

TOKYO AMERICAN CLUB

MARCH 2021

INTOUCH



Nihonbashi Welcome

The Club prepares to launch its inaugural satellite hub



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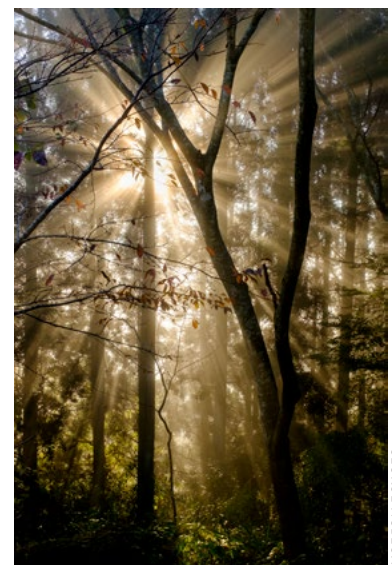
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Ahead of his Club photography course this month, award-winning lensman George Nobechi talks life passions and reconnecting with his heritage.



GEORGE NOBECHI

COVER IMAGE OF TOKYO AMERICAN CLUB NIHONBASHI LOBBY BY YUUKI IDE

INTOUCH

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Explore the Club's range of advertising possibilities by talking to the Club's exclusive advertising agency, Custom Media.

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JOINING TOKYO AMERICAN CLUB

To arrange a tour of the facilities, contact the Membership Office.

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Making Club History

WORDS ALOK RAKYAN

IMAGE KAYO YAMAWAKI

The keenly awaited Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi opens soon. Its handover to the Club is complete and the staff is busy training and testing procedures and processes for the opening on March 31.

It's been a lot of work since 2018 when the TAC Nihonbashi Task Force was set up to oversee the opening of the satellite club. As vice chair of the task force, I have participated in a fascinating journey. I have the utmost appreciation for the able leadership and commitment shown by Ginger Griggs, the task force chair, who spent hundreds of hours drafting e-mails and proposals and microscopically going over every aspect of the project.

We could not have reached this point without her, nor without the invaluable contributions of Jim Mori, Jim Fink, Terry White and Koichi Komoda. Of course, none of it would have been possible without the support, advice and coordination of Club management: Nori Yamazaki, Wayne Hunter and Tony Cala.

As background, the task force and management met around twice a week, not just with Mitsui Fudosan, the developer, but with architects, the project manager, vendors, the art curator and Club chefs armed with menus.

Every element of the new clubhouse was discussed, from the layout and ceiling wood to faucets and signage fonts. Nothing was overlooked. We even physically "tested" every piece of furniture for shape, size and comfort. No stone was left unturned and I hope that Members will appreciate all the hard work.

At absolutely zero cost to the Club, the new facility offers a notable benefit for both Azabudai and Nihonbashi Members. And it promises wonderful opportunities for interacting with a new demographic of Member.

In addition to the task force, I was part of the Board's crisis response team, which oversaw many of the decisions made last year during the first wave of the pandemic. Not all those decisions were easy. Some were contentious and many were not unanimous. While the majority of the membership was satisfied with how things were handled, some Members were not.

And therein lies the challenge of how we, as Members, can contribute to the betterment of the Club. Having sat on various committees as well as on the Board, I can confidently say that the best way is to raise your hand, show your commitment to volunteering, maybe join a committee and start making a difference.

Alok Rakyán is a Club governor and vice chair of the TAC Nihonbashi Task Force.

"AT ABSOLUTELY ZERO COST TO THE CLUB, THE NEW FACILITY OFFERS A NOTABLE BENEFIT FOR BOTH AZABUDAI AND NIHONBASHI MEMBERS."

Landmark Launch



YUUKI IDE

The Club makes history on March 31 when it welcomes Members to its first-ever satellite clubhouse.

Located on the sixth floor of Nihonbashi Muromachi Mitsui Tower, a short walk from Nihonbashi's eponymous bridge, Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi features a restaurant (pictured), bar and lounge, private dining room, fitness center and access to a VIP area.

"The site is looking fantastic. Club Members have a lot to look forward to," says Daishi Yoshimoto, the architect behind the premises' interior design.

The Nihonbashi Club will be open for weekday use by both adult Members of the Azabudai Club and those who join the Nihonbashi facility. Learn more on page 20. *NJ*

SAKE

Inauguration Brew



The Japanese have been knocking back the sake at ceremonies for centuries. Whether for offering thanks to the Shinto gods, marking milestones or warding off bad luck, the fermented rice drink plays a significant role in so much of Japanese culture.

In keeping with this tradition, the Club releases the third edition of its exclusively produced Hakkaisan (pictured) *junmai ginjo* sake in time for the March 31 opening of Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi, which features on the bottle's updated label design.

Made from Niigata Prefecture's premium *koshi tanrei* rice, the sake will be available at The Cellar for ¥2,740 a bottle from the end of March. *NJ*

Perfect Partnership

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to destroy it," American business tycoon and philanthropist Warren Buffett once sagely declared. Never has this been truer than in this age of quick-fire tweets, online reviews and viral videos.

Businesses might spend millions on brand image and logos, but their reputation is determined by the day-to-day experiences customers and clients have with their service, whatever that might be.

Just as a company's public standing can be wrecked with an irate social media post, so the converse is equally accurate. Word-of-mouth recommendations remain a powerful tool.

Joining an institution like the Club is rarely done impulsively. People talk to friends and seek out opinions from coworkers before signing on the dotted line. This is evident from the number of new expat Members who say they joined the Club at the urging of colleagues.

The developer Mitsui Fudosan no doubt carried out its own due diligence before deciding to invite the Club to establish a satellite facility on the sixth floor of its multiuse complex of Nihonbashi Muromachi Mitsui Tower (a building that shares the same designer as the Azabudai Club: Pelli Clarke Pelli).

Business collaborations, to a certain extent, are about staking your reputation on the reputation of your partner. And Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi, set to open on March 31, looks like the product of a marriage made in heaven.

Turn to page 20 to read more about the Club's Nihonbashi hub.

Nick Jones

From the Shelves



KAYO YAMAWAKI

Lee Mawer

We can't resist a juicy political tell-all. At least that's what the sales of memoirs of former presidents and prime ministers indicate. In fact, nonfiction books in general have been enjoying something of a boom in recent years. Member Lee Mawer is one of those readers more likely to be found among the Library's nonfiction stacks.

What was your favorite childhood book?

1984 by George Orwell. It was enthralling. I read it late into the night

then picked it up again the next morning. I was captivated by the protagonist's struggle against an omnipresent state.

What inspired your love of books?

I was naturally drawn to books at an early age as a wonderful escape from everyday life. I began reading magazines and Hardy Boys books. My mom reminds me of the time when, after reading the latest *Newsweek* magazine as a 12-year-old, I wanted to discuss the Middle East war at 5:30am on the way to hockey practice. Although my

mom encouraged me to read, this was a bit overwhelming at such an early hour, to say the least.

What genre do you most enjoy?

I like to learn interesting facts, new ideas and different perspectives. I focus on nonfiction that ranges from biographies to science. A recent autobiography I enjoyed was *First Light* by Geoffrey Well, the inspiring story of an 18-year-old British fighter pilot in World War II. I could never imagine myself being able to do such a thing as a teenager. While a bit of challenge to read, Nick Lane's *The Vital Question* was informative and worthwhile. The biochemist reveals the links between energy and cell biology to explain how life began.

