



# The Art Of Craftsmanship

photo STEFAN DONGUS  
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*Tradition in 5th generation: Yasunori Masunaga*

## MASUNAGA

MASUNAGA OPTICAL ranges among Japan's largest and most eminent eyewear manufacturers. With a history going back to the year 1905, the company played a major part in establishing the Fukui prefecture in the western part of the main Honshu island as a hotbed of eyewear manufacturing. Japanese craftsmanship is highly regarded around the world and a large number of international companies are relying on Japan to manufacture their high-end eyewear. MASUNAGA still values manual craftsmanship in its production process and handles all manufacturing strictly in-house. In the bigger picture, the traditional company is driven by long-term goals rather than short-term profits, as explained by Mr. Yasunori Masunaga in our interview.

**Mr. Masunaga, how many family generations have been leading the company at this point?**

This is the fifth generation. MASUNAGA OPTICAL premiered the production of eyeglasses in Fukui in June 1905. The company founder Gozaemon Masunaga brought in skilled craftsmen from Osaka and Tokyo with the ambition of establishing the optical industry solidly in Fukui.

**Was it difficult at the time?**

He entered into the industry the hard way. At first, eyeglasses manufactured in Fukui were regarded to be third-rate in the world. In order to raise the quality standards of the products, Gozaemon established a guild-like system where full-fledged craftsmen could create their own businesses. Thanks to this system, the number of eyeglass craftsmen increased gradually, and the optical trade spread all over Fukui.

**Fukui is still famous for eyewear today. MASUNAGA has played a major part with over one hundred years of tradition. What's the secret for a brand to survive for so long?**

MASUNAGA craftsmanship is applied consistently throughout every stage of our manufacturing process. In this era of mass production, outsourcing and cost reduction, MASUNAGA has chosen to mainly continue our hands-on creation processes.

**How does your manufacturing process start?**

When deciding on new models or examining new technology, highly qualified engineers first make all prototypes by hand. The

**MAJOR MILESTONES IN THE MASUNAGA HISTORY:**

- In 1911 MASUNAGA wins its first Gold Medal at the *National Manufacturing Trade Exhibition*.
- Three solid gold optical frames were presented to the Showa Emperor as a gift upon visiting MASUNAGA OPTICAL, Fukui in 1933. In those days, the Emperor was regarded as the living god of Japan. The craftsmen who were to make the optical frames for the Emperor purified themselves every morning and dressed only in white while they were making these important frames. The optical frames presented at the time have not deteriorated and are still very beautiful after 80 years.
- In 1970 MASUNAGA frames »Custom-72« are placed in *Osaka Expo* Time Capsule.
- In the year 2000, MASUNAGA is awarded the award for best sunglasses as the first Japanese company in the *Silmo Awards*.
- In 2002, the MASUNAGA 1905 retail store officially opens in Aoyama, Tokyo.
- MASUNAGA wins a *Silmo Award* for three consecutive years in 2013, 2014 and 2015.
- *In 2014, Masunaga designed by Kenzo Takada* launches as a collaboration project of MASUNAGA OPTICAL with Mr. Kenzo Takada.
- In the same year, MASUNAGA designs and produces spectacle frames for the European, American, and Asian markets.

litmus test for passing our craftsman's inspections is the 'tactile experience'. Our innovative technology involves the strength of the entire company as a unit. We are relentless in solving challenges, which leads us to the discovery of new know-how.

**Speaking of new know-how, in what ways have the demands placed on eyewear brands changed over the last ten years?**

Over the past ten years, the eyewear user tends to demand niche brands. The MASUNAGA brand is a niche brand in the market and the demand for it is growing every year. This means that we are looking not only towards optical frame function and fashion but going many steps further into making a better visual experience for the eyewear user. In order to continue to improve our daily lives, eyewear must evolve as society changes. We are committed to work towards this goal, allowing us to go into the next century of MASUNAGA OPTICAL with pride, determination and confidence that we will achieve our goals.

**What is your philosophy when it comes to achieving these goals?**

Our philosophy is to make the best possible product at any cost. Of course, we aim to be profitable but MASUNAGA has always been prepared to accept a temporary reversal when quality levels are at stake. We continue to develop new designs to meet new

needs, but we guarantee one thing will remain constant – the MASUNAGA quality.

**Please explain the concept behind this claim.**

These words are still the basis for our employee's code of conduct after more than 100 years, and we intend to continue this way in the coming 100 years.

**So after over 100 years, are your glasses still made exclusively in Japan?**

Yes, we manage all of the design, materials research, metal processing and coloring in our own factory.

**What are the benefits?**

This total focus assures stability, quality and performance.

