



# **MATCHIBAKO**

**Japanese Matchbox Art of the 20s and 30s**

By Maggie Kinser Hohle



Plate 10: Night Club Yawata

Bauhaus Tokyo babe beckons.



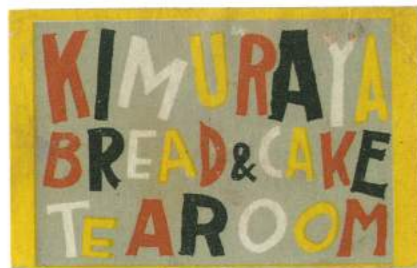
Plate 11: Barber Naruse

"New equipment, new hair. With high-quality technology, we'll not be beat."



Plate 12: Cafe Heaven

In Asakusa, a fairy butterfly with a bob 'do dances among the stars.



**Plate 27: Kimuraya Bread & Cake Tea Room**

Three years into the bakery business, Kimuraya opened the first of its chain of stores, and built the brand into a national name. Like Nikke, Kimuraya associated itself with the Japanese navy early on, distributing unsold bread to the sailors, but graphically appealed to a broad – and modern – civilian market.



**Plate 28: PAN**

A working man strides off with a loaf of Kimuraya bread under his arm. It reads PAN, in roman letters, because the Japanese word evolved from the Portuguese, pao. The smoke from his pipe leads to the same word written in katakana, followed by the Chinese character for department, which stood for "shop". Two phone numbers and addresses of the growing company are listed in characters at the left and bottom right. Only the Kimuraya logo links this with the vision of Old Japan that follows.



**Plate 29: Kimuraya Storehouse**

Here's a traditional mud-walled, plastered storehouse. Designed to thwart both Japan's humidity and its once-common conflagrations, the storehouse signifies inherited wealth worth saving from fire. But there's a bit of fun here; sharing the shelter of the graffiti'd umbrella, like initials left by lovers, are Pan (bread) + Kiccha, a nonsensical and now archaic form of kissa, or tea and coffee.



Plate 31: Florida

An "11-Member New York Negro Jazz Orchestra" performed at the Akasaka Ballroom "Florida". Unabashed proof: the headshots. "No need to investigate," begins the black-on-orange type, "just come hear them once". "New York" is transliterated with Chinese characters, common practice from the mid-1800s, when the country was forced open by the U.S. and flooded with foreign place and personal names, with no way to write them.



Plate 32: Metropolis

"The world a hundred years from now" is the tagline here for Franz Lang's 1926 expressionist science fiction story of a city of oppression. In Metropolis, workers live underground, ruled as much by the machines they operate as by the privileged literally upper classes, who live and frolic above. The tagline occupies the center of this label and is also oddly repeated upside-down in the upper right corner. The large, highly stylized title is in katakana, reading vertically and right to left: "Me-to-ro, po-ri-su".



Plate 33: Takarazuka

Japan's first revue, the all-female Takarazuka troupe, was created in 1914 by the Hankyu railway and department store, just to attract people to a new stop on its tracks near Osaka, the small hot-spring spa town of Takarazuka. This label advertises a Tokyo performance at the Shimbashi Entertainment Hall, built in 1925. Three productions – ballet, opera, and big revue – are billed. A little odd by Western standards, Takarazuka is like a female counterpart to the all-male Kabuki theater. The male roles in particular, played by women with their short hair and male garb, jibed perfectly with the masculinity of street-scene moga (modern girls). Male film stars also tended towards center, with effeminate styles and mannerisms, further twisting the typical gender roles of pre-modern Japan.

Matchibako depicts Japan's swift transformation into an industrial empire in the early 20th century, as illustrated in the infinitesimal advertisements on matchboxes from the period. In an uncertain society and its changing leisure market, matches joined cigarettes in Western-style hotels and cafes, and in sushi bars next door. Patrons might be found in Western dress or traditional kimono, debating Marx or the latest silent film, but all saw themselves reflected in the new graphism.

Although most were anonymously designed, these tiny remainders alternately show the influence of Cubism and the Bauhaus in illustration and English type, and retain conventional wood block fonts and right-to-left Japanese text. This little book is a delightful collection of images from the other side of the globe.



MARK BATTY PUBLISHER