What are you reading now?

I am currently rereading *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman, a fascinating book on how people think and perceive things.

When were you last unable to put down a book?

American Kingpin by Nick Bolton. A nonfiction book that reads like a thriller, it is about the epic hunt for the mastermind behind the darknet platform Silk Road.

March Makeover

After a winter hunkered down at home, it's time to treat yourself to a top-to-toe "spring-clean" with three discounted treatments from The Spa.

For all of March, enjoy 20 percent off a 60-minute aromatherapy session (¥9,600) that blends essentials oils and muscle manipulation to leave you relaxed and refreshed. Or if the first buds of the season have you reaching for the antihistamine, you can find relief in the deep-cleansing New Proskin (¥12,800) and Gentle (¥9,600) facials from Dermalogica.

After 60 minutes, you'll look—and feel—as fresh as the spring blossom. *NJ*



KAYO YAMAWAKI

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MEETINGS

Down to Business



KAYO YAMAWAKI

When Member Ricardo Tasca was planning a year-end marketing meeting with colleagues dotted around the globe, there was only one place he considered holding it.

“I chose the Club because of its state-of-the-art facilities, catering and technology,” he says. “And by choosing the Club, I could be assured that my team and myself were going to be safe.”

Just as employees took teleworking and online meetings in their stride last year, so the Club quickly embraced the new business normal. Its safety-focused meeting packages make use of the Club’s spacious event rooms and web-conferencing setup for socially distanced and hybrid gatherings.

Since business risks shouldn’t extend to meetings, organize your next event at the Club. Contact 03-4588-0308 or banquet@tac-club.org. *NJ*

DINING

Couriered Cuisine



KAYO YAMAWAKI

Who says you need to be at the Club to enjoy your restaurant favorites? The likes of American Bar & Grill’s Reuben sandwich (pictured) and Chinese chicken salad are now available for delivery to your door.

Launched last month, the Club’s partnership with delivery service Food-E means that Members can have lunch or dinner shipped to the office or their home (within 5 kilometers of Nishi Azabu).

“Food-E is focused on upscale, premium restaurants where the quality of the delivery is a critical element towards the success of each order,” says Scott Kihara, the Club’s chef de cuisine.

After setting up an account on the Food-E website (www.food-e.jp), Members can receive a 25 percent discount on each order. *NJ*

WINE

Spring Sippers

WORDS KAZUMI FUKUMURO

IMAGE KAYO YAMAWAKI



As we bid farewell to winter’s chill, it’s time to start thinking about wines for a warmer season.

My first Cellar recommendation for spring is Famille Perrin’s 2018 Les Sinards Châteauneuf-du-Pape (¥5,800). This southern Rhône red blend is well balanced with fruit aromas and good acidity, just as you’d expect from winemaker Mark Perrin (even Brad Pitt hired him to help launch his own winery).

Staying in France, Thibault Liger-Belair set up his small-batch winery in 2002 with inherited vineyards in Burgundy’s Nuits-Saint-Georges. The richness and smooth texture of his 2017 Gevrey-Chambertin La Croix des Champs (¥9,300) shows how far he has come in honing his craft.

Pinot Noir is also the grape of choice in Schramsberg’s 2016 Blanc de Noirs, a world-class sparkling wine that often appears on the menu at official White House banquets. The Napa winery believes in handcrafting every stage of production, even down to the labels on the bottles. Available for ¥3,610.

Whatever your go-to wine might be, why not try something new in time for spring?

Kazumi Fukumuro is a member of the Club’s Wine & Beverage Committee and a licensed sommelier.

For the month of March, receive a 10 percent discount on purchases of at least three bottles of any of these recommended Cellar wines.

Events in March

Since some events may be postponed or cancelled due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis, please check the Club website for the most up-to-date information.

3

Toastmasters Luncheon

Learn how to engage a room and feel comfortable at the podium with the help of the Club's welcoming band of Toastmasters.

› 12–1:30pm › Manhattan I › ¥2,200 (online attendance: ¥500) › Sign up online

3

Wednesday Storytime

Youngsters pick up a lifelong love of reading at this inspiring session of children's tales from the shelves of the Children's Library. Runs every Wednesday.

› 4–4:30pm › Children's Library › Free
› Ages 2–6 › Details online

4

Jindaiji Daruma Festival

Members head to a temple in western Tokyo for a *daruma* doll event that has its origins in the 17th century. Organized by Connections.

› 9am–4pm › Details online

5

Friday Night Live

Local musicians Steve Gardner and Felix Sonnyboy bring the sounds of the Mississippi Delta to the Winter Garden for an evening of country blues.

› 6–7:30pm › Winter Garden › ¥2,500 (walk-ins: ¥3,500) › Members only
› Sign up online

5–7

Le Creuset Sale

If you're looking for cooking inspiration or motivation, you'll find it at this three-day sale of top French kitchenware.

› 10:30am–7pm › Beate Sirota Gordon & Haru Reischauer classrooms
› Members only › Details online



2

Gallery Exhibition: Yoshihito Takeuchi

From pigs in stripy, undersized T-shirts to nattering bovines to chimpanzees in banana-shaped hats, Yoshihito Takeuchi's illustrated characters never fail to raise a smile. And that's exactly what the Japanese artist wants.

Takeuchi's uplifting anthropomorphic subjects have appeared on everything from kindergarten and hospital walls and train exteriors to product packaging and the cover of an elementary school textbook. Many are featured alongside his central message: "I wish you are always smiling."

Born in 1969 in Osaka, Takeuchi majored in product design at the Kyoto City University of Arts. He has exhibited his works across Japan and has hosted live painting events.

Takeuchi, whose illustrations are on display at the Frederick Harris Gallery through March 22, says he hopes his art can encourage and inspire.

"Of course, in order to convey smiles, I try to enjoy myself as much as I can," he says. "By expressing a smile, I hope that people feel they are connected and that that feeling is widely shared." *NJ*

Moment I became an artist.

At 27 years old.

What I would tell my 20-year-old self.

Please pursue what you want to do.

My creative space.

A renovated, traditional folk house near the World Heritage site of Kofukuji Temple in Nara.

Artist I'd most like to get to know.

Photographer Mitsuhiko Imamori.

› Through March 22 › Frederick Harris Gallery › Artworks available for purchase through The Cellar
› Details online

6

Youth Toastmasters Club

Youngsters pick up tips on public speaking, debating and holding an audience's attention from members of the Club's own Toastmasters group.

› 2–3pm › Brooklyn rooms › ¥1,000
› Ages 10–18 › Sign up online

8

Culture Connections

Member Keren Chitayat discusses the fascinating customs and cuisine of Israel at this monthly celebration of world culture.

› 10am › Manhattan III › Connections members only › Details online

10

TAC Talk: Timon Screech

Why would an English king dispatch a ship to Japan with lavish gifts for a Japanese shogun? Professor Timon Screech shares the details of this little-known tale of 17th-century diplomacy.

