



TEA STORAGE JAR

Japan • Bizen high-fired stoneware
Momoyama Period (1573–1615) • 1989.73



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Buddhist monks from China introduced tea drinking to Japan as a means of aiding alertness during meditation. The tea drinking ritual reached its peak in the elaborate Japanese tea ceremony. The renowned Japanese tea master Sen-no Rikkyu (1521–91) advocated using simple rustic items, such as this jar, produced at rural kilns for tea gatherings. Japanese ceramics associated with tea are regarded as some of the finest traditional, utilitarian arts objects produced.

Following Buddhist ideas, crafted wares with random irregularities enabled viewers to more easily appreciate the objects' inner beauty, thereby creating a more spiritual experience. Such is the rustic appeal of this tea storage jar. It was hand-built by stacking spiral coils of clay, which were then refined and trimmed with a wooden tool on a potter's wheel.

The jar was fired at a high temperature in a wood-burning kiln. During firing, accidents such as ash deposits (that would fuse to the surface making a glaze), marks made by rope (cord marks), and other imperfections resulted in distinctive and spontaneous effects that later potters tried to reproduce. The black fire marks and the spot of moss green ash glaze on the shoulder of this iron red jar were deliberately created, resulting in a natural look greatly appreciated by tea masters.

Tea leaf storage jars such as this one were carried from Edo (Tokyo) to the tea growing area of Uji (near Kyoto) at the beginning of every summer. This "journey of the honorable tea jars" was made to collect the finest tea of the season for the shogun.