



Scanning down from top left:

Square plates by Kofutoen (small, medium, large); tiny bowl by Kofutoen; bowls by Tsubakigama (small, medium, large); rectangular white plate by Hantoen; round plates by Tsubakigama (small, medium, large); hexagonal plates by Sanpoen (small, large); round white plates by Sojuen (small, medium, large); sake cup by Tsubakigama; small bowl by Tsubakigama; three small hexagonal plates by Sanpoen

Seto Ceramic Ware

Brand Highlights

- *Setomono*, or Seto ware, is synonymous with ceramics in Japan. The influence of this “Land of Pottery” surpasses that of all other pottery-producing areas in the country
- Clay, tools, diverse technical know-how, and educational facilities: everything to do with the ceramics trade is found in Seto
- Eight Seto potteries are open to the public for tours to see the quality firsthand

Seto, in the north central part of Aichi prefecture, is *the* place for pottery. Indeed, the generic term in Japanese for ceramics is *setomono*—wares from Seto. It’s a household name found literally in the cupboards and on the tabletops of just about every home in the country. Archaeological evidence suggests that high-temperature kilns capable of firing ash-glazed works were here as far back as the late 10th century. By the 12th century, Seto and Mino in Gifu prefecture were the only places in Japan able to produce glazed ceramics. Today some 300 business concerns make up the prefectural ceramics association. There is no knowing the number of potters who have worked in Seto, or how many tons of wares they have made. Seto has everything related to pottery: high-quality clay, shops for equipment and glazes, museums, and vocational schools.



Local legends address the development of kilns in Seto for high-fired glazed ceramics. One tells of Shirozaemon Kato, who went to China in the early 13th century and brought back the techniques he learned. Inspired by a dream, the story goes, he found high-quality clay in Seto and established his kiln there. The first person to begin making porcelain in Seto was Tamikichi Kato, the son of a local potter. After learning porcelain methods in Kyushu, Kato was central to advancing manufacture of the Seto *sometsuke* blue-and-white style. The two men are enshrined at Fukagawa and Kamagami Shrines, respectively.



Kilns that could fire clay to a high temperature and produce ash-glazed pottery were first established in Seto in the 10th century. By the 12th century, Seto and Mino in Gifu prefecture were the only places in Japan capable of making glazed pottery. There have been ups and downs, but even in the early postwar years of the late 1940s, Seto was home to more than 500 workplaces related to the ceramic industry. Seto’s potters have established a vibrant base for the mass production of a diverse range of pottery, as well as a solid distribution network both domestically and abroad.

Left: Two Seto scenes; below them, tools used in making pots on the wheel at Sanpoen. Such implements are typically handmade by potters themselves, but many shops in Seto offer all the equipment one needs for making pottery.

Above: Wielding a large brush, Mayuki Kato of Singama demonstrates how she uses surface tension to apply cobalt-oxide pigment to a white ground for a *sometsuke* piece. This technique, called *dami*, achieves a superb gradation of blue.



Hiromasa Yamamoto

Aichi Pref. Pottery Industry Cooperation

Mayuki Kato

Singama

Dai Shimakura

Chikudoen

Tatsunobu Kato

Sanpoen

Eiji Hayashi

Tsubakigama



These 10 elite potters at the forefront of today's Seto ware are shown in a quarry located in the city's center. One of Seto's strongest assets as a pottery-producing area is the superb quality of the clay found at this site—it puts Seto in a class of its own.

The vast amounts of clay extracted from this quarry over the past thousand years or so have been shaped and fired into Seto ware that has been dispatched across Japan and throughout the world. Known as "the heart of Seto," the location is carefully guarded; even those directly involved in the local industry have limited access to it.

Indeed, to potters in Seto this is a sacred site. It represents the spirit and talents of countless artisans whose porcelain wares have brought functional beauty to the lives of everyday people.

One day, when all its clay deposits have been mined, the quarry will be filled with soil from another place. Eventually the land will be transformed into a forest or community park or residential area. It's not so commonly known, but other clay pits from times past now serve their communities as open fields, wooded lands, and recreational sites, showing no hint of their former role.

Hiro Ikeda

Imaruyo Co., Ltd.

Keiichi Ishikawa

Sojuen Inc.

Akimasa Azechi

Aito Co., Ltd.