› 7–8pm › Washington & Logan rooms
› ¥1,500 (online: ¥500) › Copies of *The Shogun's Silver Telescope* available for ¥3,700 › Sign up online

12

Board Together

Test your wits at the Library's newest (tech-free) tabletop game club. Enjoy an afternoon of strategy with old-school boardgames like Risk, Catan, D&D and chess. Continues every second Friday.

› 5–6:30pm › Teen Connection
› ¥1,000 › Recommended for ages 12–18 › Sign up online

12, 19 & 26

Winter Garden Melodies

Unwind at the end of the workweek with the soothing tunes of pianist Karen Kamikawa on March 12 and pianist Kotomi Hasegawa on March 19 and 26.

› 6–9pm › Winter Garden › Details online

13

DIY Comic Book Club

Creative kids craft their own comic book with the Library's Drew Damron. The fun continues every second Saturday of the month.

› 11:30am–1:30pm › Teen Connection
› ¥2,000 › Ages 6–14 › Sign up online



13

Nikko Sake Brewery Tour

Yasuhiro Watanabe and Tomoyuki Katayama have been through a lot together. Friends since kindergarten, the pair both traversed their youth and into the responsibilities of adulthood in the tourist area of Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture.

They also both took over their family sake businesses—boutique breweries dating back to the 19th century in the town of Imaichi. The 50-year-olds have faced the same adversities over the years, from sake's waning popularity to the Tohoku disaster of 2011 to the current global pandemic.

But as with any industry, there are opportunities, too, and Watanabe sees a burgeoning interest in sake from younger Japanese and drinkers overseas.

“Demand for high-quality sake is increasing,” he says. “While total volumes are declining, there is a growing demand for sake with

distinction, especially locally brewed sake.”

Members will learn more about the ins and outs of making the rice-based alcohol when Watanabe and Katayama lead behind-the-scenes tours of their respective Watanabe Sahei Shoten and Katayama Shuzo breweries.

Later, the brewmasters will host a sake-pairing lunch at the charming Nikko Kanaya Hotel, another local institution founded in the 1800s.

Day-trippers will then visit the eighth-century Futarasan Shrine, dedicated to the deities of Nikko's three most sacred mountains. Since sake has long been associated with Shinto ceremonies, this final stop provides an apt finale to a day of cultural exploration. *NJ*

› 7:45am–7:30pm › ¥8,800 (guests: ¥10,600) › Limit: two guests per Member › Sign up online

15

Toastmasters Luncheon

Public-speaking enthusiasts of all ages mark World Speech Day with dinner and a celebration of the spoken word.

› 6:30–8pm › Manhattan I & II
› ¥4,900 (guests: ¥5,880); Junior Toastmasters: ¥4,300; online: ¥500 (guests: ¥600) › Sign up online

16

Cocktail Connections

Mask up and mingle with friends over happy-hour drinks during this monthly mixer.

› 5–7pm › Traders' Bar › Connections members only › Details online



Rie Kayano (left)

20 TAC Talk: *Ainu: My Voice*

Words are culture. And when a language becomes extinct, an entire way of life goes with it.

“With every language that disappears, the world loses a wealth of traditional knowledge,” warned UN Secretary-General António Guterres during a 2019 speech about the challenges facing indigenous groups around the globe.

The dilemma extends to the Ainu, Japan’s indigenous minority and the original settlers of northern Japan. Following centuries of discrimination and assimilation, estimates of Japan’s Ainu population vary greatly, from 25,000 to 200,000.

Some Ainu are even unaware of their ancestry. This was the case for Rie Kayano until she told her mother about being taunted at her elementary school.

The documentary *Ainu: My Voice*, which will be shown at the Club this month, follows Kayano as she unearths her ancestry and endeavors to preserve

Ainu culture and its unique tradition of folk song.

Member Chuk Beshier is the film’s executive producer.

“Be it women or minorities within Japanese society, unless Japan comes to terms with its inherent diversity, it faces the real possibility of irreversible decline,” he says. “I thought Rie’s story is an important one to tell because it helps Japan question its preconceived sense of identity.” *NJ*

• 7–8pm • Washington & Lincoln rooms
• ¥1,500 (online: ¥500) • Sign up online

18 Book Lovers’ Group

The Club’s band of bibliophiles meets for 90 minutes of freewheeling literary discussion and book recommendations.

• 11am–12:30pm • Vista • Free • Sign up online

20 Show & Tell Jamboree

Ages 6 to 9 build confidence while learning how to wow a crowd at this afternoon of games, music and self-esteem-boosting activities.

• 2–3pm • Brooklyn rooms • ¥1,000
• Sign up online

22 Camp Discovery

Camp fun returns for three weeklong sessions of arts and crafts, music and sports for ages 3 to 9.

• 9am–3pm (Camp Plus: 3–5pm)
• ¥45,000 (¥10,000 per day); Camp Plus: ¥3,600 per day • Members only
• Sign up online

24 IWA 5 Sake Dinner

Over four courses of sake-paired cuisine, Richard Geoffroy, appearing virtually, shares his journey from Dom Pérignon cellar master to sake brewmaster in Toyama Prefecture.

• 6:30pm • New York Ballroom
• ¥20,000 • Sign up online

27 Saturday Storytime

Kids jump into the weekend with tales of magic and adventure from the shelves of the Children’s Library.

• 11:30am–12pm • Children’s Library
• Free • Details online

29 Coffee Connections

Embrace the possibilities of spring by meeting old friends and making new ones at this monthly get-together of Connections members.

• 10am • Connections members only
• Details online

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Stylish Send-Off

Two newlyweds explain how the Club helped them throw their dream wedding party.

WORDS JOAN BAILEY

IMAGE 37 FRAMES



Leslie Kee and Joshua Ogg

The wedding was set for December in New York City. But when the Covid-19 pandemic set the world on its head, Leslie Kee and Joshua Ogg finally accepted the inevitable and cancelled.

The Tokyo-based couple began to worry that the opportunity to celebrate their union at all in 2020 was slipping away. Then they discovered the Club.

“We decided to do it right after we got our partnership certificate in Shibuya and a week after our wedding in Kyoto in September. We chose November 22, an ‘*ii fufu*’ [good couple] day,” says *Vogue* photographer Kee, 49. “That only gave

us about 10 weeks, but Chizuka [Yamakita] and the Club staff were amazing.”

Yamakita, a wedding planner with the Club for more than 15 years, set about crafting a memorable event for the couple and their 180 guests. She regularly met the pair to go over every detail, from the usual food and flowers to arrangements for a room for members of the media.

Kee’s profession meant that the guestlist would be something of a who’s who from the worlds of Japanese fashion, television and music. Interest in the big day was so keen that the occasion was to be livestreamed.

“I think that added another level of pressure,” says American Ogg, 32, of the preparations for the Club team, “but they handled it beautifully. The staff consulted us on every aspect and were really flexible with our schedules—as well as what we hoped for and wanted for the day. Everything was perfect.”

While a flower arrangement is a typical table decoration at wedding receptions in Japan, Kee and Ogg wanted the floral designs to incorporate a rainbow, the international symbol of the LGBTQ+ movement.

“We wanted each table to have a unique arrangement in one color of the rainbow. In the end, we had a total of 27 different kinds of flowers in seven different colors spread over 27 tables,” explains Singaporean Kee. “It was a landscape of color that represented all of our different friends and family.”

