

they say that this strong relationship is an important factor in the success of their business. In order to deal with family crests, after all, one should be part of a close, happy family to be able to understand and reflect the strong bonds that tie together the history of any family. In the beginning, the business was chiefly concerned with hand-painting kamon onto kimono. Kamon is only painted on very formal kimono, with the craftsmen using a *bun-mawashi* (bamboo compass) and an ink-dipped brush to create the extremely intricate curves of each emblem. Kamon are also all created using only perfect circles and straight lines. These crests were originally only held by houses of the imperial court, but were gradually adopted by samurai and commoners. Unlike Western families' coat of arms, Japanese kamon are generally more abstract in their symbolism and kamon are used by organizations other than families. Clients can request crests whose form could be inspired by favorite words or concepts or names and the like, that reflect identity or brand image.



A kamon delicately engraved into the bottom of a glass. Very pleasing as a celebratory gift.

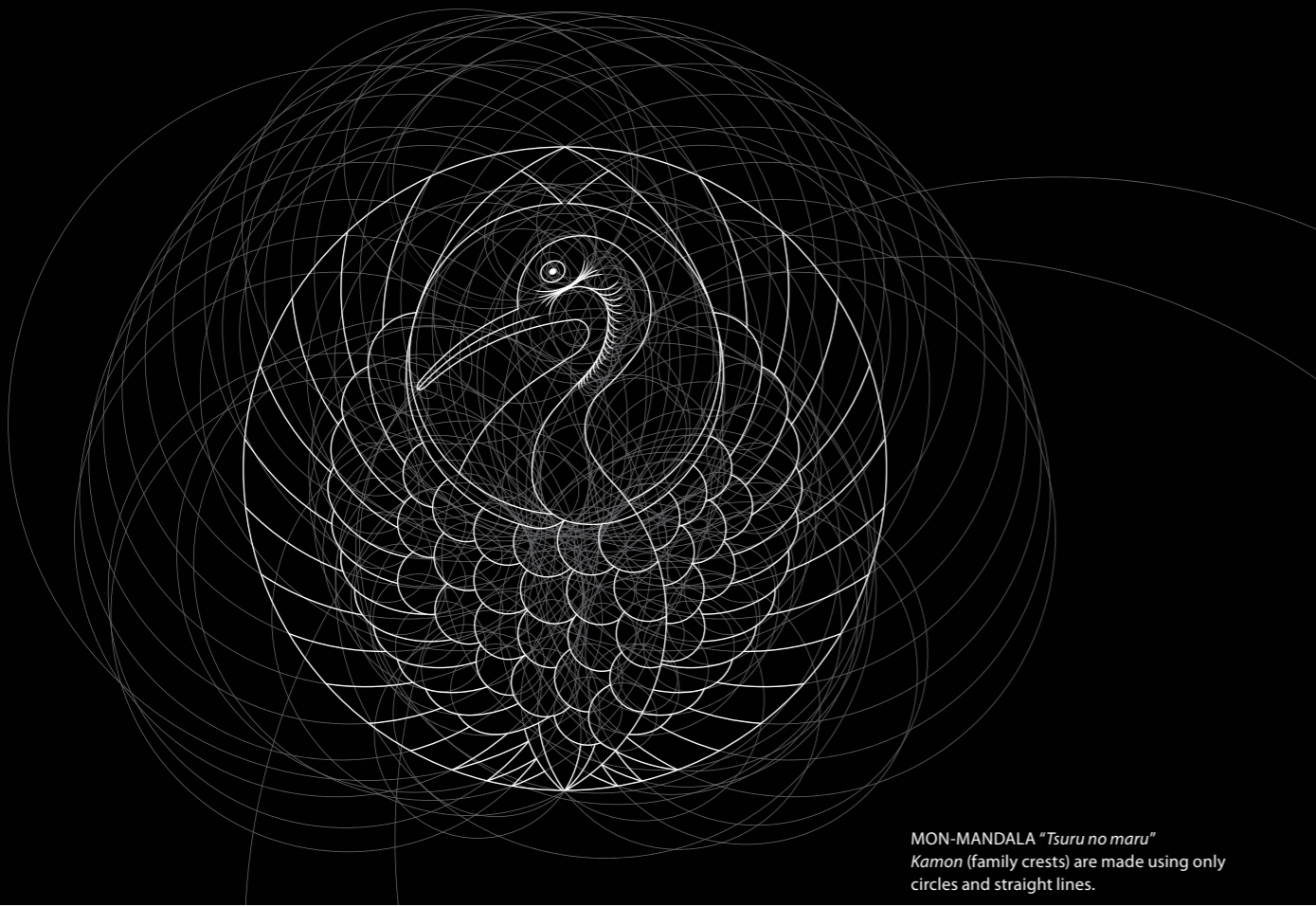
with Yohji mastering design software and thereby opening up an entirely new world of possibilities in terms of what kind of designs they could create as well as the genres into which they could expand. As a result, they are now able to combine a traditional craft used since the Heian period (794–1185) and spread to the commoners in the Edo period, with the requirements and aesthetic desires of modern artists, interior decorators, and fashion designers, in addition to brands in need of package and product design.

