

Yuki Engineering Co., Ltd.

“Mécénat Activities”: Going beyond receiving the Mécénat Award



At Yuki Engineering’s Kozainomori tatami room: (left) Kazuki Arita, Corporate Planning Department/ (right) Naoki Makita, Representative Director and President

12 years have passed since [Yuki Engineering Co., Ltd.](#) from Fukuoka Prefecture received [the Demolition and Rebirth Award at the Japan Mécénat Awards 2011](#). The company, which specializes in demolition, restored a townhouse built in the Meiji era. It is currently preserved and utilized as a café-restaurant and event space named [Kozainomori](#). In this report, I would like to talk about the impact that the Mécénat Award for Kozainomori had on Yuki Engineering’s business, as well as the company’s initiatives since receiving the award.

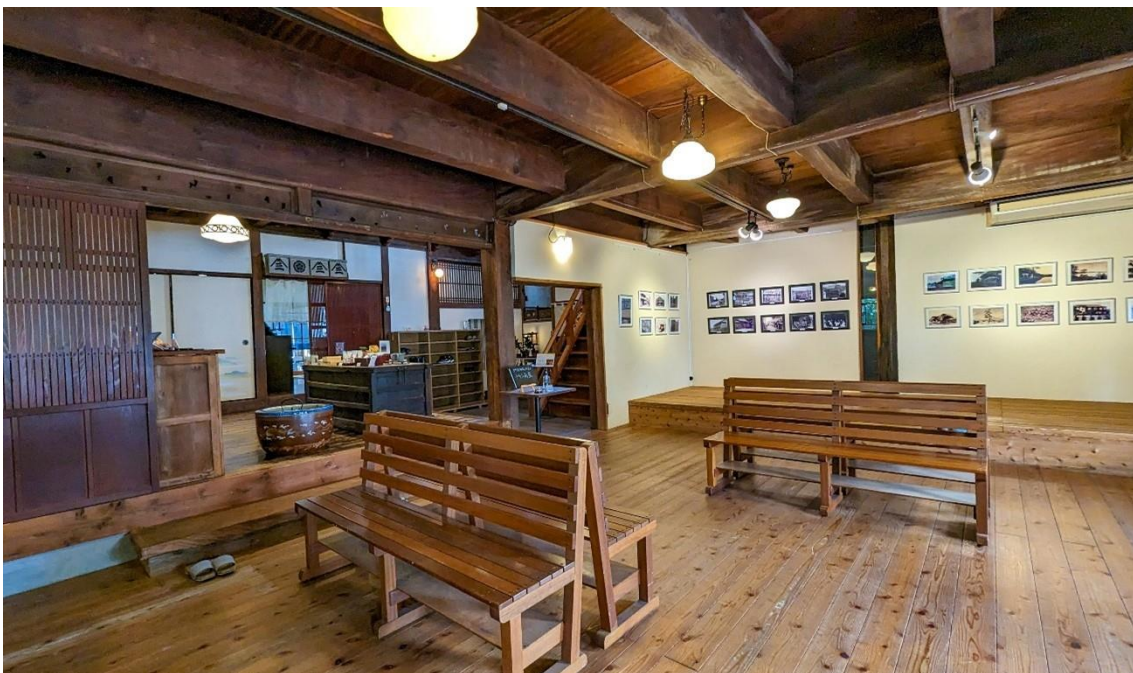
## The ever expanding utilization of Kozainomori post-COVID



Kozainomori is located along Maebaru Meitengai, a 5-minute walk from Chikuzen-Maebaru Station. The area was once a post town known as Maebarushuku in the Fukuoka Domain, where the sankin-kotai procession passed through during the Edo period.

The nearest station to Kozainomori is Chikuzen-Maebaru Station on the JR Chikuhi Line. The station also services subway lines from central Fukuoka such as Fukuoka Airport, Hakata Station, and Tenjin Station, and the journey only takes about an hour even on the local train.

This convenience is one of the reasons why the city of Itoshima, where Kozainomori is located in, is now a popular migration destination in Japan.



