

The Application Guidelines for the Fifth Annual “Kengo Kuma & Higashikawa” KAGU Design Competition

- Introduction:

We are entering a time in which the value and potential of rural areas are being reconsidered. Higashikawa, the "Town of Photography," and the "Cultural Capital of Photography," is a beautiful town in Hokkaido, Japan. Located in a beautiful rural setting, surrounded by the Daisetsuzan Mountains, it is also blessed with pure groundwater. With the aim of communicating the richness of life through architecture and furniture, our town has promoted a new initiative in collaboration with architect Kengo Kuma, who has a strong interest in the use of architecture and design in rural settings.

Higashikawa, with its small size and thriving furniture industry, has long implemented programs that would only be possible here: it starts with the “Your Chair” project, which gives the children a sense of safety and belonging from a young age. In Elementary School, the children learn while surrounded by wooden furniture. When they graduate Junior High School, as a graduation present, they take home their wooden chairs that they have used and cared for over three years. It is now time to start a new project and train the young people who will be the leaders of the next generation.

Architect Kengo Kuma has joined us in supporting our town and our region. He is an early advocate of promoting the appeal of regional communities through architecture, with a strong interest in expanding the use of local resources and educating the next generation of young people. In a sense, Kengo Kuma, who is working on regional revitalization through the world of architecture, and Higashikawa, a sparsely populated town blessed with a rich environment and a thriving furniture industry, have been working together to propose a new way of life.

- Purpose:

The town of Higashikawa is a major producer of Asahikawa furniture. We are calling for designs that embody KAGU, a new, mindful way of life for the young people who will shoulder the responsibilities of the future.

KAGU is an extension of the conventional concept of furniture that aims to connect people to the world. We use a variety of objects in our daily lives, but it is difficult to see the context in which they are made and used. We realized that in the current way of life, we handle objects without care and treat them poorly, all in the name of saving time and effort; people rush to get results, and don't take the time to think deeply about the items they are using. This can have many harmful effects.

Our hope is that the upcoming KAGU design competition will provide an opportunity for your ideas, which have a lot of potential, to take shape and be used for a long time, so that a path towards mindful living can be realized little by little.

- Contest Details:

Theme: Healthy Furniture

- The work must be designed by the applicant themselves in strict accordance with these guidelines, the Health-Conscious Furniture law and competition rules.
- The work must be the applicant's original work and be previously unpublished except for class work or graduation displays.

A Message from Kengo Kuma, Head Judge

Higashikawa, aiming to be Japan's healthiest community, is a highly health-conscious town supported by trainers stationed through an official partner company and by its rich water resources from vast natural environment.

We invite you to propose healthy furniture — pieces that promote wellness through their use, encourage reflection on the meaning of health, and embody the well-being of both people and the planet. With a broad and diverse perspective, please present your vision of healthy furniture that truly reflects the spirit of Higashikawa.

Kengo Kuma

Head Judge of the “Kengo Kuma & Higashikawa”

KAGU Design Competition

- Eligibility:

Students who are no older than 30 years of age and are enrolled in an educational institution at the time of application are eligible to participate.

Group entries are also accepted, in which case all members of the group must meet these requirements.

- Number of Entries:

One per applicant or one per group.

※Each individual may only be involved in the submission of one work, whether as an individual or in a group: multiple entries by one person, such as submitting an individual entry and a group entry or participating in more than one group entry will not be accepted.

- Application Fee: none

- Submission:

The title, main idea of the design, explanation of the work, as well as a sketch, drawing, CG model, or model photo of the work should fit onto a single A3-size sheet (single-sided, landscape layout). The submission should be a PDF file. Only English or Japanese may be used.

- Inquiries:

To make an inquiry, please send your name and contact information to the following email address. The organizer will contact you as soon as possible.

Email address to contact: official@kagu-higashikawa.jp

- Application Period and How to Apply:

Submission period: Monday, December 1, 2025 – mid-January, 2026

Please submit the following items during the application period using the application form on our website. Entries not submitted through the form, that contain inappropriate or false information, or that do not meet the requirements may be invalidated.

① Submission **【File Format: PDF】** :

- The title, main idea of the design, explanation of the work, as well as a sketch, drawing, CG model, or model photo of the work should fit on a single A3-size sheet (single-sided, landscape layout). The minimum font size is 10 points.
- Only English or Japanese may be used.
- The work should not include any expressions, symbols, or characters that may identify the entrant.
- The submission should be an A3 PDF file.
- The file size must be 3MB or less.

② A document certifying that you are a student enrolled in an educational institution. In the case of a group entry, please submit one for all members. **【File Format: PDF, jpeg or GIF】** :

- This document can be an enrollment certificate or student ID card, etc. showing that you are a student enrolled in an educational institution. It should be PDF, jpeg, or GIF format.
- The file size must be 1MB or less per file.