Befitting a celebration that featured dozens of live music acts, the grooms’ wardrobe changes were equally dazzling. They appeared first in embroidered white *hakama* by iconic wedding dress designer Yumi Katsura before donning bespoke Thom Browne suits and tailored Yohji Yamamoto tuxedos.

Even the safety measures were customized for the day: each of the guests received a black mask emblazoned with the rainbow-colored words “We Are the Love,” with Club staff wearing a black-and-white version. Temperature screening at the entrance to the New York Ballroom and hand sanitizer at every table ensured guests could enjoy the party with peace of mind.

Although a honeymoon in an exotic locale was out of the question, a stay at one of the Club’s Guest Studios was a more-than-satisfactory substitute for the couple.

“It was really important to us to be able to have this party, to celebrate our love in this way,” says Kee. “I’ve been in Japan for 30 years and society here is not very open about LGBTQ+ yet. We wanted to be the first gay couple to have their reception at Tokyo American Club, to show people what is possible, what love is.”

BRIDAL FAIR

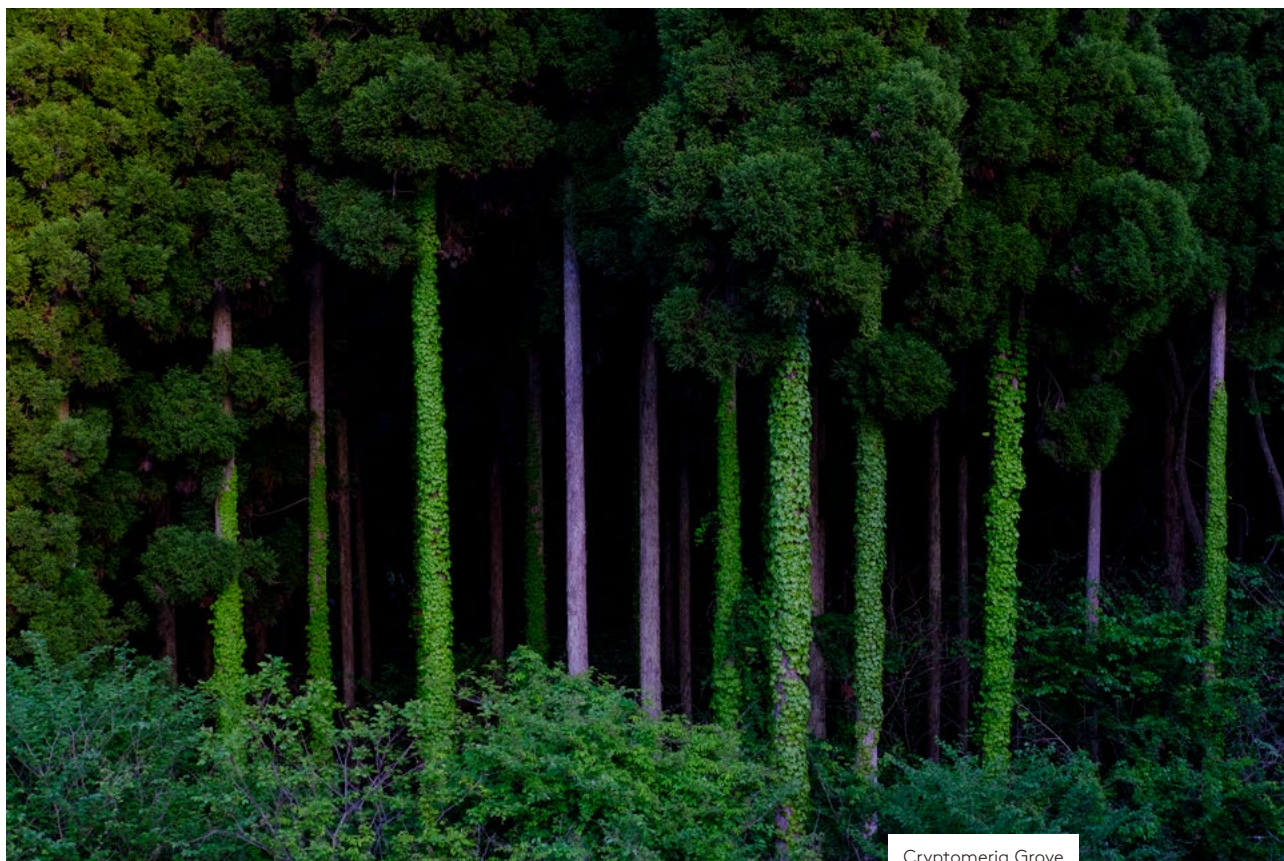
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Framing the World

Ahead of his Connections-organized photography course this month, George Nobechi shares his own journey behind the lens.

WORDS TIM HORNYAK

IMAGES GEORGE NOBECHI



Cryptomeria Grove

The camera doesn't make a bit of difference. All of them can record what you are seeing. But, you have to *see*," the celebrated photographer Ernst Haas once declared.

George Nobechi would likely agree. The award-winning photographer's "Here. Still." project features landscapes from Arizona to Aomori, framed by the windows of hotels, diners, cars and trains. They play on exteriors and interiors and invite viewers to contemplate time, space and self.

Nobechi, 40, sees these windows as a metaphor for his own bicultural identity. Born in Tokyo to a Japanese mother and Canadian father, he studied history and international relations at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

His father passed away when Nobechi was just 19, and he entered the world of finance to help support his family. After stints working in Japan and the United States, he quit the industry to focus on his passion: capturing the world around him with his camera.

