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Celebrating the Olympus tradition



Takeshi Yamashita

This year, Olympus celebrates 90 years of success. Its story begins in Japan with Takeshi Yamashita's dream of manufacturing high-quality Japanese microscopes. He was just 30 years old when, on 12 October 1919, he founded Takachiho Seisakusho – the company destined to realise his vision. Six months later its first product was launched: the Asahi, named after the "Rising Sun". Two further models followed later the same year.

Humble beginnings

Both the microscopes and the company's second product line, clinical thermometers, were initially marketed under the brand name Tokiwa. However, the economic climate at the time did not favour Japanese manufacturers. A new name synonymous with high quality was needed. It would have to be easily understood around the world and rich in positive associations.



From local myth to global legend

One of Yamashita's original ideas was to call his new company simply "Takachiho" after the mountain where the gods dwell in Japanese mythology. The challenge was to find an international equivalent that also conveyed the same qualities. The legendary Mount Olympus, home to the ancient Greek gods, was the obvious choice. In 1921 "Olympus" was registered as the company's trademark, laying the foundations for what is today a renowned global brand.



Takachiho Seisakusho

Shaping the future of photography

The history of photography under the Olympus banner began in 1936 with the introduction of a bellows camera, the Semi-Olympus I. After an interruption caused by the Second World War, the Olympus success story continued in 1948, when the company launched the first Japanese 35mm camera, the Olympus 35.



Soon after, Olympus turned its attention to the inside of the human body, creating a public sensation in 1950 with its first gastro-camera. In 1963, the company came to Europe with the foundation of Olympus Optical Co. (Europa) GmbH in Hamburg, Germany. Today, in addition to its contributions to medicine and diagnostics, the company is most known for its revolutionary cameras. These have been cherished by generations of photographers the world over.

Although company founder Takeshi Yamashita passed away in the late 1950s, his vision had long become a reality. His dynamic and creative spirit lives on and is a fundamental part of the Olympus tradition. Over the coming weeks, we look back at some of the highlights of the Olympus story.