

Switzerland national day

Sharing a mutual passion for innovation, precision and reliability

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I am pleased to be given the opportunity to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of Swiss National Day, which marks the founding of the Swiss confederation 724 years ago, on Aug. 1, 1291. Today, Japan has become one of Switzerland's most important partners not only in terms of economic exchange, but also in international affairs, as well as research and innovation.



With over 250 events in Japan alone, last year's celebrations of the 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Japan demonstrated the strength and vitality of this mutual relationship. The scope of these various activities clearly underlined the fact that despite obvious differences in size, culture and geography, both countries share remarkable similarities and common values such as a love of innovation, precision and reliability, as well as a need for harmony in society.

These qualities naturally

transpire in the products and designs originating from both countries. It is not by accident that both are associated with watchmaking, an industry that values precision, sophistication and craftsmanship.

The recent landing in Nagoya of Solar Impulse 2 was another opportunity to celebrate our shared spirit of innovation. When the experimental plane, powered by solar energy alone, ran into difficult weather on its attempt to circumvent the earth, the Japanese authorities spared no effort to accommodate the aircraft's unorthodox requirements during its unexpected stay on Japanese soil. Solar Impulse 2 went on to break the record for the longest uninterrupted flight in history when it safely landed in Hawaii after spending five days crossing the Pacific Ocean.

The development of new energy technologies and renewable energies was also the focus of the recent visit to Switzerland of Masao Uchibori, governor of Fukushima Prefecture. I look forward to many more such opportunities for our countries to collaborate toward achieving inspiring goals in the years to come!

Swiss design in Japan

In Japan, Switzerland is fa-

mous for its beautiful landscapes, tasty cheese and chocolate and for the popular animated series "Heidi." Less known among the general public is the fact that our small alpine nation has left a widely recognized and long-lasting imprint in the fields of graphics, architecture and industrial design.

Often referred to as the "International Typographic Style," the design that originated in the 1950s in Switzerland has served as the foundation for many of the developments in graphic design since the second half of the last century.

Led by designers Armin Hofmann at the Basel School of Design and Josef Muller-Brockmann at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts, this style privileges simplicity, objectivity and readability. Some of the main components are the emphasis on the use of sans-serif typography, grids and asymmetrical layouts. It also often combines photography and typography as a means of visual communication.

The typeface Helvetica, developed in 1957 by Swiss typeface designer Max Miedinger, became one of the most popular typefaces of the 20th century and inspired many others, including Arial. Other



The innovative lightweight aircraft Solar Impulse 2 took off from Nagoya Airport for Hawaii on June 29. SOLAR IMPULSE

prominent figures of this prolific period in Swiss Design include Max Bill, Emil Ruder and Adrian Frutiger, all of whom followed the precept of using the minimum number of elements required — simplicity expressed in the most attractive manner — and that all design elements need to follow defined grid lines and geometric shapes.

In the field of modern architecture, Le Corbusier, who was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds to a family of watchmakers, remains one of the most important references, and his portrait

can be found on a Swiss bill. Peter Zumthor, who won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2009, also qualifies as a contemporary Swiss architecture icon. Design and architecture aficionados worldwide flock to Switzerland to visit Therme Vals, a hotel and spa complex he built over the only thermal springs in the Graubunden canton in Switzerland.

Exchanges between Switzerland and Japan in the fields of design and architecture have been flourishing and artists from both countries have successfully exported their de-

signs worldwide. While a number of Swiss architects have left their marks in Japan, including Le Corbusier (the National Museum of Western Art in Ueno), Mario Botta (the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art) and Herzog & De Meuron (the Prada store and the recently opened Miu Miu store in Aoyama), the same can be said about Japanese architects in Switzerland. To name a few, SANAA, Riken Yamamoto, Kengo Kuma and Shigeru Ban were all involved in groundbreaking and spectacular projects in Switzerland.

To guide the public in Japan through their exploration of the many Swiss design landmarks in Tokyo, the second edition of the Swiss Design Map (swissdesign.jp) will be launched in September. The aim is to highlight locations where Swiss design and architecture can be found and experienced, as well as to invite the public to participate in a series of exciting events and exhibitions related to Swiss design.

The rich program of activities includes this year's Tokyo Art Book Fair, which will focus on Swiss publishers, the exhibition of the Design Workshop Japan-Switzerland during Tokyo Design Week

and an exhibition of Swiss jewelry artist Otto Kunzli at the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum. For those outside of Tokyo, the exhibition "Swiss Design," traveling first

to Shizuoka, then to Hokkaido, retraces the origins of the country's design from the 19th century to today, showcasing Swiss products, architecture and graphics.

Congratulations
to the People
of
Switzerland
on the Occasion
of
Their National Day



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