**Do you feel that your Japanese origins are also an advantage when selling your products in other countries?**

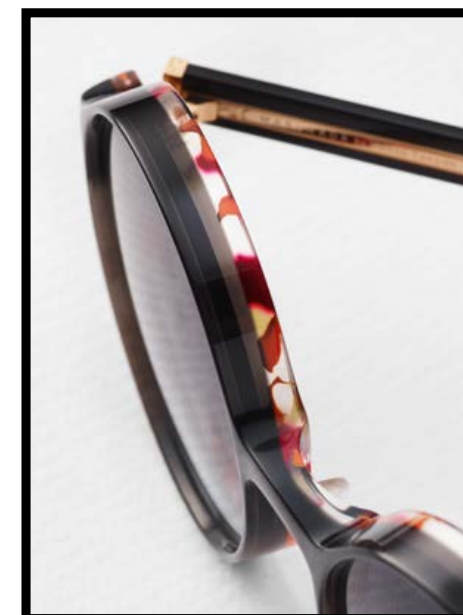
Yes indeed, mainly our craftsman's eye for precision and perfection. The Japanese origin gives the customer a quality assurance. This concept works optimally in the entire world.

**Japanese craftsmanship is constantly praised, not only in the eyewear business. What is so special about it?**

The work ethic and determination to strive for precision and perfection.

**What significance do these values hold for MASUNAGA?**

MASUNAGA craftsmen draw on fluid visuals from the realms of sculpture and architecture to produce stunningly beautiful frames. MASUNAGA does not rush the deve-



lopment of frames in order to ensure a flawless final product with MASUNAGA quality.

**Many brands from Europe and the United States manufacture their glasses in Japan. Do you also produce for other labels?**

Yes, we do produce for our business partners.

**Okay, we're not going to ask who it is... But please tell us in which areas your expertise is particularly strong.**

Our expertise lies mainly with producing high technology hidden in a simple design. This allows us to achieve delicate and beautiful lines and styles in our frames. MASUNAGA OPTICAL is able to achieve a brilliant combination of minimalist aesthetic and maximum function.

**It's especially impressive to achieve high-tech by hand. What is the share of manual production steps in the overall production process?**

MASUNAGA relies entirely on hands-on creation processes. MASUNAGA's frames are 100% handmade and every single frame is the result of highly skilled craftsmen perfecting every manufacturing process.



**How many working steps are involved in each individual pair of glasses?**

There are over 400 manufacturing processes involved in making an optical frame. Generally, productivity is low when one company is in charge of all the processes. However,

MASUNAGA not only creates eyewear from the most premium acetate plates, engravings on the titanium temples are also state of the art.

## MASUNAGA

### »Vela«

Precisely engineered acetate inserts and titanium sheets at 3 mm thickness are perfectly combined. The arabesque patterns on the bridge and temples add vintage elements to the frame.

### »Campanule«

The temples are fashioned from MASUNAGA's highly skilled welding technology using pure titanium and solid 18 karat gold. Our company created the world's first direct joining technology between shape-memory metals and other metals. Based on this know-how, the joining technology was established. Delicate engravings on the bridge, the bar and the temples are reminiscent of 1920s jewelry details. The »Campanule« is well engineered and matches the plastic rim and metal front perfectly.

### »Dahlia«

It achieves a bold profile by using acetate sheets at 10 mm thickness, but still looks thin viewed from the front. While maintaining a rich aesthetic in a true acetate frame, the »Dahlia« is engineered to be lighter to provide the best comfort.



