Kura Sushi, Inc.

Interior design of conveyor belt sushi restaurant

Design registration No. 1671153

**<u>A restaurant design characterized by a distinctive design featuring a wooden *yagura* structure where diners can feel the warmth of Japanese style</u>**

In January 2020, Kura Sushi, Inc. opened its first global flagship restaurant Kura Sushi Asakusa ROX in Asakusa, Tokyo. At the same time, defining the year 2020 as its "second startup stage," it adopted a new and unified corporate logo for Japan and its U.S. and Taiwan subsidiaries as a way to consolidate its overseas business strategy. The new logo features an Edo-style font representing Japanese culture. Kura Sushi Asakusa ROX is characterized as the industry's first attempt at a center for Japanese culture, inspired by the concept of "SightEating," where customers can enjoy sightseeing and eating at the same time.

The company was expecting that people who came to Japan for the 2020 Olympics and enjoyed Kura Sushi would also later visit Kura Sushi locations in their home countries or raise the recognition of Kura Sushi on SNS. This flagship restaurant attracted much attention at the beginning, such as being featured in articles in two of the "Big Three" American television networks. Although it would take some more time for international tourists to visit the flagship restaurant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the eye-catching interior design, with its soft atmosphere, is attracting many domestic customers, including those from the local community, as a new style of revolving sushi restaurants.

This interior design is one of the first two designs successfully registered as interior designs under the revised Design Act. It is characterized by an in-room *yagura* structure consisting of pillars and roofs, and a well-balanced arrangement of plain wood furniture, such as tables and chairs. The design is a contemporary rendering of space that imparts a warm, Japanese feel, combining the *yagura* structure assembled in a distinctive style, the integrated interior design comprising plain wood pillars and tables, and tatami-mat seating plates for chairs. On the wall is a *ukiyoe* artwork by Utagawa Hiroshige depicting kiosks selling sushi, tempura, sweet dumplings, and people enjoying the food under a *yagura*. The company explains that Kashiwa Sato, a creative director who handled the interior design and new logo was inspired by this *ukiyoe* artwork. The collection of lanterns and masks displayed on the wall, and booths where customers can play shooting and ring toss games are reminiscent of townspeople's culture and festivals of the Edo period depicted in the *ukiyoe* artwork. "Although we are a restaurant operator, we are first and foremost in the service business. Therefore, how to entertain and surprise our customers always remains our core mission. This flagship restaurant reflects these core missions," Akihiro Tsuji, a representative from the company's Public Relations Department, Public Relations and Marketing Division said. The interior design won a bronze award in SDA Award 2020, and the "Best of Best," the highest prize in the interior category of ICONIC AWARDS 2021 held by the German Design Council.

Kura Sushi has proactively launched new initiatives, such as a pioneering touch-panel order system, along with innovative technology, including a "water collection system" for collecting used dishes and antibacterial sushi cover "Mr. Fresh" enabling diners to take dishes off the lane without touching them. Kunihiko Tanaka, the President and Representative Director and also the founder, recognizes intellectual properties as important assets. As indicated by its

comprehensive IP strategy including the acquisition of trademark registrations and patents since the 1990s, the company shows strong interest in the revised Design Act. It was in September 2019 when the interior design for Kura Sushi Asakusa ROX was finalized, and the company filed an application for protection of this unique interior design soon after, in December of that year, in an attempt to become the first to obtain a registration for an interior design. According to Tsuji, this was also a way to show respect to Kashiwa Sato, the designer.

The global flagship restaurant also forms part of the company's business strategy to expand its presence to urban areas, as the company's regular restaurants are mainly located alongside major roads or populated residential areas to attract families. Unlike regular restaurants focused on functionality and ease of management, the global flagship restaurant added the design concept and comfortable experience, renewing the colors of sushi conveyor lanes, dishes, and the built-in storage in the tables according to Sato's proposal. As Kura Sushi Asakusa ROX was the first global flagship restaurant, the company staff faced some problems, for example, the standard storage did not fit properly when used in the flagship store, and AI cameras for capturing sushi dishes or dish covers on the conveyor belt did not work well and needed resetting. After quickly addressing these shortcomings, the company launched its second global flagship restaurant in Dotonbori, Osaka, in April 2021. An application for design registration of its interior design directed by Sato using plain wood and lanterns in a similar way as those for the Asakusa ROX store was also filed. The company has announced its future plan to deploy an overseas business strategy through global flagship restaurants inside and outside Japan. The unique, unprecedented interior design of the global flagship restaurants will deeply impress customers visiting the restaurant and provide the fun experience of a revolving sushi restaurant. Protected by a design right, the interior design will serve to build the brand image of Kura Sushi.