WABI-SABI
Is appreciating beauty that is "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete" in nature. Characteristics of wabi-sabi aesthetics and principles include asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, economy, austerity, and modesty. This helped influence tea as a casual encounter into a special ceremony.

Clay as Soft Power
SHIGARAKI WARE IN POSTWAR AMERICA AND JAPAN
November 12, 2022 — May 7, 2023 | Taubman I Gallery

SUPPORT
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UMMA Activity Booklet created by Isabel Engel and Grace Vandervliet

Where can you apply & embrace wabi-sabi in your own life?

Want to learn more about wabi-sabi? Check out this illustrated book by Mark Reibstein titled Wabi Sabi.
Clay. The local sandy clay from the bed of Lake Biwa has a warm orange color and makes very durable pottery. This clay characterizes Shigaraki ware.

Wedging. Just like kneading dough to bake bread, wedging is an essential process to ceramics. Clays such as kibushi, mizuchi, or gairome are kneaded to make a strong clay that can be used to make thick and large pottery vessels.

Shaping. Potters place the prepared clay onto a potter’s wheel or a table to form and shape with their hands and other tools. Wheels can be powered by foot pedals or be electrically powered.

Drying. When considering the drying process, keep in mind the weather, humidity and wind! The hotter and dryer, the faster things dry and work can dry unevenly in the shelves – this can lead to cracking.

Prepping. Your work is dry! It is called greenware now and it is at its most fragile! Before your work can be fired it should be “cleaned up”. You work won’t go into the kiln if it has sharp edges – when glazed, sharp edges turn into razor blades!

Firing. When the work is completely dry it can go into the kiln. The kiln is wood-fired to 1000°C (1832°F). Works can bake in the kiln for more than 7 days before they are ready. This process burns off the water in the clay as well as some of the chemically-bound water.

Unload. The workers need to wait 2-3 days for the kiln to cool down. The temperature at the time of unloading is about 200°C (about 392°F) So, the workers must wear work gloves and take other precautions to avoid being burned.

Shigaraki ware is historically everyday items, like storage jars and cooking stoves! Before tea cups can be used, potters need to sand down the lip of the cup, or else it might cut you when you drink. It also has a rough, bumpy exterior that some might call “imperfect.” That’s considered wabi-sabi.

This idea of wabi-sabi directly influenced the practice of tea in Japan.