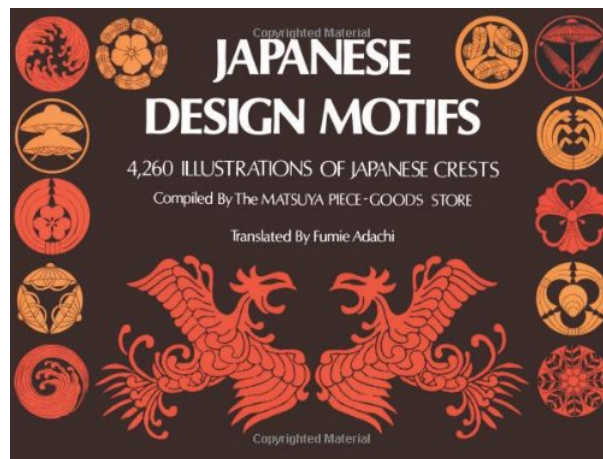
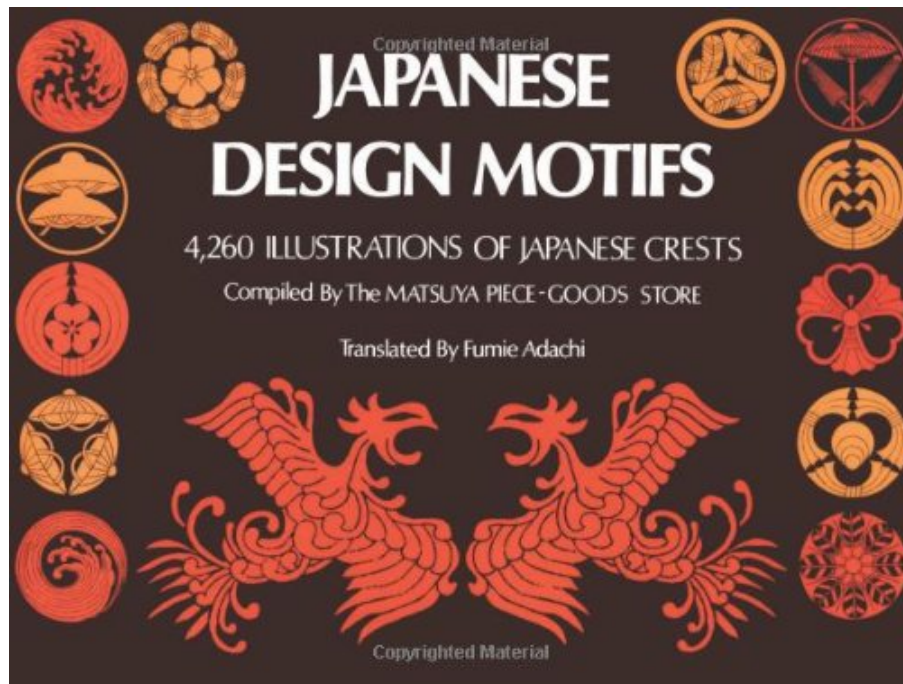


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Language Notes

Text: English, Japanese (translation)

From the Back Cover

This collection presents more than 4,000 individual designs in the 900-year-old tradition of Japanese family crests. Through constant variation and invention over the centuries, this has become one of the richest graphic art traditions in the world.

Most of these motifs are circular, and they can all be fitted into a square. Within those limitations is a seemingly endless range of designs, beginning with the dozens and dozens of root motifs—rice plant, ginkgo, scallop, lightning, anchor, spool, raft, candle, scissors, fern, saki bottle, lotus blossom, mountain arrow, pine, wisteria, ship, rabbit, and scores of others. Practically every kind of plant, bird, animal, natural phenomenon, and manufactured object of Japanese culture was at one time or another included in a family crest. In addition, each of the root designs was treated to dozens of imaginative variations—they were reproduced bilaterally, in triangles, diamonds, five- and six-pointed stars, in spirals, were built up in series, made to overlap, combined with each other, and so on. Some of these are classic and recognizable designs, like the yin-yang, linked rings, and treasure knot. Many of the others have rarely been seen in the West.

Graphic artists, textile designers, pattern-makers, advertisers, and other commercial artists looking for an untapped source of novel, appealing designs will find a wealth of material here. Some of these motifs can be used to suggest an exotic flavor, and others are universal and can be used almost anywhere.

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Most helpful customer reviews

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Organization Issue

By Highlander

I am unable to understand the reviewer who began with the sentence: "How does one rate a book with no words in it? The only way to do it is by description." The book clearly has words in it. It is organized alphabetically, albeit a Japanese alphabet. The crests are organized by motif and the table of contents and index clearly explain the structure of the book. Unless we were reading different books, I found that the book was a significant asset in examining the range and topics of Japanese crests. It is what it is -- an extensive presentation of crests. It provides insight into the objects chosen by Japanese culture to be placed in these highly visible and socially important family icons. Variations of the crests' themes are interesting - - how many ways can a stylized arrow be presented? The Japanese ties to the entire range of nature and human constructs emerge as one peruses the book. Admittedly, it doesn't have the plot of "War and Peace", but it is not intended to do so. I think that this book has value to designers, artists, students of Japanese art and culture, and hobbyists looking for Japanese motifs. I won't haul it around constantly for a good read, but I will consult it as need and interest dictate.

27 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

Pretty Pictures - Not suitable for medieval research

By Barbara Nostrand

Following the Meiji Restoration in the nineteenth century, the Japanese people were granted a number of prerogatives formerly reserved to the noble and military castes. Among these privileges was the right to have household arms variously called kamon, monsho, or simply mon. As a result, Japanese around the nation went out and acquired kamon for themselves. The Matsuya Piece Goods Store catalog satisfied their demand for new clothes with nice spiffy kamon on them.

While the Matsuya catalog does provide a cyclopedic view of late nineteenth century notions of what kamon should look like, it does not provide reliable information for those interested in premodern Japan. This is a problem shared with most books about kamon whether in English or Japanese. However, there are a few books available in East Asian libraries and some even currently in print in Japan which do link kamon to clans, families, regions, historical periods, and even specific individuals. If your interest in kamon is of a historical nature, I recommend that you seek these out. If, however, your interest is primarily artistic, this is a fine book with well rendered depictions of a vast array of these designs.

If you are interested in what Japanese military bearings looked like in the early 17th century, then you would do well to acquire a copy of O-umajirushi: A 17th-Century Compendium of Samurai Heraldry by Xavid "Kiho" Pretzer. This work contains images of a variety of flags, battle standards, and other military bearings many of which incorporate kamon. If you are interested in a chronological study of Japanese genealogy and kamon then you would do well to acquire a copy of ??? "Daibukan" by Hashimoto a copy of which is currently for sale at the Japanese Amazon website. "Daibukan" is in Japanese. It identifies the owners of kamon and often gives other information about rank and titles along with family trees. It does not provide Japanese blazon for the kamon depicted.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Nice clean cut stuff.

By AaronLS

This stuff is eye candy to anyone who does graphic design of any sort that uses 2D graphics. My mother gets ideas for quilting patterns and I've been inspired several times while looking through the book and gone and loaded up photoshop and started messin around. This stuff is surprisingly beautiful and fascinating when you notice how simple the designs are.

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