

Talking About Japan

を

話

そ

う



A Conversation with Foreign Residents

We are sitting quietly outside on the wooden edge of Honen-in temple, facing one of its ageless magical inner gardens. A soft breeze is warmed by a bright autumn sun. The decor is perfectly matching what anyone would imagine being the heart of Kyoto. Except that none of us is Japanese... or at least in appearance. As the majority of foreigners in Japan could only think of Tokyo as their base, for a few some, there is nowhere else than Kyoto on earth. JQR has met with three of them to find out why.

JQR Most foreigners choose to live in Tokyo, why not you?

ROBERT I decided to move here for cultural and business reasons. I am like one of those baseball cards collectors who know all the statistics and details about all players, but to ceramics. Ceramics come from West Japan, from Kyushu up to Nagoya. What people call the 6 old kilns of Japan are mostly in this area. An hour away from Kyoto you have Shigaraki, or Tamba, or Echizen, or Bizen a short train ride away. So to be close to the art that I so love, it just made sense to be here.

JOEL I like the city, so I love to visit Tokyo or Osaka, but Kyoto almost feels like the countryside. It is surrounded by mountains, there is a river running right through it, and I also love nature. I like jogging, bird watching, and all of this is never far away. I used to go rainbow trout fishing on my own when I was ten years old, so when I come here and sit in a traditional garden, it makes me feel some of that.

SACKO The part I like of Kyoto is the human scale of the city. Unlike Tokyo, where you often can't manage your own movements with the long distances or flow of the crowds, here it is easy to decide if you go by bicycle or by bus, it is easy to understand the city and to manage it your own way. If you want the historical part of it, it is right there, if you want the modern part of it there you go, there are nice cafés everywhere, it's very easy to network.

JOEL Kyoto is a living museum just like Florence or one of those historical cities. And it's easy to cycle from one end to the



Joel Stuart

Painter, print and installation Artist who arrived in Japan 26 years ago. Originally from Washington State in the US, he finds Kyoto as the ideal work environment for him.

Oussouby Sacko

From Mali, he studied architecture for 6 years in China before moving to Kyoto where he planned to finish his studies and get a year or two of work experience before going back... but that was 21 years ago.

Robert Yellin

Ceramics curator, born in New Jersey in the US, he arrived in Japan in 1984. He has since written several books and created the world's largest English language database on Japanese ceramics. After years in Shizuoka, he made the move to Kyoto 15 months ago.

Living in Kyoto History, quietness and convenience

- Joel Stuart
- Oussouby Sacko
- Robert Yellin

other within 20 minutes like I did this morning to come here.

We have department stores, Internet, we can live internationally here, it's not like we're isolated.

SACKO You often hear the Japanese say that Kyoto people are difficult to reach, to access, because there are lots of codes. What I find most interesting is that it is much easier for foreigners, because Kyoto people are very willing to teach you all those codes and all about Japanese culture. Most of Japanese people coming from other regions would never dare to ask so they create their own barriers. And I think Kyoto people often reduce the structure of those codes when they are with foreigners!

JOEL But that "distance" is very useful for me. You can choose to use it or not when you feel like it. I've been living here too long, so when I go back to the United-States, where people are completely in your face, telling you their opinion about everything, I go, "Why do I have to hear this?"

ALL LOL!

JOEL For example I have a friend who is also an artist who lives in the countryside of Shiga. There, 5 times a day people just come in, sit on the couch and chat about his paintings. And he likes that attention. Me, I wouldn't be able to get anything done if people came. So people here leave me alone when I do my work and if I want to engage, then they come. So that works for me.

ROBERT All that adding to the fact that Kyoto wasn't bombed during World War II,

**Meet our
three interviewees!!!**