

Pole position

Mike Farish talks to the new leader of the Sony Design Centre Europe



Tak Kawagoi

Director of Sony Design Centre Europe

Tak Kawagoi studied Design at the Kyoto Institute of Technology, graduating in 1991 with a BA from the Faculty of Design. After graduation he began his career at Sony, joining the Creative Centre in Tokyo as a designer. Following on from this he was assigned as a senior designer at Design Centre Europe based in London. He was the appointed art director at both the Creative Centre and in the global marketing team at Sony Ericsson. His experience is vast and in addition to working on projects such as the iconic Sony Ericsson logo, he has also created branding communication for BRAVIA televisions, the alpha digital camera range campaigns and Sony FIFA sponsorship programme. He was appointed as the new director of Sony Design Centre last summer. His main intention in this new role is to elevate the value of the Sony brand from a European perspective through the upcoming projects.

Name

Job title

Career

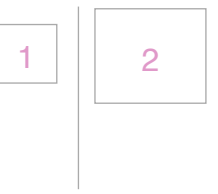
In many ways the world is now a single global market. One of them is the existence of brand names with a reputation for quality and style that exert their influence wherever they are sold. But one of the ironies in this situation is that 'global' brands are rarely 'single-sourced' in their design. In other words, they do not just reflect the tastes and preferences of the part of the world where the company whose name they bear is based. Instead they fuse influences from around the world into designs that both retain a distinctive, individual character and yet can take account of regional - in global terms - preferences.

One of the companies that epitomises this approach is Japanese consumer products manufacturer Sony. While the company's headquarters and main design base remain in Japan it operates Design Centres in both Europe and North America that work with the core operation back in Japan to achieve that crucial balance of characteristics across the whole of the company's product range.

Since late last year the director of Sony Design Centre Europe

(DCE) - the European arm of Sony's globalised design operation based in London - has been Takuya Kawagoi, known informally as 'Tak'. Kawagoi came to the post from Japan, but with the experience of two previous spells working in Europe. For three years at the end of the 1990s he worked as a designer with the DCE and then spent another four years working with the global marketing team at Sony's sister company Sony Ericsson, where he developed the well-known Sony Ericsson logo.

Kawagoi says that the DCE has around 16 designers with specialist expertise across a broad range of areas including product design, graphics, user interfaces and detailing. The purpose of the team, though, is not just to add a localised appearance to products whose roots are in Japan. Instead it is, he says, to help create products in which the "Sony design language is provided with European added value." The average age of the design staff at the DCE, he says, is around the early 30s - an indication that the accent is on youth and energy, but not at the expense of sufficient experience to make informed judgements.



Picture this | 1. The idea for the Sony BRAVIA Monolithic design concept is that it combines aesthetic appeal and minimalist style to create a design statement in its own right. 2. Kawagoi had a hand in designing the Sony VAIO.

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projects may be running in parallel with 15 to 20 smaller initiatives at any one time.

Kawagoi believes that in comparison to Japan, design in Europe involves a much more eclectic mix of trends and influences. From a personal point of view he says that is what makes it so interesting and why he was so keen to come back to his new

job. From a business perspective it is also why the DCE can be a "concept provider" to the main design headquarters back in Japan and not be merely a subsidiary operation devoted to no more than the localisation of designs emanating from the Pacific Rim.

But for that to happen, Kawagoi adds, one essential precondition is that he does not remain office-bound. "I can't help create new value by doing that," he observes. But just walking round the streets of London is a valuable experience in itself. "You can feel the mix of influences - both traditional and modern," he adds.

Ultimately, in fact, Kawagoi looks to the similarities rather than the differences between the UK and Japan as the crucial factors in his job and in the way the DCE meshes in with Sony's global design operation. "Both countries are islands," he notes - something that can lend countries a mix of characteristics, on the one hand some that are immediate and local and on the other some that may derive from considerable distances away. The result in design terms is a creative fusion whose dynamics fuel a genuinely global business. ■