Shigetoshi Kato

Hantoen

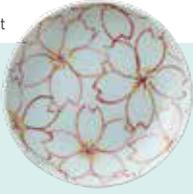
Masao Kato

Kofutoen



Uwae-kashoku: Overglaze enamel decoration (hand-painted)

After pots have been fired, they are decorated with overglaze enamels and fired a third time at a lower temperature. Decorations are painted by hand, just like the iron or cobalt pigment decorations that are done before glazing. A diverse range of vivid colors is the distinguishing feature of this type of decoration.



Doban tensha: Copperplate-printed transfer

With this technique, the design is copperplate printed on Japanese washi paper. The paper is then stuck onto bisqueware and water applied to transfer the design. The technique requires some skill, but is well suited to high-volume production of pots with detailed decorations. The transfers can be applied to seamlessly cover the entire surface—curves and handles and all.



Paddo insatsu: Pad printing

In the pad-printing process, zaffer, or cobalt-oxide pigment, is applied to a copperplate etched with a design. A machine then pushes a silicone pad onto the copperplate to pick up the pigment pattern and apply it to the surface of the piece. When a mold is used to produce pieces in large quantities, the process allows detailed designs to be applied to exactly the same specifications.



Kushime: Combed decoration

The surface of a piece is scraped as though by a comb. Sometimes the purpose is not just for decoration, but is also functional, as in the case of this mortar for grinding sesame seeds and spices.



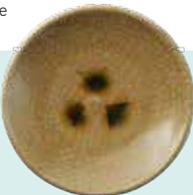
Kuro Oribe: Black Oribe

Black Oribe refers to works with a white clay body that is partially covered with a black glaze, and with some element of decoration. The decoration may result with engraving, so the white body shows through, or by painting the black in sections and then brushing iron-oxide designs between them. In older days, paper stencils were used to create such decorative patterns.



Kizeto: Yellow Seto

Yellow Seto ware is derived from *oniita* and *bengara*, two kinds of iron oxide, as well as other iron content in the clay and glazes. Carved or stamped decorations are often used and are given a green accent with the application of *tanpan*, a sulphate mineral. *Kizeto* pots may have a glossy or rough surface. Each Seto kiln has its own particular style.



Oribe

This type of pottery is named after Furuta Oribe, a feudal lord of the Momoyama period (1568–1603) who favored it. Pots of Oribe design are often asymmetrical and boldly decorated. Nowadays "Oribe" generally refers to pieces colored with a bright green copper glaze.



Kakewake: Double glaze

Applying a transparent glaze on top of a fritted crackle glaze enhances the translucent quality and brings out the inherent beauty of the color. The crackle glaze is applied by brush. If it is too thin, the color will not turn out properly; too thick, and the glaze will run. Skill is required to achieve just the right balance.



Ame-yu: Amber-colored glaze

So-called *tenmoku* (natural wood) glazes are obtained by mixing iron with various natural wood ashes. In oxidation firing they achieve a deep amber color, but they are temperamental, demanding expertise in both glazing and firing.



Sometsuke: Blue-and-white

Decorations painted on a white ground with zaffer, a catchall term for cobalt-oxide pigments, are fired at a high temperature. The shades of blue and white vary from kiln to kiln. Blue-and-white ware from Seto is fired with a special technique called *nerashi* (soaking), which yields a soft, warm effect.



Hori + Yuyaku: Carving and glaze

This form of decoration is achieved by carving a design and applying glaze over it. After firing, the pattern shows clearly, as the glaze has pooled inside it. Such designs have a softer look than hand-painted decorations.



Tetsu-yu: Iron glaze

The main components of this glaze are iron and manganese. The color after firing is determined by the thickness of the glaze, its manner of application, where the pot is placed within the kiln, and how quickly the kiln is cooled after firing. Thus various effects can be achieved. The glaze contains a number of minerals and so gains a metallic finish, providing a nice contrast to the ceramic material.



Kinsai: Gold overglaze enamel

Gold overglaze enamel is applied to glazed pieces that have already been fired. They are then fired at a lower temperature for the third time. Pottery with gold or silver overglaze enamel decorations is very popular outside of Japan, and a large amount of it is made in Seto for export overseas.



Furitto-yu: Fritted glaze

This clear-gloss crackle glaze is difficult to achieve, because it requires a low temperature and can only be fired in a limited area of the kiln. The glass-like glaze crackles after unloading from the kiln.



Rasuta shiagi: Luster finish

True to its name, a luster overglaze brings unique color and shine to a piece. The glaze is purposely applied unevenly, so the final effect catches the light in ways that reveal beautiful color variations.



