

Rakuyaki (樂焼) or Raku (樂)

Is a form of pottery characterized by low firing temperatures (resulting in a fairly porous clay body), lead glazes, and the removal of pieces from the kiln while still glowing hot. The form was created in Japan, and is the traditional pottery form for creating bowls for the Japanese tea ceremony.

Typically pieces removed from the hot kiln are placed in masses of combustible material (e.g., straw, sawdust, or newspaper) in order to provide a reducing atmosphere for the glaze, and to color the exposed clay surface with carbon. Often glazes which craze (present a cracked appearance) are used, and the crazing lines take on a dark color from the carbon as well. This last step in the process is unique to the American form of Raku. In the traditional Japanese process, the pot is removed from the hot kiln and put directly into water or allowed to cool in the open air. The use of a reduction chamber was an American innovation pioneered by American potter Paul Soldner in the 1960s.

The name for this type of firing is taken from the Japanese family that traditionally produces the ware. The name Raku was bestowed on 16th century Japanese potter Chojiro by the great Japanese tea master Sen-No-Rikyu after he began making tea bowls to the tea master's specifications. The name as well as the ceramic style has been passed down through the family to the present.

The term Raku (literally, "enjoyment" or "ease") for this kind of pottery derives from Jurakudai, the name of a palace in Kyoto built by [Toyotomi Hideyoshi](#) (1537-1598), the leading warrior statesman of the time.

In the 16th century, the Japanese tea master [Sen Rikyu](#), who was involved with the construction of the Jurakudai, had a tile-maker named [Chōjirō](#) produce hand-moulded tea bowls for use in the [wabi](#) style of tea ceremony that was Rikyū's ideal. The resulting tea bowls made by Chōjirō were initially referred to as "ima-yaki" ("contemporary ware"), and were also distinguished as Juraku-yaki, from the red clay that they employed, called Juraku clay. Hideyoshi presented Chōjirō with a seal bearing the Chinese character for Raku. Raku then became the name of the family that produced the wares. Both the name and the ceramic style have been passed down through the family (sometimes by

adoption) to the present 15th generation (Kichizaemon). The name and the style of ware have become influential in both Japanese culture and literature. In Japan, there are "branch kilns" (*wakigama*) in the Raku-ware tradition, founded by Raku family members or potters who apprenticed at the head family's studio. One of the most well-known of these is Ōhi-yaki, or [Ōhi ware](#).

After the publication of a manual in the 18th century, raku ware was also made in numerous workshops in and around Kyoto, by amateur potters and tea practitioners and by professional and amateur potters around Japan.

Raku ware marked an important point in the historical development of Japanese ceramics, as it was the first ware to use a seal mark and the first to focus on close collaboration between potter and patron. Other famous Japanese clay artists of this period include Dōnyū (grandson of Chōjirō, also known as Nonkō; 1574-1656), [Hon'ami Kōetsu](#) (1556-1637) and [Ogata Kenzan](#) (1663-1743).

The use of a reduction chamber at the end of the raku firing was introduced by the American potter [Paul Soldner](#) in the 1960s to compensate for the difference in atmosphere between wood-fired Japanese raku kilns and gas-fired American kilns. Typically, pieces removed from the hot kiln are placed in masses of combustible material (e.g., [straw](#), [sawdust](#), or [newspaper](#)) to provide a [reducing atmosphere](#) for the glaze and to stain the exposed body surface with [carbon](#). Western raku potters rarely use lead as a glaze ingredient, due to its serious level of toxicity, but may use other metals as glaze ingredients. Japanese potters substitute a non-lead [frit](#). Although almost any low-fire glaze can be used, potters often use specially formulated glaze recipes that "crackle" or craze (present a cracked appearance), because the crazing lines take on a dark color from the carbon.