Some of their most notable works include the kamon for a Nihonbashi shopping complex, a range of artworks

displayed inside a 2018-launched hotel, and a collaboration with one of Japan's top fashion designers for the brand's autumn/winter 2019 clothing collection, which was presented on the runway at the Paris Fashion Week. Aside from their evident artistic talents, Shoryu and Yohji agree that they owe part of their current success to an appearance on a popular TV program in 2016, after which they garnered much attention and began receiving more regular orders, about once every two weeks, from overseas.

Of course, despite surging forward into the future, the father-and-son artisan duo will always maintain the more tradi-

tional side of their business—that is, creating original family crests. In doing this, they say, it is important to think about how to represent the family's name while taking into account any specific requests from the client. They still consult the pictorial book of crests called *mon-cho* in which as many as 3,000 types of kamon have been recorded since the Edo period. And they still use the old-school bamboo compass. Because true Japanese artisans understand that without the “old,” we could never have the “new.”



MON-MANDALA “Tsuru no maru”
Kamon (family crests) are made using only circles and straight lines.

The Art of Kamon

How one father-and-son team is transforming the traditional culture of creating Japanese family crests into an in-demand modern art form.

by Anne Lucas

Over the last few years, Tokyo has seen a range of its revered traditional arts and crafts experience a modern revival of sorts. Several local businesses, which have been steadfastly creating traditional Japanese products since the Edo period (1603–1868), have found unique ways in which to balance the respected “old” arts with new and innovative production methods and usages for these items. In 2016, Tokyo Governor Koike Yuriko launched

the Edo Tokyo Kirari Project to highlight the companies leading this trend. The businesses selected to be part of the project are all praised for their high quality products and superior skills, as well as for their determination to pass on Japanese culture to future generations.

One of the companies being honored by the project consists of father-and-son team Hatoba Shoryu and Yohji, who work side-by-side as *monsho uwaeshi* (artisans of family crest design and painting) at their studio in Inaricho, on a quiet backstreet in Tokyo's *shitamachi* (downtown) area, just a few minutes' walk from Ueno. Together, they are taking the time-honored skill of creating *kamon* (family crests) to new, contemporary heights with their stylish sensibilities and incorporation of digital technologies.

As third- and fourth-generation *monsho uwaeshi* respectively, Shoryu and his son Yohji come from a long line of artisans with a history that stretches back to 1910. The pair work well together, getting along as friends, and



The father-and-son team at work using both ancient and modern technology.

In 2010, exactly 100 years since their family business was founded, Shoryu and Yohji decided to make a significant change and transformed the company into a more comprehensive design studio. There were a few key reasons for this shift. They considered the fact that kimono are increasingly only worn for more formal occasions, and that there are more commercial institutions using kamon to represent their name, so they realized the potential for new opportunities. They also embraced digital technology,



The *bun-mawashi* (bamboo compass) has been used for centuries in the design of *kamon*.