Interior of Kozainomori. In the back is a panel displaying old photographs of the building that were taken when it was completed in 1901

On the day of our visit, a once-in-a-decade cold wave hit the country, and even in Fukuoka, various transportation systems were affected by the wind and snow. Despite the weather and the fact that it was a weekday, the parking lot was almost full. Even as I was taking photographs of the exterior, several groups of customers arrived for lunch.

Kozainomori was temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but most of the customers have now returned, and various events are being resumed. During afternoon hours, it is open not only as a café, but also as a co-working space. Working in the calm atmosphere with a view of the garden is a refreshing change of pace, and also a conducive environment to come up with some good ideas.

Kozainomori is currently contributing greatly to the branding of Yuki Engineering. The trigger was receiving [the Mécénat Award in 2011](#).

### **Atmosphere within the company changed significantly after receiving the Mécénat Award**



Naoki Makita, the current Representative Director of Yuki Engineering Co., Ltd. His father Takashi, who was the President when the company received the Mécénat Award, relinquished his representation right and stepped down as Chairman in 2019.

“I think my father fell in love with this building at first sight”

When Takashi Makita, the former President, decided to preserve the former Nishihara Residence (currently Kozainomori) in 2005, Naoki could not understand his intentions

for a while. Neither did the employees. “Restoring and utilizing an old residential house” sounds respectable, but it is also expensive and time-consuming, and unlikely to be profitable as a business.

What he really thought was, “I would rather you put more effort into our core business.”



Kazuki Arita, the person in charge of Kozainomori, and a native of Itoshima. He is a former museum curator who has been independently researching Maebarushuku, and was scouted by Takashi when he visited Kozainomori as a guest

Despite the mixed reaction within the company, Takashi’s determination remained unwavering. He invested his own money in the restoration, and opened Kozainomori in 2006. At the time, some viewed the restoration of this old residential house and the restaurant business, which were completely different from the company’s main business, as “the President’s hobbies”.

However, Takashi did not start Kozainomori simply for fun. He had his sights set on eventually establishing it as a business. Arita, who is in charge of Kozainomori, was hired as a full-time staff member, but he was first assigned to the Fukuoka Sales Office when he joined the company. The aim was for him to learn the basics of demolition, which is the company’s main business. Naoki met Arita as colleagues, and they hit it off. Little by little, he began to deepen his understanding of Kozainomori.

Under these circumstances, receiving the Mécénat Award accelerated the change in mindset towards Kozainomori within the company. Out of the 94 applicants (88 companies and organizations) for the Mécénat Awards 2011, there were 7 winners. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> year since Kozainomori opened in 2006.

Despite being surrounded by famous companies that are household names, Yuki Engineering’s activities were highly praised throughout the country. Receiving this award served as a major step towards changing the company’s position on Kozainomori and

understanding its significance.

## Utilizing Kozainomori to help employees realize the significance of mécénat activities



Front gate of Kozainomori. This entrance is only used for welcoming guests, and is usually closed. Arita has always wanted to see what lies beyond the gate since childhood

Even though receiving the Mécénat Award helped spread awareness of the importance of utilizing Kozainomori, it was still difficult for employees to visit the location spontaneously. Yuki Engineering's Head Office is located in Dazaifu City, and it takes about 50 minutes by car or about 2 hours by public transportation to reach Kozainomori. It was too far away to “drop by for a visit”.



Lunch served at Kozainomori, Machiya Gozen. A healthy dish cooked with ingredients from Itoshima, such as Nijo red rice and black rice. Reservation required in advance

So first, as part of their welfare program, the company distributed lunch coupons to the employees so that they could “enjoy spending time with their families at Kozainomori”. Even before Itoshima became famous throughout Japan as a migration destination, it was a popular spot for holiday driving trips. If lunch was free, it would be easier for families to go on outings.

Next, the company started holding employee trainings at Kozainomori. New employees of Yuki Engineering work as staff members at the facility for about a week, and receive on-site training on customer-oriented etiquette. No matter what kind of work they do, what lies before them is the customer as an individual. The skills they learn on how to interact with customers while working at Kozainomori will be useful to them in future, both within and outside the company.