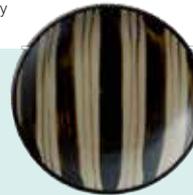
Hai-yu: Ash glaze

This glaze is made from natural pine ash and feldspar. Reduction firing yields green and, in places where the glaze has pooled, a deeper glossy emerald. With oxidation firing, the iron inherent in the glaze turns yellow.



Tetsu-e: Decoration brushed with iron pigment

Decorations are brushed onto bisqueware with iron-oxide pigments derived from rusted iron. Depending on the thickness of the glaze and the amount of iron in the pigment, the color after firing will range from yellowish to nearly black browns.



Uwae tensha: Overglaze decals

An image on a paper decal is transferred to a fired pot, which is then fired again to temperatures of 750 to 800°C. Suited to mass production, this technique makes it possible to render intricate designs in a variety of vivid colors.



Gairome type A (frog's eye)

A typical example of granite-derived Seto clay with quartz particles. This extremely plastic sedimentary kaolinitic clay is a main ingredient in porcelain and tableware.



Odo (yellow ocher)

Contains about 80 percent good-quality clay, but the shrinkage rate is high. Used to fashion ceramic hot pots, tiles, and flower pots.



Shirotsuchi (white clay)

Close to *kibushi* kaolin clay but without as much organic matter, *shirotsuchi* vitrifies at a lower temperature. It is used to make mortars and large storage pots.



Fuka

This diatomaceous clay, found in the layer between *gairome* and silica sand, is commonly used for tiles.



Kibushi type A

Derived from feldspar and mica eroded from granite, this finest of clays contains carbonized fragments of wood. Fine-grained, it has high plasticity and heat resistance, and is used in the manufacture of ceramic dolls.



Gairome type C (frog's eye)

This clay, which contains sericite mica, is somewhat lower in quality than *gairome* type A.

The Vast World of Seto Ware

The 18 samples on the opposite page, made by nine members of the Local Creators' Market Seto Ware team, reveal the great variety of expression possible. From traditional Oribe and yellow Seto glazes to pad printing and luster finishes, there is practically no design or technical challenge that Seto potters cannot meet. These artisans draw from a long and varied tradition, and whether their wares are produced in bulk quantities or for small-lot orders, the artistic human touch is always present. Flat rectangular or hexagonal plates cannot be made by machine, and even bowls or pots fashioned by the thousands on slab rollers each have their edges neatly rounded off by hand. Such attention to detail is a great part of the appeal of Seto ware.