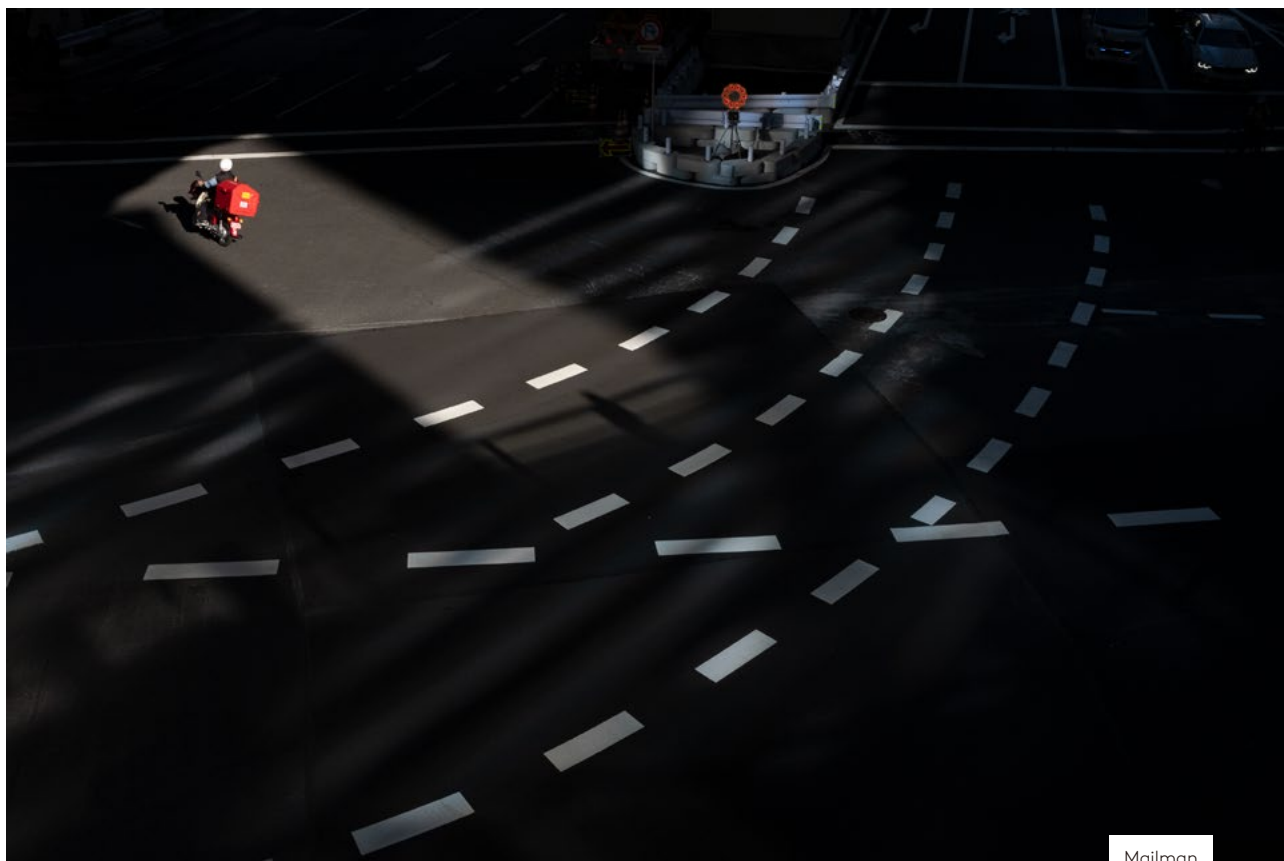
"I was more interested in what we can say about life," Nobechi says of the project he started in 2015. "Like feelings that are universal, like nostalgia, longing and loneliness, and exploring those through photography, so that you're trying to strike the meaning beyond what you see in the frame."

After leaving his job in New York in 2015, Nobechi embarked on a journey that lasted nearly 1,000 days. He photographed his way around the American Southwest before interning at a

photography workshop organization in New Mexico, where he honed his craft with the likes of the noted *National Geographic* lensman Sam Abell.

During this time, Nobechi began shooting scenes for "Here. Still." Some of those images are now included in the collections of the Detroit Center for Contemporary Photography and the Australian Museum of Contemporary Photography, and the project received accolades in a number of international photography competitions.

"That was part of my inner journey, a way to reconnect with life. Outside the window is a stage, with life playing out, but I'm not a player in that because of the disconnection I felt in my prior career from the life I thought I was going to pursue before my fa-



Mailman



George Nobechi

KATE BREAKER

ment, referring to the scene in the 1994 movie when Tom Hanks' character suddenly stops his epic marathon and returns home. The photographer decided to move back to his homeland of Japan to work on projects centering on aspects of Japanese culture and everyday life. Since his relocation, his work has graced the pages of publications like *Newsweek*, *Asahi Camera* and *Fraction*.

Just as he learned from some of photography's greats, Nobechi is keen to mentor others. Through Nobechi Creative, he takes clients to rural villages in Iwate, Toyama and Gifu prefectures to practice their skills, attend workshops and connect with artisans and locals. But when the global pandemic hit, he started organizing online master classes with photographers like Abell, Kate Breaker, Matthew Jordan Smith and Stephen Wilkes. The initiative has raised more than \$70,000 for charity so far.

Club Member Donna Beeman is one photographer who has rediscovered her passion for her vocation thanks to Nobechi. While she enjoyed taking portraits and photographing events, she was in search of something more. A coaching session with Nobechi proved transformative.

"I have also been able to experience George's mind-expanding Evenings with the Masters series and his Sunday Night Is Photo Night workshop, both now for the second time," says Beeman. "The opportunity to learn from George and to interact and learn from people with a shared interest from all over the world has been the highlight of this pandemic year for me, as well as an inspiration for my future as a photographer."

For Nobechi, inspiring fellow photographers means helping them to set goals, cultivate a good work ethic, develop patience and, crucially, observe the quotidian.

"Teaching has always been a passion of mine," he says. "Sure, you can take a great picture of Mount Fuji, but what about your local neighborhood shrine or park? What I want to tell people is that there's beauty all around us in Japan, right under our noses."

CAPTURING JAPAN

- Lecture: March 11 • 7-8:30pm • Toko Shinoda and Yukiko Maki classrooms
- Photo Walk: March 13 • 9am-12pm
- ¥15,000 • Sign up online

ther passed away," explains Nobechi. "That inner journey started to make me think about Japan, Japanese aesthetics and the presence of people who are departed."

In 2017, Nobechi experienced what he describes as a "Forrest Gump" mo-



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Curating Creativity

What do ceramicist Kenichi Iwase and photographer Phil Uhl have in common? The answer lies behind display glass at the Club.

WORDS NICK JONES

The emotions art can evoke are as multifarious as the forms it can take. And while curators have no control over the effect of an artwork on an audience, they do at least decide what goes on display in the first place.

An art gallery has featured at the Club since the 1970s. The current space, the Frederick Harris Gallery, hosts regular shows by local artists and is overseen by a committee of art lovers. JoAnn Yoneyama, the committee's chair, discusses the gallery's role:

How does the committee select artists?

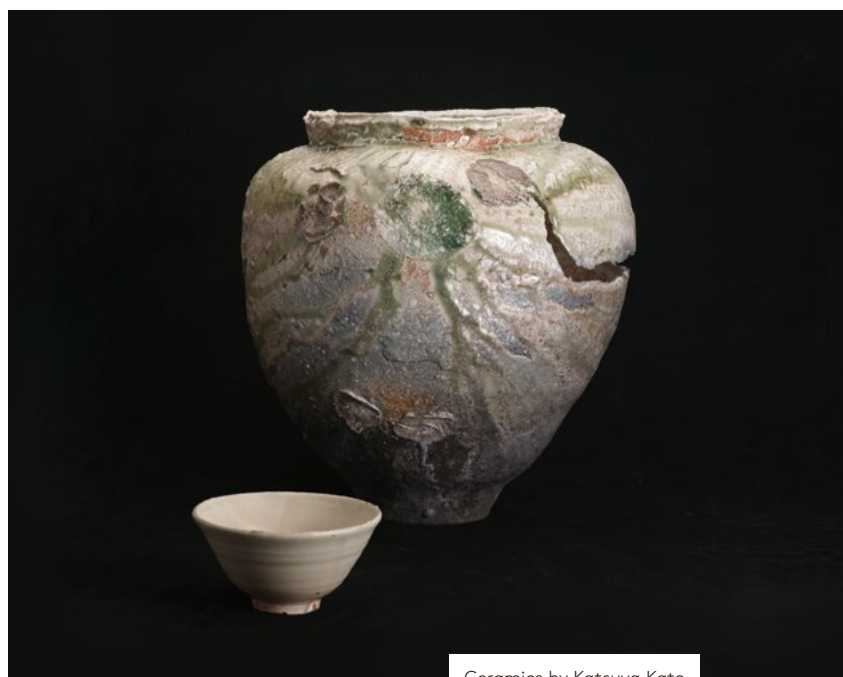
The committee members have varied art backgrounds, from curating exhibits to being artists themselves, and with their experience, we follow the selection guidelines. During our monthly meetings, we review applications and sample artworks. Members independently review each piece and vote whether to accept or deny the application. Evaluation is based a few criteria: the quality and reasonableness of the artwork; whether it would be of interest to Members; its wider educational or cultural appeal; and whether we exhibited similar works recently.

