felt more, well, *wabi-sabi* - The beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. The beauty of things modest and humble.



## HISTORY OF WASHINGTON DC URASENKE

BY MARY REPASS

The history of Urasenke in the Washington, DC, area has provided a significant path in the study of tea. Beginning as a study within the home of Miyakawa Sensei in the late 1950s, Urasenke has continued to be the significant provider of lessons, cultural exchange, and contributor of Japanese traditions for Northern Virginia and Washington, DC.

Through several transitions and group studies, the formal establishment of the Urasenke Chapter was formed in 1979. The chapter provided lessons, held meetings, and cooperated with events such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and other Japanese festivals. Schools and assisted living homes were visited for demonstrations. Demonstrations were also given at the Smithsonian and Japanese Embassy when requested.

Nozoe Sensei was sent from Japan in 1994 following Miyakawa-sensei's retirement. A tea room for lessons was built in Rockville, Maryland. In 1998, a new move for the tea room was made to McLean, Virginia. Katherine Lyons and her husband Austin Babcock was assigned as teachers at that time.

In 2001, the Urasenke Foundation in Kyoto officially formed the Tankokai Northern American Association of which Washington, DC became a part. Urasenke is now looking forward to the future of further involvement within the area and in providing a cultural exchange of the study and understanding of tea.

## A KYOTO DIARY

BY KATIE BECHTOLD

May 9

This morning's first lecture was by Gary-sensei on the general order of activity in a *chaji* (茶事), supplemented with beautiful photos from the book *茶の美* ("The Beauty of Tea"). The lecture that followed, by Tanihata-sensei on Japanese tea culture in the Kamakura and Muromachi eras, happened to include a description of *tōcha* (鬪茶), a kind of tea event of that time with clear similarities to modern *chaji*. Tanihata-sensei also explained what historians know about tea culture from that time based on the cargo from a recently-discovered shipwreck of a Japan-bound vessel from 1323. Apparently it was not unusual in those days for a Japanese temple or shrine to raise money by coordinating a trade mission from China (with a possible stop in Korea for celadon) to import tons of highly-valued utensils.

Today's afternoon *jitsugī* (実技) was again with Imagawa-sensei and again was *hakobi usucha* (運び薄茶), this time with *haiken* (拝見). Even though today was the warmest, most humid day yet this season, I was happy to be back in the first-floor Gakuen tea rooms, and it was nice to feel the occasional breeze through the open doors. I used *hibashi* (火箸, large metal chopsticks for handling charcoal) for the first time today! Not as part of a *sumi temae* (炭点前) but rather in my role as one of the fire setup people. I used them to rotate the *shitabi* (下火) as we started them burning before *jitsugī* and to remove charcoal from the braziers after *jitsugī*. They require some finger/hand strength, for sure. A notable utensil we used today was a *Tantansai-gonomi kiku karakusa kuro oonatsume* (淡々斎好み 菊唐草黒大棗).

Perhaps more interesting to my readers, though, was today's *omogashi* (主菓子), which was *chimaki* (粽), an item I've been curious to try ever since I learned about them in our seasonal topics lecture for May (at which point I started noticing them over virtually every doorway around here), but which I hadn't bought because of their relatively high price for *omogashi*. Reportedly the school paid 800 yen each for the ones for today's *jitsugī*. They're nontrivial to unwrap, so in our class for each *temae* the guest would start unwrapping practically as soon as the *temae* had begun.

After today's *jitsugī*, we new Midorikai students headed over to the Urasenke Center to accept our scholarship kimono (plus *obi* and *nagajuban* (長襦袢)). As I wrote last time, we had the option of add-

ing a *mon* (紋) to the back of the kimono, which makes it suitable for formal occasions. If you are Japanese you already have a designated *mon* from your family, but if you aren't, you get to choose one, an act of identity-expression that rivals choosing a name for yourself. The shopkeeper has a catalogue of **around four thousand** *mon* but I eventually found one I think suits me well.

And there on the right is mine. It's 北斗七星, a.k.a. the Big Dipper. What do you think? If you're curious, some of the other astronomical crests can be found at this website: [http://www.harimaya.com/o\\_kamon1/zukan/tuki\\_z.html](http://www.harimaya.com/o_kamon1/zukan/tuki_z.html).



Katie Bechtold is an Association member who is currently studying chado at Midorikai in Kyoto.



**General Meeting**

All members are welcome! This is a great opportunity to meet other association members!

**Date:** Sunday, February 12th, 2012

**Time:** 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

**Place:** McLean Community Center

1234 Ingleside Ave.

McLean, VA 22101

**YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Dear Members,

Have you ever been urged to write something about the Way of Tea? Did you discover something new while attending a tea affair? Have you experienced a eureka moment about a Zen phrase? We would like to invite you to write for *Ocha no Wa* about anything to do with

the Way of Tea or any related cultural aspects of it. We are sorry that the space is limited only to a page or two including photos. Contact us at [ochanowa@tankokaidc.org](mailto:ochanowa@tankokaidc.org) for more details or questions.

– Editors

**2011-2012 Officers**

President: William T. Breer

Vice President: Masakazu Watanuki

Chief of Administration: Norie Watanuki

Treasurer: Mioko Miller

Event Secretary: Akiko Takagi

Membership Secretary: Yumi Yamasaki

Bilingual Recording Secretary: Takako Dickinson

Supervisors: Margaret Ann Linn, Mary Repass

Honorary Advisor: Masako Soyu Miyahara

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

Tea Demonstration

**Date and Time:** Wednesday, January 25th, 11:00 am

**Place:** Capitol Hill Day School in NE Washington, DC

**Description:** Tea demonstration for the middle school students who are studying tea and tea cultures around the world

General Meeting

**Date and Time:** Sunday, February 12th, 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm

**Place:** McLean Community Center

**Description:** See the announcement on this page

Tea Demonstration

**Date and Time:** Sunday, March 10th, 11:00 am

**Place:** Green Springs Garden at Alexandria

**Description:** Tea demonstration for an education program. See <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/ed-adult.htm>

Tea Demonstration

**Date and Time:** Wednesday, March 28th, time to be determined

**Place:** To Be Determined

**Description:** Tea demonstration for the college students who are studying Asian art history

**CORRECTIONS**

The previous issue of *Ocha no Wa* accidentally omitted several sentences from the Tanabata article by Sachiko Nakayama. The missing section is:

*Many of the attendants were not familiar to tea and asked interesting questions: 'How long does it take to become a tea master?', 'Can males be hosts?' 'Are these tea bowls antique?' For me, an hour at the Ippaku-tei brought me back childhood memories of summers spent at my grandparents' traditional Japanese wooden house in Mito city. These were happy memories of when I spent days reading, napping and staring at my grandparents' small Japanese garden, lying on the engawa (Japanese veranda) using a zabuton (Japanese cushion) as a pillow, feeling the occasional summer breeze, and listening to the sound of locust.*

We apologize for the error.