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INTERVIEW

“Our concept combines Western and Japanese living cultures”

Interview with Eva and Erwin Zehnder, founders and owners of Sato Slow Living

Blending Japanese aesthetics with a philosophy of mindfulness and sustainability, [Sato Slow Living](#) creates timeless spaces and objects that invite calm and simplicity into everyday life. Their curated collection reflects a deep appreciation for natural materials, refined form, and quiet elegance. We met Eva and Erwin Zehnder, the founders and owners of Sato Slow Living, in their Zurich showroom.

What inspired you to open *Sato Slow Living*?

Our fascination with Japan, its architecture, and its traditional minimalist design were the driving forces that inspired us from the very beginning. It all started with our deep passion for Japanese aesthetics. We opened Sato in 1994. At that time, the Japanese lifestyle was relatively unknown in Switzerland, which we recognized as a great opportunity. It was important to us that our business didn't just sell futons but translated Japanese living and lifestyle into the Swiss everyday experience.

Your shop has been in Zurich for many years, bringing together European and Japanese ways of living. How would you describe your concept to someone who has never visited *Sato Slow Living*?

Our concept combines Western and Japanese living cultures. We create a European-Japanese living environment characterized by a reduced, minimalist, and timelessly modern design. A key element is intelligent multifunctionality,



Eva and Erwin Zehnder in their showroom in Zurich ©JETRO Geneva

inspired by the limited living space often found in Japan: our furniture is designed to offer a wide range of possibilities with minimal effort. A sofa can be transformed into a bed in just a few steps, and a futon can simply be rolled up to create a flexible space for everyday life during the day. Furthermore, we place the highest value on sustainability and durability, ensuring our products accompany our customers faithfully through the various stages of their lives.

Many people today talk about “slow living” and minimalism. What does “slow living” mean to you and how does it influence the products and services you offer?

For us, “slow living” is a very deliberate alternative to the increasing pace and

sensory overload of modern everyday life. It is about pausing and truly living - not about rushing home to tick off more tasks, but about consciously creating a personal sanctuary that provides the necessary peace and relaxation. This is directly reflected in our products: we create understated designs and consistently avoid short-lived, loud trends or disposable furniture. Our interiors are meant to offer clarity and plenty of open space, transforming the home into a place that radiates lightness, harmony, and comfort.

Your offer includes minimalist furniture, Japanese ceramics, futons and tatami, and other accessories.

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Selected Japanese design products in the Sato Slow Living showroom in Zurich. © JETRO Geneva

What products would you say are the most popular among your customers?

Our most sought-after products, alongside futons and tatami mats, are notably our tatami beds, which are exclusive in-house designs. Another hallmark of *Sato* is our multifunctional sofa beds. The design of individual living concepts is another core competence. Using elements such as shoji sliding walls, classic tansu chests, modular tatami islands, comfortably upholstered folding chairs, or wardrobes with shoji fronts, we offer a harmonious translation of Japanese living culture, which we integrate individually into modern Swiss living environments. This core range is complemented by high-quality textiles, cushions, and bed linen from the in-house sewing atelier located within our shop. In this respect, we are almost unique. This allows us to provide excellent quality and customized customer solutions at the highest level.

How do you source your products from Japan and on what basis do you select them?

The most important selection criterion for us is whether the products can be meaningfully adapted to Swiss living conditions - Japanese living culture must suit our architecture and local needs. To ensure high quality, we source our furnishings through direct contact with Japanese manufacturers. These personal relationships also ensure that we can maintain comparably high standards regarding quality.

Can you tell us how your business partnerships with Japanese companies have evolved since *Sato Slow Living* opened?

In our early years, some Japanese partners found it quite unusual that we, as Swiss people without a Japanese family background, wanted to distribute their traditional products abroad. We had to work hard to earn this trust over the years. Fortunately, it worked. Today, we maintain a close network of direct contacts. Our supplier

relationships are now characterized by strong mutual appreciation and reliability.

Do you think that JETRO services are useful for Swiss companies looking for new products from Japan?

We consider JETRO's services to be very useful and helpful. They are excellent for initial research and enquiries with potential manufacturers, which makes access much easier. The logistical assistance on the ground—such as the shuttle service directly from the hotel to potential manufacturers, as well as the friendly and attentive support and assistance provided by JETRO staff—is also a major advantage for Swiss companies looking to collaborate smoothly with Japan.

How do you see the relationship between Japanese and Swiss lifestyles evolving, and what role would you like *Sato Slow Living* to play in this exchange?

We can clearly feel that the current "Japan boom" and the fact that more Swiss people are travelling to Japan, is a huge help. People return home enthusiastic and inspired by the culture there and then specifically look for something Japanese for their own interior design. For these customers, we are the ultimate point of contact and a true "Japan oasis" in the heart of Zurich. In the overall furniture market, this way of living is naturally a niche, but *Sato* does not just occupy it; we are clearly the market leader in this segment.

Thank you for the interview!

Results of the Federal Vote of 8 March 2026

On 8 March 2026, Swiss voters cast their ballots on a total of four nationwide proposals. These votes covered monetary policy, media financing, climate policy, and the taxation of married couples. According to preliminary official information, turnout was in the usual range for nationwide votes.