How much interest from artists does the gallery receive?

The gallery has developed a positive reputation within the art community, and we are fortunate to receive many applications. Approved artists are scheduled 12 to 18 months in advance. This allows artists, if they wish, to create new works for the exhibition.

What does the gallery bring to the Club?

The purpose of the committee is to plan, organize and maintain a program of regular exhibitions that are of high



Ceramics by Katsuya Kato

quality and interest to Members. We try to introduce up-and-coming artists, Member artists or artists with a special story to tell. Since art is subjective, we want to feature a wide variety of artforms, from prints and ceramics to lacquerware and mixed media—and everything else in between. Located on B1—with a small display on the first floor—the gallery offers a tranquil space in which to take in the pieces on display.

What have been the standout exhibitions in recent years?

I've only been the committee chair for two years and last year was quite different, but there's always interest in traditional Japanese styles of art, such as *nihonga* paintings, woodblock prints and pottery.

How much of a challenge was 2020 for the committee?

Last year was very stressful. Following the postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, quite a few artists cancelled their

exhibitions. The gallery was going to be empty for six months. This meant that we needed to find artists who were willing to exhibit quickly in a space that was subject to Club safety restrictions. I was very happy how the committee came together to ensure that there were wonderful works of art to admire throughout a challenging, stressful year.

What are the committee's plans for the gallery?

We will continue to host exhibitions that intrigue and stimulate. I don't know when we will be able to open up the gallery to the public, but for now Members can still accompany guests to the gallery. Guests can purchase works as well. Whether you're an art fan or not, I urge you take a moment to drop by the gallery and enjoy the quality pieces on display.

**GALLERY EXHIBITION:
YOSHIHITO TAKEUCHI**

• March 2–22 • Details on page 10

Second Home Comforts

Club history will be made later this month when the much-anticipated Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi opens its doors for the first time.

WORDS NICK JONES

IMAGES YUUKI IDE



Lobby



Clutching an iPad, Daishi Yoshimoto weaves his way between scaffolding platforms, carts piled high with construction materials and stacks of neatly wound cabling. He stops and looks upwards.

“You never normally have such a beautiful ceiling in a gym,” he says of the sleek, dark-wood vaulted canopy. “It’s like working out in a restaurant. We didn’t want to create any space that was second grade.”

Yoshimoto begins swiping through images of architectural renderings on his tablet. He finds what he’s looking for: a computer-generated snapshot of how the space will appear in a few short weeks.

“The reception desk there. The rowing machine there. The running machines over there and the stretching mat there,” says Yoshimoto, pointing to different parts of the winter sunshine-saturated room that will soon house the very latest in cardio and weight-training equipment.

The 50-year-old Japanese architect is making one of his weekly tours of the site of Tokyo American Club Nihonbashi, ahead of its inauguration on March 31. Located on the sixth floor of Nihonbashi Muromachi Mitsui Tower, in the heart of Tokyo’s Nihonbashi district, the adults-only satellite facility is the first of its kind for the Club.

“This is a historic step for the Club. In our nearly 100-year history, we have never extended to include a second facility. This is going to be a wonderful benefit for our Members in a really great part of town,” says Member Ginger Griggs, chair of the TAC Nihonbashi Task



American Room

Force, which oversaw the entire project.

That epochal aspect to the venture was not lost on Yoshimoto when he began to forge his design concept for the new clubhouse.

“The fact that it is the first outpost of the Club, that alone was extremely exciting. A lot of pressure as well,” he says. “I didn’t want to make a smaller version of Azabudai. It had to have its own character.”

Over months of collaborative meetings between Yoshimoto, the task force and Club management, design revisions, research and back-to-the-drawing-board moments, the Club took shape. The result is a warm, bright space infused with subtle, contemporary sophistication in every detail of its structure.

“We wanted to create a home for the Members and so creating this warm atmosphere is extremely important,” Yoshimoto says.

Three natural materials, he explains, underpin the home concept: basalt, which forms the curved stone wall that runs between the lobby and the bar area, where antique bronze, the second material, is evident, and walnut, the wood of the pitched ceiling veneer.

“The whole Club is covered by a single roof, almost. The sense of everything being under one roof is important,” says Yoshimoto. “As far

“MEMBERS CAN EXPECT A WOW MOMENT WHEN THEY ENTER THE CLUB. IT WILL BE A PLACE THEY CAN BE PROUD OF.”

—Daishi Yoshimoto

as texture goes, I love walnut and its color. It gives a modern atmosphere to this space. It’s a very solid-looking and warm wood.”

Those arriving through the Club’s entrance are welcomed into a stylish lobby, whose furniture and fittings are intended to give it the feel of an intimate living room. From here, Members can head directly to the fitness area and locker rooms or follow the artwork-lined hallway to Satchmo’s bar, Muromachi Lounge and the American Room, the Club’s restaurant, which also includes a separate, private dining room.

Members will even have access (subject to availability) to an adjacent VIP space, with its own large conference table and bar. It all amounts to an upscale urban retreat overflowing with opportunities.

“It is a beautiful venue that has been carefully thought through, not only for its design but for its comfort, coziness and the way in which it promotes Member engagement as well,” Griggs says.

Satchmo’s is one such spot that is sure to draw a crowd, not least for its eye-catching square bar configuration.

“This is the ‘wow’ bar,” explains Yoshimoto as he watches workers hoist a brass frame to the ceiling. “They’re just suspending the arma-



ture from which we're going to hang 50 light-bulbs. There's going to be another ring around that where you hang your glasses and put your liquor bottles, in addition to the illuminated liquor tower in the center."

From custom-made furniture and cantilevered reception desks to bespoke carpeting and a one-of-a-kind wine cellar, so much of the 1,500-square-meter Club facility is unique.

"It's a fabulous benefit to our Members and at no additional cost to them. It's an amazing thing to be able to offer," Griggs says of the weekday facility.

That offering helped to inspire Jonathan Bethune to become a Member at Azabudai earlier this year.

"Honestly, that was one of the things that motivated me to get the regular membership that allowed me access to both spaces," he says.

And since the American's office is in the same building as the Nihonbashi Club, dropping by means merely hopping on an elevator.

"I think pretty much any day I'm going to the office, I'll be stopping over there, if not for the gym then to have lunch," he says. "And it will be great for business opportunities and for meeting people there."

The Club's location was the attraction for another new Member who works close by. Osamu Sato says he specifically joined the Nihonbashi hub for its "awesome" facilities and networking opportunities.

The momentous project has its origins back in 2017, when Mitsui Fudosan, the developer of Nihonbashi Muromachi Mitsui Tower, approached the Club (through Member Rike



Private Dining Room

Wootten) with the idea of an ancillary clubhouse. Months of meetings and negotiations followed, with Members voting in favor of Mitsui Fudosan's proposal at the Club's 2018 Annual General Meeting.

