



Otis Ingrams' 'katumi piece' is a one-off piece of furniture, inspired by the interior door panel of the Lexus LC coupé.

Credit: Lexus

By human hand



LONG-LASTING



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SMEs

A London-based leather artisan, Otis Ingrams, is the first expert to have his craftsmanship feature in a new series of films made by automotive brand Lexus to celebrate the importance of 'takumi'. Takumi is the Japanese word for master craftsman. In the west, there is a wide acceptance that if a person can devote 10,000 hours to any activity (golf, painting, playing the violin and so on) they can become an expert. In Japan the belief is that it takes six times that, 60,000 hours, to achieve takumi status.

Lexus has made films in the past to highlight the craftsmanship of its own employees who have reached takumi status, including Katsuaki Suganuma, who has worked for the automotive company for more than 30 years and is now the person in charge of refining its choice and use of leather and all interior materials. In this new series, 'In Search of Takumi', it seeks to illustrate parallels between a takumi at Lexus and the work of different artisans working in the UK today. It picked Otis Ingrams to start the series off.

Takumi piece

The film shows Otis Ingrams at his North London studio and follows his work to create his "takumi piece", a one-of-a-kind leather seat, (he calls it a "chaise") inspired by the design and

Lexus chose a leather artisan, Otis Ingrams, to launch a new film series. The short documentaries highlight parallels between the work of Lexus's own master craftspeople (takumi) and that of skilled people plying traditional trades in the UK today.

craftsmanship on show in the Lexus LC coupé. In the film, Mr Ingrams explains that the Lexus LC coupé proved to be a good starting point because the car is "incredibly sculptural". He says he focused specifically on the interior door panel out of admiration for its smoothness and flowing lines.

The designer completed an apprenticeship at the Bill Amberg Studio and went on to set up his own studio, OTZI, and to build up a reputation in creating bespoke, hand-

crafted pieces. He says in the film: "Leather's a very special material for me. It has huge potential. You can use it for almost anything and use it with a wide range of other materials." He explains that he sought to translate "the sense of speed, dynamism and acceleration" that the Lexus LC offers into leather furniture, into his takumi piece.

One shot

He is clearly pleased with the chaise, which uses a carved frame covered in vegetable-tanned leather dyed a colour called, appropriately, London tan. He says it's "way too heavy", but comfortable. It also reflects the car in the way he hoped, he explains. "I think from start to finish I probably spent 100 hours on the piece," Mr Ingrams says. "The stitching is all done by hand and everything had to be hand-finished."

He used "very little machinery" past the point at which the main body of the piece was complete and worked with great care to keep to his original vision. "It's a challenge to produce something that's incredibly polished while, at the same time, only really having one shot at doing it," he says. "The satisfaction of producing something as technically difficult as this was really rewarding."

Whole hide, hand-cut, hand-stitched

He chose the scale of chaise carefully, "blowing it up" to a size at which he knew he would be able to use one whole hide. He chose thick leather for this project because he wanted the material to have "structure and generosity". The film shows him laying the hide out on a cutting table, scoring round the shape of the pieces he needed to cover the frame and cutting them out from the hide, all by hand. Some of the pieces of leather then had to be skived, also by hand, "feathering the edges down to half a millimetre".

Next, he stretched the leather pieces around the frame using glue and staples to hold them in place initially, allowing him to form the seams and use a pricking iron to mark out where all the stitches would go. For the stitching, he used linen thread coated in beeswax and applied a running stitch that no machine could replicate. After this, he waxed and burnished the bevelled edges to apply a high shine to them. "That shine really brings the piece together," he comments.

The need for craftsmanship

Evidence of handcraft, of "human interaction" is important in a unique piece, Mr Ingrams insists, and he explains that the project he chose appealed to him because it represents "a synthesis of modern and traditional production". Just as in the Lexus LC coupé, advanced machinery helped produce a complex shape, which he brought to life using traditional materials, traditional handcrafts and hand tools.

He explains that he had read about the Lexus commitment to quality and craftsmanship in the upholstery it uses, investing in "the best hides and the best stitching" to make its car interiors beautiful and comfortable. "I wanted to translate that," he concludes. "I think there will always be a need for craftsmanship. No matter how complex or difficult pieces made by computer-aided design, robots or machinery are, those pieces are always, quite distinctly, lacking in human quality."

A further four films will come out in the months ahead to show further parallels between UK craftspeople and takumi. For Otis Ingrams to have launched the series is a credit to his skills and a tribute to the deep connections that leather has with quality products, tradition and takumi 🙏



A running stitch that no machine could replicate is one of the elements that emphasise the handcraft credentials of the piece. Waxing and burnishing techniques bring a special high shine to the edges.

Credits: Lexus