A tatami room with a traditional alcove on the second floor of Kozainomori. Also used as a tour and event space

Needless to say, the training also includes explanatory lectures on the architecture of Kozainomori. As part of their work, trainees will see every corner of the building while maintaining it, and will acquire knowledge that goes beyond classroom lectures. Whether it be with customers or in their private life, trainees will be able to use Kozainomori as a topic of conversation, and smoothly answer any questions. It is an initiative that kills multiple birds with one stone.

Kozainomori has attracted attention as a sustainable approach to achieving SDGs, and has been covered by many media outlets in recent years. This has also translated into each and every employee’s pride in the company, fostering a virtuous cycle.

## New initiative is “sustainable food production”



Homemade cakes made at Kozainomori Patisserie. Available for takeout and mail orders

While serving a healthy menu using locally sourced ingredients from Itoshima at Kozainomori, Yuki Engineering began to look into the production of safe food. Therefore, in 2021, the company opened [Aso Kura Farm](#) as an affiliate company. The company is currently working to achieve efficient and sustainable agriculture by utilizing their expertise in construction machinery.

How can the company utilize seasonal vegetables produced using pesticide-free farming methods? Creating new cooking methods is also one of the roles played by Kozainomori.



Soup made with vegetables harvested at Aso Kura Farm

At lunch on the day of the interview, Aso Kura Farm Vegetable Soup was served as an appetizer. It is an innovative dish consisting of a raw vegetable salad topped with warm beet soup instead of dressing. This dish was only made possible by the quality of the lettuce and baby leaves, which keep their crisp texture and do not wilt under the warmth of the soup. The beautiful pink soup has no earthy flavor that is typical of beets, and is very tasty and refreshing.

Fukuoka is famous nationwide as a gourmet city, and the quality of restaurants in the city is high across the board, as the competition is fierce. I felt that Kozainomori has the potential to become a viable business even solely based on its original flavors.

### **The role of Kozainomori goes beyond being just a “good old building”**



A casual single flower in a vase arranged by the staff. This attention to detail conveys their love for the building, which has in turn led to its careful maintenance and comfort

It is said that arts and culture help create local communities and contribute to economic development. However, corporate support of arts and culture does not immediately translate into operating profit numbers.

A large-scale development project called the Tenjin Big Bang is currently underway in Fukuoka. This is an urban plan that aims to replace aging buildings with advanced, earthquake-resistant buildings to strengthen the city and promote further development. Yuki Engineering, which specializes in demolition, is deeply involved in the development. There are some positive aspects to scrap-and-build. However, it is not the same as blindly destroying old buildings and structures.





A view of the corridor from the Japanese-style room in Kozainomori. The construction technique and wood used for this building are now lost, so it will be impossible to reproduce the building once it is destroyed

The very existence of Kozainomori teaches us that everything that has been accumulated by people who lived in the past will eventually be lost if we do not actively maintain them.

I urge you to visit the location and experience the atmosphere created by Kozainomori. I believe that it is in some way connected to helping us find guidance on how to live flexibly in these rapidly changing times.

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### **After the interview**

I decided to participate in the interview for this report because I had lived along the Chikushi Line for about 13 years, and left Fukuoka just around the time Kozainomori opened. It was a memorable interview for me as well, allowing me to look back on my past. In particular, I was deeply moved by the numerous episodes of fateful encounters that led up to the former Nishihara Residence starting a new life as Kozainomori. It is as if the house was waiting for a new chance that would allow it to bring the best out of itself.

No matter where you look, you can see that Kozainomori is a beautiful building that has been meticulously maintained and truly cared for. Next time, I would definitely like to visit on my personal time.



Mécénat writer: Mana Misato

- Date of interview: January 23, 2023 (Monday)
- Location of interview: [Kozainomori](#) (3-18-15 Maebaru-chuo, Itoshima-shi, Fukuoka Prefecture)
- Interview: [Yuki Engineering Co., Ltd.](#) (1096-8 Oaza Kitadani, Dazaifu-shi, Fukuoka Prefecture)
- Others: [Aso Kura Farm LLC](#) (953-6 Kurabaru, Aso-shi, Kumamoto Prefecture)