- Important Notes:

- Please use an e-mail address that can receive e-mails from the organizer.
【Blocked domains: @mail.ru, @bk.ru, @list.ru, @inbox.ru】
- A confirmation email will be sent after completing your application. If you do not receive it, check your spam folder or verify your registration information.
- After the deadline, entries cannot be modified or cancelled.
- The applicant is responsible for all costs associated with the production of the work.
- If your work uses images or illustrations that may infringe on third-party rights, you must obtain the necessary permission beforehand.
- Entries found to infringe on others' rights, including copyright, may be canceled. Applicants are solely responsible for resolving any third-party claims or lawsuits at their own risk and expense; the organizer and sponsors are not liable.
- Entries identical or similar to previously published designs, or judged to infringe on others' rights, may also be canceled. The organizer is not responsible for any resulting disputes.

- Judging:

- 10 works will be selected as finalists by the judges in mid-February 2026.
- The selected applicants and their works will be announced on the competition official website, as well as by individual correspondence.
- Final judging will be conducted from the 10 selected works to determine the winners of each award.
- The applicants selected as finalists will be asked to submit the following by the date specified by the organizer prior to the final judging. ※The details will be notified separately to the selected applicants.
 - a presentation script
 - a 1/5-1/1 scale model of their design (Any materials may be used in the model; please note that models will not be returned.)
- In the final judging, the judges will decide on each award based on the submitted works and the presentation.
- In principle, if you are selected as a finalist, you must attend the award ceremony to be held in Higashikawa, Hokkaido, Japan. (Scheduled to be March 22, 2026)
- In the event that there is any falsehood in the information entered on the application form, any violation of the application guidelines, or any other circumstances that are deemed inappropriate, the entry will not be judged and the prize may be withdrawn.
- We are unable to respond to enquiries about the judging process, criteria, results or other related matters.

- Final Judging and the Awards Ceremony Date:

Sunday, March 22, 2026. The planned location is Higashikawa, Hokkaido, Japan.

- Awards (Prize Money and Additional Prizes)

- Grand Prize (Kengo Kuma Award, 1 entry): ¥500,000 cash prize/ rights for commercialization
- Second Prize (SOLIZE Award, 1 entry): ¥200,000 cash prize
- Excellence Award (2 entries): ¥100,000 cash prize (each)
- Honorable Mention (6 entries): No cash prize
- 【Special Award】 (Higashikawa Woodworking Association Award, 1 entry from the above award

winners): rights for commercialization

※ The prizewinners will be invited to attend the final judging and the awards ceremony.

※International prizewinners must have a valid passport. The time between selection and application is short, so please prepare your passport in advance.

※Prizewinners will be provided with accommodations in Higashikawa and round-trip transportation from the airport closest to their home to Higashikawa. For group entries, up to two members may be invited.

※For the Grand Prize (Kengo Kuma Award) and the Special Award (Higashikawa Woodworking Association Award), the organizer and relevant business partners will discuss commercialization. Final decisions will be based on technical and financial feasibility and consultations with the prizewinners. When visiting Higashikawa for meetings on product commercialization, prizewinners can meet local woodworking businesses and observe or participate in production sites. Travel expenses (round-trip from the airport closest to the prizewinner's residence) and accommodation costs in Higashikawa will be fully covered by the organizer for one visit only.

- Judges:

- Head judge: Kengo Kuma (Architect, Professor at the University of Tokyo)
- Judges:
 - ◇ Eisuke Tachikawa (Design Strategist, Evolutionary Thinker, Representative of NOSIGNER)
 - ◇ Asao Tokolo (Artist)
 - ◇ Hiroshi Nakamura (Architect, NAP Architectural Design Office)
 - ◇ Masahiro Harada (Architect, Professor at Shibaura Institute of Technology)
 - ◇ Katsuhiko Hibino (Artist, President of Tokyo University of the Arts)
 - ◇ Teppei Fujiwara (Architect, Associate Professor at Yokohama National University)
 - ◇ Noritsugu Oda (Chair Researcher and Design Advisor to the town of Higashikawa)
- Judge for Special Award (Higashikawa Woodworking Association Award):
 - ◇ Higashikawa Woodworking Association
(Association of wood-related businesses in Higashikawa)

- Legal Matters:

- All submitted works, including samples, remain the organizer's property and will not be returned.
- All copyright and design rights to the submitted works belong to the applicant(s).
- If your work is commercialized, we will discuss legal matters with you separately.
- The organizer reserves the right to display the work and use it in print, online, or other publicity.
- The organizer or its designee may use the submitted work freely for exhibition, publication, editing, reproduction, distribution, etc., without notice, and the entrant must not interfere.
- The organizer or sponsors may use the submitted works for promotion at no charge.
- The organizer will have the right of first refusal in the case of commercialization.

- Disclaimer:

- The organizer is not liable for any loss or damage incurred by entrants, except in cases of intentional misconduct or gross negligence.
- The schedule and contents of this competition are subject to change without prior notice.

- Organizer:

- "Kengo Kuma & Higashikawa" KAGU Design Competition Executive Committee
 - ◇ Composed of: The Town of Higashikawa, Higashikawa Chamber of Commerce, Higashikawa Tourism Association, Higashikawa Agricultural Cooperative, Higashikawa Construction Association, Higashikawa Forestry Association, Higashikawa Promotion Corporation, Asahikawa Furniture Cooperative, The Higashikawa Town Council, The Higashikawa Board of Education, Higashikawa Woodworking Association

Main office: Higashikawa Culture and Exchange Department

Phone: +81 166-82-2111, Email: official@kagu-higashikawa.jp