Yoshimoto and the task force began their regular Friday get-togethers the following year. With 27 years of experience as an architect in both Japan and overseas, Yoshimoto says the Nihonbashi Club is the most intensive interior fit-out project he has ever worked on.

"But it was fun," he says. "What made it fun was that everyone on the task force was so enthusiastic about the project and had a lot to say. I got a lot of energy from the task force."

Griggs, a former Club governor, says the project represents more than two years of hard work by the task force, which had to navigate its way through the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Remarkably, the Club is opening after only a three-month delay.

"Even though it's a small venue, it's a complex project and involves a lot of people," she says. "I've been incredibly fortunate in that the teamwork has been superb. Everyone involved has shown unfailing commitment, focus and cooperation."

All that remains is for the first Members to be welcomed across the brand-new Club's threshold on March 31. Yoshimoto says they won't be disappointed.

"It's a very minimal, simple entrance, but a whole different world inside," he says. "Members can expect a wow moment when they enter the Club. It will be a place they can be proud of."

"IT IS A BEAUTIFUL VENUE THAT HAS BEEN CAREFULLY THOUGHT THROUGH, NOT ONLY FOR ITS DESIGN BUT FOR ITS COMFORT, COZINESS AND THE WAY IN WHICH IT PROMOTES MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AS WELL."

—Ginger Griggs



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Freewheeling Thrills

Member Bill Farrell explains his fitness switch from two legs to two wheels and the appeal of putting cleat to pedal.

IMAGE KAYO YAMAWAKI

I was a runner as a teenager at school in Ireland and I won a track scholarship to a university in New York. At the time, a lot of the universities on the east coast had a tradition of taking Irish runners.

Even up to last year, I was still running around the [Imperial] Palace with my wife once a week. I ran my last marathon in Berlin 10 years ago and loved it. I wanted to do more but my dodgy knees and hips just couldn't do it. I was looking for another challenge and decided I would spend more time on the road bike.

When we moved back to Western Australia about eight years ago, I joined a good cycling group and saw my skill and fitness levels start to really improve. Bike fit is different from running fit. You have the lung capacity, but you're trying to train totally different muscles in your legs. It takes a long time to develop really strong glutes for the bike, and you use a different set of muscles in your calves from running.

It took a good couple of years to get to the point I am now, and I'm probably the fittest I've ever been on the bike. That's been a combination of cycling outdoors in the summer in Japan and then working on a bike trainer inside with a system called Zwift, where you participate in virtual races on an app. I might do a 150K ride outside on the weekend and then I'll do between 30 and 50 a day on the indoor trainer.

Last summer, when my wife was back in Perth, I decided to get out and about and see some of Japan. For a couple of different weeks, I based myself in



Bill Farrell

Nozawa Onsen and rode through all the mountains in Nagano. The terrain there is just as tough as anything I've done in Italy or France.

I then did a bike tour around Shikoku. I went on the Shimanami Kaido across the islands and then down to Kochi and up to Uwajima [in Ehime Prefecture]. It was incredible. It was probably some of the best cycling I have ever done. Some of the roads in the mountains were stunningly beautiful. I remember cycling Route 381 along the river to Uwajima in the afternoon. It was just magical.

I also have a single-speed city bike. If I don't feel like getting on the Lycra, I will just get on the city bike and cruise

around Tokyo for a few hours. Exploring new spots like that is amazing.

Cycling is a lot more social than running. I've met some incredible people. It's given me a sense of adventure. It's taken me to places I never would have gone, particularly in Japan. It has also given me a sense of confidence, knowing that you can plan and execute these tours in foreign countries—and have fun doing them.

Being able to get out on a ride, refresh and get your mind right for the working week is hugely important for me. You come back tired but feeling exuberant and energized.

As told to *INTOUCH's* Nick Jones.

Arrivals

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Avenue Capital Group

Patrick McLeod & Carine Splendore
Dow Toray Co., Ltd.

Ikuko & Shinya Miyagi
Sony Corporation

Megan & Matthew Rossi
PricewaterhouseCoopers Aarata LLC

Marc & Kathleen White
Biogen Japan Ltd.

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Kai & Mariko Kono
Liquid Group, Inc.

JAPAN

Rie & Takashi Aoki
Azul Enterprise Corp.

Hidegori Furuta
Fujitsu Ltd.

Miki Inaho
Miki Global Challengers

Kazuki & Aiko Maeda
Timemachine Co., Ltd.

Kazuhiro & Eri Ozasa
Uka Co., Ltd.

Malia Shimbo
Anela, Inc.

Mei & Yoshiyuki Takano

Nanako Yamada
Dentsu, Inc.

UK

Paul & Alison Johnston
Chubb Insurance Japan

Departures

Yurika & Hirofumi Akaike
Samih Al Mawass & Dania Idriss
Nathalie Carlucci
Robert & Mary Conroy
Andreas & Louise Gunnestrand
Yingke He & Yujian You
Yasukiyo & Mariko Kobayashi
P Scott Lawlis
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Robert & Kimberly Morrissey
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Phillip & Hiroko Rubel
Hideki & Rie Taguchi

Up Close

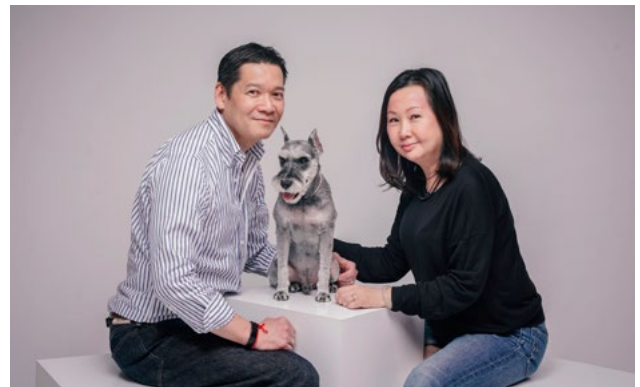


USA | **Heath & Rebecca Havey**

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"After working at international law firms for over 20 years and living in Tokyo twice, we knew on this move from California that we had to live near the Club to have a sense of community for our family. It has a feeling of being back in America and is a home away from home, where we can meet friends and join fun activities. It also brings us closer together as a family to do sports and eat meals, and the staff is always smiling and friendly."

(l-r) Elin, Rebecca, Heath and Everett Havey



USA | **Carol Choi & Takashi Terai**

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"We look forward to being part of the Club community and taking the opportunity to host events and dinners at the Club with our colleagues and friends in Tokyo. With such great fitness facilities, the Club really leaves us no excuse to not work out more often to get in shape for the summer."

Takashi Terai and Carol Choi



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The Power of Community

WORDS JOHN DURKIN

ILLUSTRATION TANIA VICEDO



As my office shook and swayed around me, I huddled under my desk. It was 2:46 on the afternoon of March 11, 2011, and the strongest recorded earthquake in Japanese history had just erupted off the northeast coast of Honshu. As the aftershocks continued, we watched in horror at the live TV pictures of surging tsunami waves washing away entire coastal communities.