## MASUNAGA

### »GMS-106«

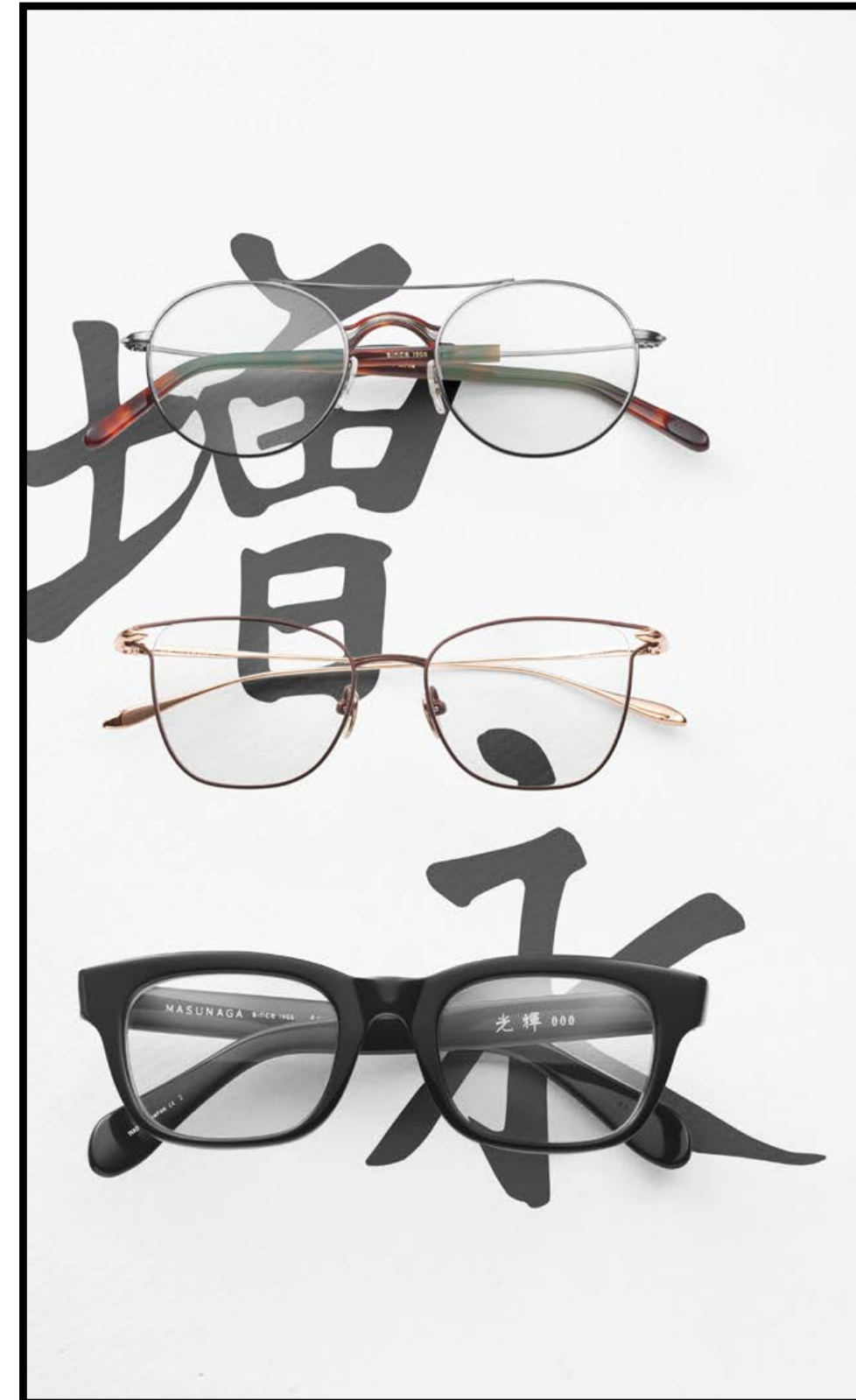
Details like the celluloid overlay from that time are redesigned with a modern interpretation. Delicate milgrain detailing on the bridge and temples. Unique titanium and acetate combination designs are featured on the bridge and temples.

### »Liberty«

The beautifully sculpted thin temples are made of gum-titanium, highly elastic titanium alloy. Delicate milgrain detailing on the temples is created by highly skilled pressing technology.

### »000«

Staying true to the spirit of our historical frames, the »000« features silver rivets, durable seven-barrel hinges and custom nose pads. The lustrous finish of this model is achieved by many steps of barrel polishing and clay polishing applied in-between steps by MASUNAGA craftsmen.



MASUNAGA OPTICAL is the only company in Japan that places one single factory in charge of all processes from design, raw materials research, metal processing and coloring to finishing in an integrated way.

**Please tell us more about this integration.**

Our integrated production system serves to improve the details and quality. For example, when MASUNAGA OPTICAL develops a new model, the molds are always built in-house. If there is a problem in the wear comfort that can be felt right after completing one pair of glasses, it will be corrected in the previous stage immediately.

**That's an impressive level of control. What kind of materials do you prefer to work with?**

We are proficient in all types of materials including solid gold, titanium, acetate and many more.

**But do you personally have a favorite material?**

My favorite material is titanium. It's the lightest metal you can find on earth.

**For this interview, you have hand-picked six frames for us. What was the reasoning behind your choices?**

We chose three models from our 2019 Spring/Summer New Collection, the »Liberty«, »Vela« and »Dahlia«. The other three models are our iconic models since we have won the *Silmo d'Or* with the »GMS-106« and »Campanule«. What's more, the »000« is the successor of our »Custom-72« that was placed in the *Osaka Expo* time capsule. It is single-handedly the representative model of our acetate frame collection continuing from »000« to »075«.

**Mr. Masunaga, thank you for these valuable insights. ▽**

*www.masunaga1905.com*



*Witness the delicate blend between various materials.*