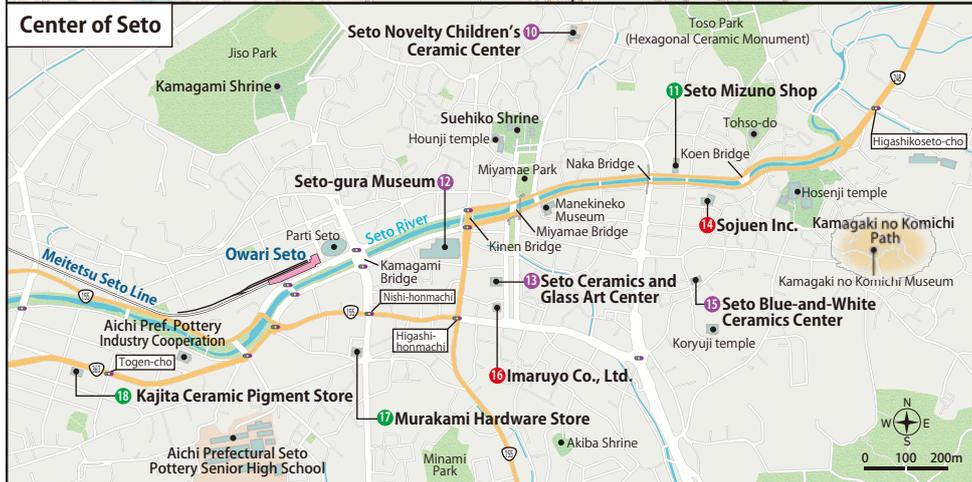
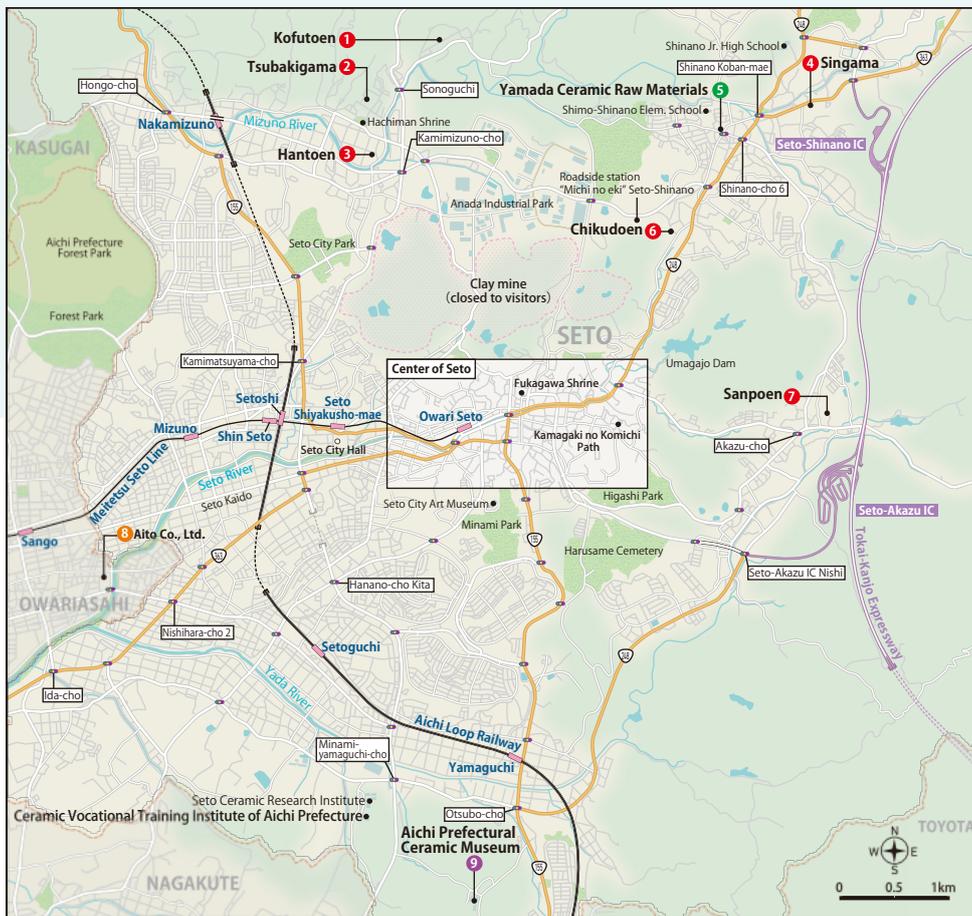
A rainbow of colors

At the Seto Mizuno shop in the center of town, large glass sake bottles filled with liquids of many different colors are on display. At first glance the offerings seem a rather unusual assortment of sake, but this is no liquor shop. It is an *enoguya*, a place where those in the pottery business obtain their glazes. The colored liquids are the concoctions of shop owner Yasuharu Mizuno. A chemist of sorts, he gauges what his clients need with the assistance of color chips, and prepares the glazes accordingly for their review. He is a storehouse of experience and advanced knowledge on the subject.



Places to Go in the Land of Pottery

Swing by a few potteries in charming Seto to meet the experts and learn directly from them about their wares.



Whether you are visiting for business or leisure, the best way to see the appeal of Seto ware and its many production techniques firsthand is to visit some potteries. The eight listed here are open to the public.

Potteries

- Chikudoen 6** 1-101 Shinano-cho
T: 0561-42-0322 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-41-3424
chikudouen@tohki.co.jp
Closed weekends and public holidays. No reservation required
- Hantoen 3** 62 Suihoku-cho
T: 0561-48-0489 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-48-1411
Closed weekends, public holidays, and year-end/New Year holidays. Reservation by fax
- Imaruyo Co., Ltd. 16** 1-58 Higashi-honmachi (Production area not open to public)
T: 0561-82-6121 F: 0561-82-6123
104@imaruyo.jp
Closed weekends, public holidays, and year-end/New Year holidays. Reservation by fax or email
- Kofutoen 1** 1309 Sono-cho
T: 0561-48-1035 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-48-1035
mail@sonogama.com
Closed weekends, public holidays, and year-end/New Year holidays. Reservation by email
- Sanpoen 7** 123 Kamamoto-cho
T: 0561-82-3256 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-87-1351
sanpoen-kama@outlook.jp
sanpoen-kama.com
Reservation by email or through website
- Singama 4** 330 Nakashinano-cho
T: 0561-41-0721 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-41-0721
singama@gctv.ne.jp
Closed irregularly. Reservation by phone or email
- Sojuen Inc. 14** 24 Sugitsuka-cho
T: 0561-82-6428 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-82-6428
info@sozuyu-en.com
Closed weekends, public holidays, August 13-15, and year-end/New Year holidays. Reservation by fax or email
- Tsubakigama 2** 532 Suihoku-cho
T: 0561-48-1265 (Jpn. only) F: 0561-48-1538
tubakigama@nifty.com
Closed weekends, public holidays, and year-end/New Year holidays. Reservation by fax or email

