

America's Greatest Workplaces 2023

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THE CIA'S BLIND SPOT

WHAT ARE PUTIN AND ZELENSKY REALLY THINKING?



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Craftsmanship for the perfect optical frames

Partnering with renowned designers, Masunaga Optical produces only the highest-quality glass frames.



Home to Japan's eyewear manufacturing industry, Japan's Fukui region produces 97% of all optical frames in the country. This rich history began with Masunaga Optical, which pioneered eyewear production in Fukui in 1905 and still leads the industry to this day as it approaches its 120th anniversary in 2025.

Founder of the company, Gozaemon Masunaga, did not find it easy at the beginning, as retail clients were reluctant to buy Fukui-made eyewear. But as the products improved, they began to sell gradually in cities throughout Japan. Having brought in skilled craftsmen from Tokyo and Osaka, Gozaemon established a guild-like system, and later full-fledged craftsmen went on to create their own workshops. Thanks to this system, the number of eyewear workshops increased,

and the optical frame industry spread all over Fukui.

"Masunaga Optical was the cradle of the optical frames industry," states current president and Gozaemon's great grandson, Soutaro Masunaga, before highlighting the *monozukuri* (manufacturing craftsmanship) philosophy that has guided the company over the last 118 years. "In terms of our *monozukuri* philosophy, our mission statement has remained since the company's establishment. It says: 'We manufacture excellent eyeglasses. We want to make a profit if we can, but we do not hesitate to take a loss. It is always in our thoughts to manufacture excellent glasses.' These words are still the basis of the code of conduct for our employees."



Back in the 1970s, while many eyewear manufacturers acted purely as OEM compa-

nies, Masunaga started trying to understand more about the retailer's point of view, which then led to an understanding of what end users wanted from their glasses. Gradually it start-



ed transforming the business from an OEM to a more market-in approach. "We produce and sell our own brand, and we are building our own retail channels. We can balance the needs of both opticians and end users. I think this is what differentiates our company from other eyewear manufacturers," adds Mr. Masunaga. This approach has enabled the company to build its global success over the past five decades, with international markets today making up 80% of the company's total sales revenue.

As glasses are seen as both a medical device and fashion item, production can be a challenge as companies try to balance between the two. "Balancing different aspects is important and I think that eyewear is becoming more and more fashionable these days, but still, we must think of ourselves as an eyewear company, not a fashion company," says Mr. Masunaga. "This is inevitable in our business because eyewear still has a medical aspect to it and needs to function as a medical device. We try to balance three major aspects: technological know-how and function, user-friendliness, and then in the end add a fashion aspect. We must combine these aspects to create better products, which leads to better customer satisfaction." This manufacturing outlook has led to the creation of products such as the award-winning Anti Tension Frame, which disperses the weight of the frame perfectly to offer unbeatable comfort and durability.



"We try to implement our best R&D capabilities to create the best products for customers."

Soutaro Masunaga,
President, Masunaga
Optical Mfg. Co., Ltd.

As the company continues to grow its success and global operations, it hopes to work with more top eyewear designers both at home and abroad. However, staying true to its roots and supporting the Fukui area will remain at the top of its priorities. "The founding fathers



thought long and hard about what could be introduced to the area to help local people and make contributions to the local area," says Mr. Masunaga. "They wanted to make the area flourish and provide jobs for locals. Still, this philosophy continues, and it has not changed over 118 years. Of course, our company has evolved with the times, but the founding principle continues to push us to make significant local contributions."

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