

# Wood and Paper Surpass Plastic

Japanese companies are addressing the global issue of plastic waste with traditional techniques, novel ideas, and a strong desire to help bring about a sustainable, recycling-oriented society

Dealing with plastic waste in the oceans is currently an urgent global issue. In fact, it was a topic of utmost importance at the G20 Osaka Summit in June 2019. Now, many people have begun thinking about how we use plastic products.

That sense of crisis led to the creation of wooden straws made with the thinnings left over from forest conservation work. Aqura Home Co., Ltd., a Japanese wooden house builder, invented the straw.

At first, the company was looking for a way to hollow out pieces of wood, but then a traditional Japanese technique for shaving wood into a smooth surface caught its attention. An idea to wrap thin slices of wood about 0.15mm thick into a helical shape led to the product.

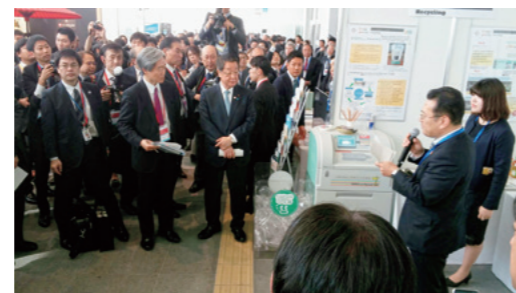
Aqura Home President Toshiya Miyazawa says, “Our goal is to produce three billion straws a year, but we consider the wooden straws a business that contributes to society. That’s why we’re publicizing our

production method and techniques so that the straws can quickly come into widespread use. In addition to straws, we encourage people to switch from other plastic items to wood. As a green company, we believe that this is our mission.” Some Japanese hotel chains have already started using the straws,



Toshiya Miyazawa, representative director and president of Aqura Home Co., Ltd., became a carpenter at age 15 and later founded his company. His penchant for carving wood with a traditional Japanese hand plane called a *kanna* led to the idea for developing the wooden straws.

The straws were placed in drinks served at the G20 Summit and G20 Ministerial Meetings, and attracted attention from the participating countries’ delegations.



Even after being placed in a drink for one or two days, the straw still stands strong. Japan Food Research Laboratories verified that the product is safe to put in one’s mouth.

and Aqura Home says that it has received a flood of inquiries from other potential customers in Japan and abroad.

One reason that the wooden straws came to be is the people who came together after hearing about the development project. Other companies and individuals who also see the issue from Aqura Home’s perspective endorsed the idea for a wooden straw and offered to lend their assistance. That serves as proof that growing awareness about the plastic waste issue is already spreading on the grassroots level.

Another company’s experiment seeks to address plastic waste through yet another approach. The most interesting thing about Wasara, paper tableware that still looks stylish even when stacked with hors d’oeuvres, is that it is made from bamboo fiber and bagasse, a fiber derived from sugarcane. After primary fermentation for 25 days and secondary fermentation for 60 days, the material returns to the soil. This makes Wasara sustainable tableware that can be disposed of without producing garbage.

And yet some people who use Wasara tableware say they do not want to throw it away because of its stylish design with a familiar texture reminiscent of *washi* paper or ceramics. Keiichiro Ito, the product’s developer and president of Wasara Co., Ltd., said, “At first,



Wasara seeks to develop paper tableware that will not warp, even with a steak on it. It also stays strong and solid when exposed to water. Plus, the thin material has a gentle feel on the mouth.



At receptions held at embassies and other formal settings, Wasara catches the eyes of guests for its attractive designs. Wasara is even suitable for use at a traditional Japanese tea ceremony.

people wouldn’t give us the time of day. That is probably because attitudes have changed, but even so, no matter how environmentally friendly the product is, if it does not have excellent utility or design, then most people will not be interested in it. Wasara was the result of much innovative, rewarding work.”

Recently, upscale restaurants, cruise ships and airport lounges have been using the product. Wasara has also started collecting used products and returning them to the soil at its plant. The tableware will likely come into more widespread use since it is strong, yet much lighter than ceramics and glass. The possibilities are for new tableware designed to be green and convenient endless.



Keiichiro Ito, representative director of Wasara Co., Ltd., previously served as president of a tableware package manufacturer founded over 100 years ago. In 2005, he began designing sustainable paper containers. Wasara is the product of a three-year development project.

Each of these endeavors—wooden straws and paper tableware—could be the first step to solving global issues. ✨