

Impressions Jiro Katashio

I remember my first encounter which came about by chance. One day in 1988, or maybe in 1989, I got hold of a paper sample book from the German paper manufacturer, the paper factory Scheufelen. It was to become a central thread that led me a little later to Baumann & Baumann.

There were just two lines on the plain white box: "Scheufelen Papier" and "Papierfabrik Scheufelen" – printed needle sharp in black in Univers 45 and 65 respectively, and next to them a small, red seal. My first impression was: "Like a Japanese ink drawing!"

The purpose of a paper sample book is to increase the manufacturer's paper sales. To this end, it must allow you to draw conclusions about and prove the papers' suitability for printing and further processing. But first and foremost it must be of help in decision-making. And if the functional aspect is of prime importance, the aesthetic appearance must be subordinated to it. Consequently, a paper sample book is only beautiful when it is readily comprehensible, offers precise information, is clear and understandable. This functional character of things fascinates me, and I am literally dazed by the kind of functional beauty it produces.

As regards the Scheufelen paper sample box, you could not call the design striking, rather it was subdued and restrained. The emphasis was on easy comprehension and simple handling. A closer inspection reveals the infinite care devoted to typography and raster systems. Thus my second impression born of admiration was "Fantastic, simply magnificent". I searched in vain for the designer's name on the printed matter, then got in touch immediately with the PR Department who answered my query promptly and in an incredibly friendly manner.

This was how my relationship with Baumann & Baumann began. It began as active correspondence, then in May 1989 I flew to Germany to meet them in person.

In Stuttgart, my companions and I – three Japanese graphic artists – boarded the local train to Schwäbisch Gmünd. From the train window we could see a broad expanse of fields and meadows with apple trees clothed in white blossom. The scene became increasingly idyllic; we saw grazing sheep and cows lying on the meadow. It was not unlike a "scene from a Heidi movie".

Somehow we were gripped by a strange feeling ... Virtually all Japanese design offices are located in the middle of large cities. After all, the objective of my journey was not a sightseeing tour through idyllic countryside. What kind of designers would set up business out in the sticks? My companions also looked at me somewhat unnerved. The strange sensation that crept over us all made us fall silent but for the odd word.

The town of Schwäbisch Gmünd, where the Baumanns live and work, is on the River Rems on the edge of the Swabian Alps, a low mountain range in southwestern Germany. Like many medieval towns it is enclosed by sections of an old city wall; narrow cobbled streets wind amongst the houses. In the center of town there is a small square, bordered by a cultural center, a former monastery, and a small Romanesque church. This was also the location of the Baumanns' office; creaking wooden stairs led us up to the first floor.

The name "Baumann & Baumann", hand-written with chalk on a large, black door, greeted us. Suddenly, I felt my uneasy feeling dissipate, at once I pulled out my camera to capture it all.

"My name is Gerd Baumann, and I would like to welcome you most warmly. You are our first guests from Japan." Behind him stood Barbara, who indicated we should enter with a genuine smile. We had no problems understanding each other. They both spoke English, and I was assisted by Nobuko Sugai, a Japanese artist who has lived in Germany for a long time. Moreover, the specific language of typography is international, at least for a small group in the know to which I also belong.