Companies

- Aito Co., Ltd. 8** 1-1 Karijukushin-cho, Owariasahi
T: 0561-54-2111 F: 0561-52-0746
akazechi@aito.co.jp
Business appointments only. Closed weekends and public holidays

Museums

- Aichi Prefectural Ceramic Museum 9**
234 Minamiyamaguchi-cho T: 0561-84-7474
Hours: 9:30-16:30. * Closed Mondays (if Monday is a public holiday, then closed the day after) and year-end/New Year holidays. Open daily during Golden Week
- Seto Blue-and-White Ceramics Center 15**
98 Nishigo-cho T: 0561-89-6001
Hours: 10:00-17:00. Closed Tuesdays (if Tuesday is a public holiday, then closed the day after) and year-end/New Year holidays
- Seto Ceramics and Glass Art Center 13**
81-2 Minaminakanogiri-cho T: 0561-97-1001
Hours: 10:00-18:00. * Closed Tuesdays (if Tuesday is a public holiday, then closed the day after) and year-end/New Year holidays
- Seto Novelty Children's Ceramic Center 10**
74-1 Izumi-cho T: 0561-88-2668
Hours: 10:00-17:00. Closed Mondays (if Monday is a public holiday, then closed the day after)
- Seto-Gura Museum 12**
1-1 Kurasho-cho T: 0561-97-1190
Hours: 9:00-18:00. * Closed fourth Mondays and year-end/New Year holidays
* Admission ends 30 minutes prior to published closing time

Shops

- Kajita Ceramic Pigment Store 18** 2-22 Togen-cho
Tools, glaze components, and other materials for making pottery
T: 0561-82-2765 Closed Sundays and public holidays
- Murakami Hardware Store 17** 56 Ichonoki-cho
Tools and materials for pottery
T: 0561-82-2749 Closed Sundays and public holidays
- Seto Mizuno Shop 11** 4 Haneda-cho
A wide range of glazes
T: 0561-21-820 Closed weekends, public holidays, and year-end/New Year holidays
- Yamada Ceramic 5** 6-161 Shinano-cho
Seto and other clays
T: 0561-42-0121 Closed Sundays

Classic Seto scenes

The Seto-Gura Museum, pictured at right, is located close to Owari Seto station. One of its features is an impressive installation reproducing the town of Seto in olden days, complete with climbing kilns and pottery shops. Visitors can learn a great deal about the history and skills involved in Seto ware.

Those looking for a scene unique to Seto should head over to Kamagaki no Komichi in the Hora-machi district. Climbing kilns once dotted this area, formerly a bustling hive of pottery production. A 400-meter footpath is lined with a wall built of old shelves, props, and other kiln items.



Aito Co., Ltd.

Total coordination of pottery production from design onward

Tableware, ovenware, pottery for tea, vessels for drinking sake, crafts, designer items

The trading firm Aito Co., Ltd. works with pottery designed in-house as well as commissions. Of all the companies in Seto, it has the most items geared to young professionals. CEO **Akimasa Azechi** says that if what people eat changes, then the tableware they use will, too. Across the design process from draft proposals to final product, Aito creates solutions that meet contemporary tastes and lifestyles.



Chikudoen

Colorful, personalized dishes for children

Tableware, dishes for children, dishes for pets

Established in 1924, Chikudoen specializes in small-lot consignments. In 2018, its fourth-generation head **Dai Shimakura** created Succu, a colorful range of attractive pottery with rounded edges and easily graspable handles designed for children. Chikudoen also personalizes dishes with a hand-painted name or message, a service that's proven popular in the baby-shower and pet markets.

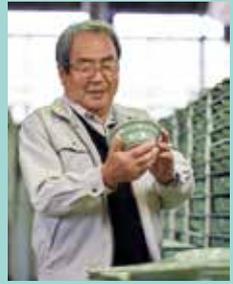


Hantoen

Diverse designs from porcelain to overglaze-enamel-decorated pieces

Traditional Japanese, Chinese, and Western tableware, interior goods

Highly diversified production is Hantoen's strength, and the company maintains a successful export business to the United States. Between 10 and 20 production lines of a dozen or so pieces each are launched each year, each one based on a theme. Some include designs conceived by fourth-generation head **Shigetoshi Kato** himself. Despite that volume, each piece undergoes careful finishing touches by hand.



