

Public Toilets = Combine business and pleasure

The Association that changed the face of the bowl!

Photo / Yosuke Suga

When you go around Japan, would it be by foot, train or car, you soon forget about the fact that finding spotless clean toilets wherever you stop at is a luxury still envied by more than one major cities of the world. However, it was quite a different case only twenty years ago! How did we switch from malodorous loos to hotel-like modern "thrones" in such a quick time? A very small group of people stands at the origin of this "miracle." JQR has met with the President of the Japan Toilet Association, Junichi Hirata, who has again proven to us that you don't need to do much to change the world!

JQR:In which context was the Toilet Association created?

Junichi Hirata: After the war in 1945, unlike Europe, which had over 60% of their territory covered with sewerage networks, Japan was literally at ground zero. And you certainly don't build up an entire waterworks network in a couple of days just because you realize you need one! Some big international events such as the Olympics in 1964 and the Universal Expo in 1970 have triggered great pushes to its development. However, we didn't care much about odours in those days and we installed mainly Japanese style floor-toilets, often just a simple hole through which you could see excrements. It was in 1985 that a small group of people joined together to brainstorm about possible actions that could change these public spaces into more pleasant spots to "gather." That is how the Association was founded.

JQR:What was your first action?

JH:We simply organized an annual contest for the best public toilet, targeting all municipalities around Japan. By giving an official prize to the best 10 restrooms and with a good media coverage, little by little, the people responsible for parks and other public spaces such as train stations have taken the problem to their own and put in a lot of efforts in those long neglected places.

JQR:But that is asking for a lot of maintenance and personnel. How did you convince people to "invest" in the cleaning of public restrooms?

JH:First with our Best Toilet Prize,

municipalities rapidly noticed that a public facility with nice restrooms was attracting much more people and they started to compete against each other. The phenomenon became as such that the entire country was then realizing the importance of keeping public restrooms clean and pleasant. Through the years, we have accumulated a whole lot of precise data on their utilization, from meters of paper to minutes of usage. A few other countries also have these kind of data, but they don't open them, because the topic is still taboo. In Japan, since this aspect of society is rather new, and also because within this short time span we have



changed three times of toilet style, from wooden buckets to floor-toilets to western-style, it was easier to tackle openly this traditionally "dirty" topic.

Today, we talk about toilets without shame, even at the dining table, we show them on TV, the "allergy" has disappeared. Well thanks to all those data that we have, we were able to understand two things. First of all, that the human being has the tendency to leave a place clean after usage if it was clean in the first place. Sadly the opposite is also true. Second, that a facility with nice restrooms attracts people and even brings higher standing to the place.

JQR: We can see that standards have reached impressive levels recently, in particular in parking areas or train stations!

JH:Yes indeed. With the new highways that were constructed came new parking areas thus new

public restrooms.

JQR:Some look like hotel restrooms!

JH:Two of our members have been involved in the basic design development.

JQR:So you are also acting as consultants?

JH:Yes. With our databases and our experience, even though we are all volunteers, we are often called for forums or new project developments.

JQR:What are your next challenges?

JH:Japan is a country at high disaster risks and Mother Nature has severely reminded us last year. We are now trying to find solutions for emergency toilets, in the case masses of people are on the street or have to walk all the way back home, when everything around is blocked.



Born in 1933, Junichi Hirata has worked many years in R&D and marketing at TOTO, where he became Executive Director then later Advisor. He took the helm of the Toilet Association of Japan in 2009 and implemented the Prize for the best toilet design. He is also the author of many publications.

SHIBUYA HIKARIE

Popular Women's Toilets Conducive to Lingering

Shibuya Hikarie opened in 2012, and the women's restroom facilities located in ShinQs, the retail portion of the complex, have been much talked-about. They include not only stylishly designed interiors, but a relaxing 3D sound system and air scented with aroma oils. The facilities on each floor even feature different themes, with one offering a woody space filled with plants, while another is like something in a luxury hotel, complete with a dazzling chandelier. Just visiting the restrooms on each of the six floors could make for a fun experience.

Shibuya Hikarie ShinQs

2-21-1 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

The restrooms are being called "switch rooms," because they provide women a place to "switch" their makeup and their mood before dinner or an important date. Women only.



Stalls in the fourth floor toilets each feature a different design, from forest to deep sea. Every visit feels like a little trip of its own.



Powder rooms feature LED lighting designed to enhance the skin's appearance. Magnifying mirrors and air-shower booths also available.