Nearly two months had passed since the opening of the new Azabudai Club after a three-year, ¥28 billion redevelopment. We had once worried about the structural integrity of the old Azabudai Club, which was built before Japan adopted strict building codes. Thankfully, we never had to find out how it would have fared in a large quake. Our huge investment in an earthquake-safe facility had paid off.

While rescue teams rushed to the Tohoku region, another crisis was just beginning. Damage to the reactors at the Fukushima No 1 nuclear power plant ignited fears over radioactive isotopes reaching the Japanese capital more than 200 kilometers to the south. Overnight, the most popular website became a webcam shot of a

Geiger counter. The US Embassy then began distributing iodine pills to prevent radiation poisoning.

Residents grew more anxious. Some governments sent planes to evacuate their nationals from what we had always considered to be a super-safe city. At the urging of their embassies, many Members and their families left. Some never to return.

The impact on the Club was severe. The global financial crisis of 2008 and the Club's long redevelopment had already reduced membership numbers to an unsustainable level. With fewer Members, we were concerned about the Club's ability to service the burden of its large redevelopment loan. The events of 2011 only exacerbated the situation.

Emerging from the immediate calamity, we began to tackle the Club's fiscal emergency. With some creativity, we sourced enough cash to pay down nearly 10 percent of our debt. That triggered interest from a Japanese bank and a deal to refinance our loan.

With the Club's finances on the right track, we turned our attention to growing the membership and restoring the Club's reputation as a world-class institution. Over the following years, we

enjoyed record financial results (by last year, we had paid down almost half of our redevelopment loan), high levels of Member satisfaction and the largest number of Members in Club history.

In 2016, five years after the catastrophe, I had difficulty holding back tears while presenting a Tokyo Fire Department official with a token of our community's appreciation for the courageous efforts of firefighters at the Fukushima plant.

We shall never forget the terrible events of 2011. And neither should we forget how Members and management came together in the aftermath to ensure the Club's sustainability.

As we mark the 10th anniversary of the Tohoku disaster, we face another crisis. The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the Club's operations and its finances. But just as our community united 10 years ago to overcome the challenges, we need to do the same again. Through working together, we can help the Club emerge stronger than ever.

John Durkin was the Club's representative governor from 2012 to 2016.



January 28
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IMAGES YUUKI IDE





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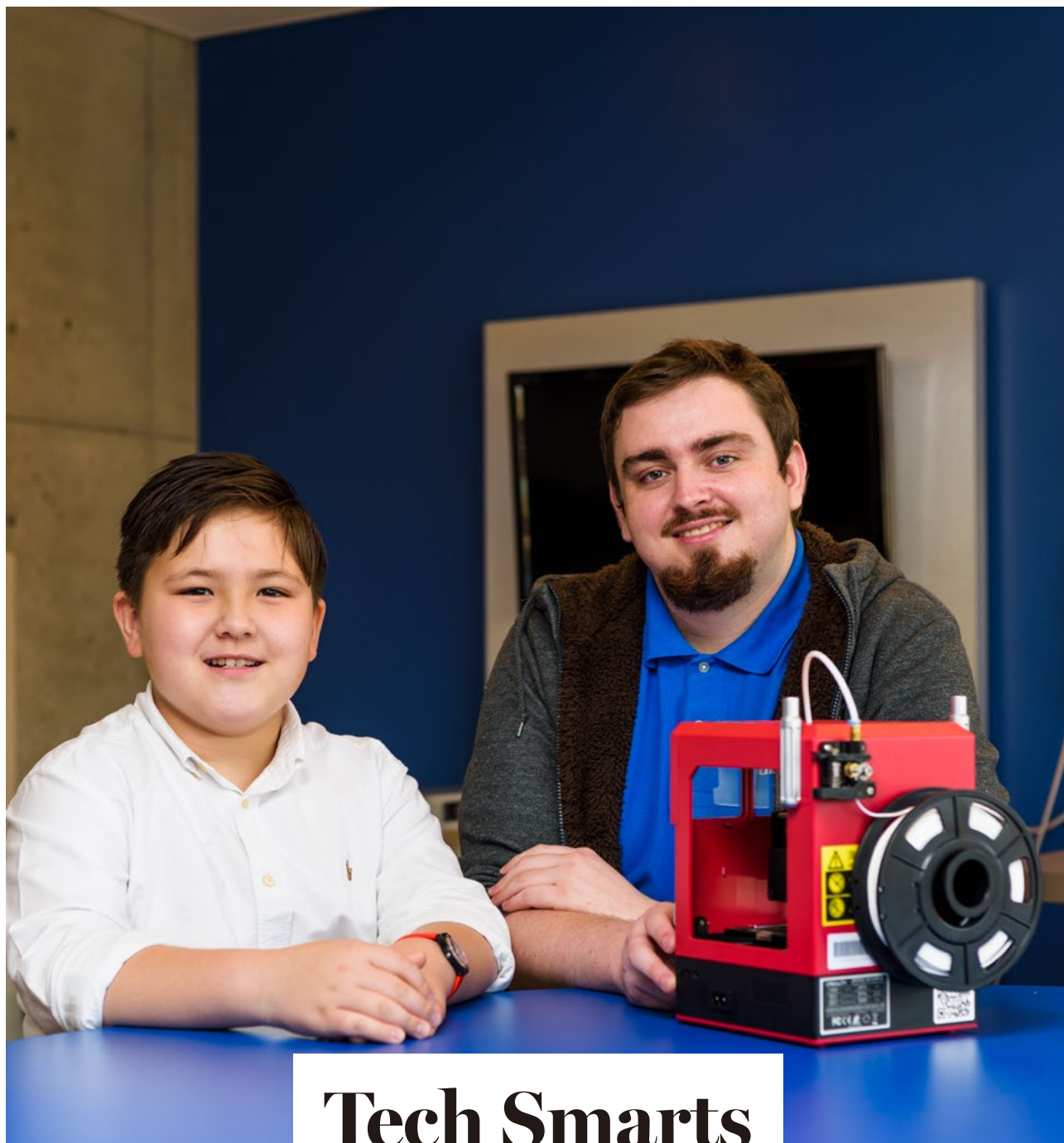
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KANO YAMAWAKI

Tech Smarts

CLASS

Coding Club

Unleash your inner tech-head at skill-building sessions that run from coding and robotics to animation design and vlogging. Led by qualified instructors, Coding Club blends science with fun to turn youngsters into the programmers, engineers and digital artists of tomorrow.

INSTRUCTOR

Mark Armstrong

A computer science and engineering grad from the University of California, Merced, Mark Armstrong is a Tokyo Coding Club tutor and mixed reality researcher at Keio University's Graduate School of Media Design. He recently helped program multilingual robot "guides" in Shibuya.

STUDENT

Joseph Daggett

"I have learned how to make maps in [the online game platform] Roblox and how to use coding in [the 'sandbox' video game] Minecraft. What I like about Coding Club is that I can learn different things about coding and I can learn how to make games and apps. It is fun."

CODING CLUB • Weekdays • 9am–8pm • ¥12,000 (private lesson); ¥8,000 (semiprivate lesson)

• Recommended for ages 7 to 18 • Sign up online

MINECRAFT CLUB • Weekends • 4–5:30pm • ¥3,500 • Recommended for ages 7 to 18 • Sign up online



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