Imaruyo Co., Ltd.

Subtle shapes for adding flair to interiors

Novelty items and interior goods

Established more than a century ago by the grandfather of CEO **Hiro Ikeda** in 1917, Imaruyo developed porcelain figurines in the postwar years. The company did much to establish the Seto name abroad through its exports to Europe and the United States. Ikeda is shown holding the highly lauded Seto-ne, a ceramic speaker that can more than double the volume of music played on a smartphone, using no electricity.



Kofutoen

Creation of a wide range of colors

Personalized dishes for children, tableware with crackled glazes, Oribe tableware

In the early days following its inception in 1964, Kofutoen produced much pottery with fritted glazes and also forged new markets by developing products for the wedding trade, specifically gifts to be presented to guests. Second-generation head **Masao Kato** is stepping up the firm's consignment production. Particularly adept at using notoriously difficult glazes, Kofutoen has created a wide range of colors.



Sanpoen

Handmade pieces embellished with crackled glaze

Tableware, vases, pottery, Oribe, and yellow-glazed ware

The first generation of Sanpoen potters fired Oribe pots in a climbing kiln. **Tatsunobu Kato**, the sixth-generation head, has successfully expanded the pottery's customer base with a modern style of tableware featuring single-glaze mugs, hexagonal plates, and other pieces. Sanpoen pottery, which features crackling accentuated by horse-chestnut tannin, is entirely handmade, and includes greens, yellows, and whites.



Singama

A beautiful contrast between pure white and cobalt blue

Tableware and vases (porcelain, traditional craft, Seto blue-and-white ware)

The deep blue rendered from glaze mixed with cobalt-oxide pigment is a distinctly Seto color. After studying ceramic design, **Mayuki Kato** entered the world of Seto blue-and-white ware as the heir apparent to her parents' Singama Pottery, where she is now mastering the art of painting on porcelain. From the molds to the designs, much of the pottery produced at Singama is original.



Sojuen Inc.

High-strength porcelain, pad printing, and screen printing

Tableware (rice bowls, tea cups, plates, etc.) for personal and commercial use (catering, hotels, airlines, etc.)

Sojuen uses a slab roller for fast and efficient production of as many as 1,000 to 2,000 items per day. It's no surprise that their wares are found throughout Japan. Still, president **Keiichi Ishikawa** ensures that the production line keeps the human touch with hand-painted designs, screen printing, and pad printing. Sojuen's high-strength, shatter-resistant porcelain is sought after by clients in the medical and social-service fields, and airline companies.



Tsubakigama

Modern tableware with natural ash glaze

Tableware, tableware for the catering trade, blue-and-white porcelain, ash-glazed pottery, interior goods, vases

After apprenticing at a pottery in Kyoto, **Eiji Hayashi** returned to Seto to take over as the second-generation head of Tsubakigama, makers of simple yet beautiful Seto blue-and-white ware. "A vessel is complete once it has food arranged on it. How appetizing the food will appear when it's on the dish is our focus, so we keep our designs understated," says Hayashi of their contemporary take on old-style Seto pottery.





Top shelf: Three cups (Sojuen), three small bowls (Kofutoen)
Second shelf: Mug (Tsubakigama), cup and teapot set (Aito Co., Ltd.)

Third shelf: Six mugs (Sanpoen), sake flute (Kofutoen), large cup (Aito Co., Ltd.)
Bottom shelf: "Seto-ne" smartphone speaker, three containers with fine Japanese patterns (Imaruyo)



Top row:

- Leaf-shaped and square dishes in various sizes by Singama
- Plates for grilled fish by Hantoen; small bowls with spouts by Kofutoen
- Coffee cups by Singama

Middle row:

- Clockwise from upper left: Small bowl by Hantoen; oval plate by Tsubakigama; plates by Aito Co., Ltd. (small, medium, large)
- Upper shelf: Cups and bowls for children by Chikudoen. Lower shelf: Two teapots by Imaruyo; five sake cups by Sojuen
- Plates with fine Japanese patterns by Kofutoen (small, medium, large)

Bottom row:

- Square plate by Kofutoen; floral plate by Aito Co., Ltd.
- Cups that can be fitted with plastic lids by Sojuen