Proposal 1: Cash initiative and counterproposal

The popular initiative aimed to enshrine an explicit guarantee of the availability of cash and the Swiss franc as Switzerland's currency in the Federal Constitution, going beyond the safeguards already contained in existing legislation. The Federal Council and Parliament opposed the initiative text but acknowledged the underlying concern and therefore put forward a counterproposal that anchored the current practice and legal framework at constitutional level. Voters rejected the popular initiative by 54.39% and at the same time approved the counterproposal by 73.39% of the valid votes cast.

Proposal 2: Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) initiative

Currently, private households pay an annual radio and television fee of CHF 335 to finance public-service broadcasting, while companies that are subject to VAT and have annual turnover of CHF 500'000 or more also pay a graded fee based on their sales. The initiative demanded a reduction of the household fee to a maximum of CHF

200 per year and the complete abolition of the fee for all companies. The proposal was rejected by 61.95% of voters.

Proposal 3: Climate fund initiative

The Climate Fund Initiative aimed to significantly increase federal resources for climate protection, adaptation, and related innovation. It envisaged the creation of a dedicated federal fund into which the Federal Government would pay each year an amount corresponding to between 0.5% and 1% of Switzerland's GDP, to support measures such as the expansion of renewable energies and climate-resilient infrastructure. Voters rejected the initiative by 70.71%.

Proposal 4: Individual taxation

Under the current system, married couples are taxed jointly, whereas unmarried couples are taxed individually, and different tax scales may apply. The reform proposal introduced individual taxation for married couples as well, meaning that in future each adult would be taxed separately on their own income and assets, with a uniform rate structure. The initiative was accepted by 54.26% of voters.

Source: [admin.ch; ch.ch](https://www.admin.ch/ch.ch)

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SITUATION

Key Findings of the 2025 JETRO Invest Japan Report

In March 2026, JETRO released the English version of the Invest Japan Report 2025, which presents the latest analysis of foreign direct investment (FDI) trends and business developments in Japan. The aim of this publication is to provide insights for foreign companies considering entry or expansion in the Japanese market.

Japan's inward FDI stock continued to expand in 2024, reaching a record 53.3 trillion yen, an increase of 4.5% compared to the previous year. Although the overall pace of inflows slowed slightly, new investments remained robust. Greenfield investment rose by about 15% year-on-year, totaling USD 31.6 billion, supported by large projects in data centers, logistics facilities, and AI-related infrastructure. Such investments reflect ongoing demand for digitalization, automation, and labor-saving solutions across industries. Cross-border M&A deals, which had declined in 2023, also made a strong recovery, returning to near-record levels, with many projects focusing on optimizing operations and improving profitability.

In 2024, the US continued to play a major role in Japan's investment landscape, recording the highest levels ever for both new investments

and withdrawals since comparable data became available in 2014. US investors withdrew 1.6 trillion yen more than they invested in Japan, which pulled down the Japan's total inward FDI for the year. Despite this, the US remained Japan's largest investment source, followed by the UK and Singapore. However, the UK strengthened its position as the gap with the US narrowed, while Asia as a region surpassed North America for the first time in 2 years.

In line with the "Program for Promotion of Foreign Direct Investment in Japan 2025" and the Japanese government's Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform 2025, Japan has raised its 2030 FDI stock target to 120 trillion yen, with a longer-term vision of 150 trillion yen in the early 2030s. These policy updates underline Japan's commitment to attracting and sustaining foreign investment as a pillar of national growth. At the same time, the government continues to strengthen security measures under the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Act. Revisions introduced in April 2025 expanded the scope of sectors requiring prior approval for inward investment, reflecting the government's efforts to safeguard critical technologies, infrastructure, and sensitive information.

Source: [JETRO](https://www.jetro.go.jp)

分析

ANALYSIS

Beyond Matcha: Discovering the World of Japanese Green Tea

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EVENT

On 30 March 2026, the [Embassy of Japan in Switzerland](#) hosted an event entitled “Beyond Matcha: Discovering the World of Japanese Green Tea” at the EHL Hospitality Business School in Lausanne. The event aimed to introduce participants to the depth and diversity of Japanese tea culture, extending beyond the well-known matcha.

The event opened with welcoming remarks by H.E. Mr. Toshiro Iijima, Ambassador of Japan to Switzerland, who highlighted the growing interest in Japanese tea among European consumers and its connection to sustainable, quality-oriented lifestyles. Mr. Christophe Laurent, EHL Group Values Ambassador, then offered guest addresses, emphasizing the cultural and educational value of such exchanges in promoting mutual understanding through gastronomy and hospitality.

Ms. Natsumi Surnely, Swiss Japan Tea Goodwill Ambassador and founder of the [kotonocha tea atelier](#) in Morges, delivered a lecture on the characteristics and brewing techniques of different varieties of Japanese tea. Participants enjoyed a guided tasting session featuring Fukamushi sencha and kukicha served cold, followed by a warm hojicha, each demonstrating distinct flavors and aromas from various tea regions of Japan. Mr. Yasuharu Matsumoto of the [Global Japanese Tea Association](#) further deepened the discussion by explaining Japan’s regional diversity in tea production and the innovation



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currently shaping its global market presence. Visitors of the event had the opportunity to interact with several exhibitors, who had information booths set up, including the Embassy of Japan in Switzerland, [JETRO](#), and a range of tea producers and brands from Switzerland, Japan, and France. These included [Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms](#), [Suenaga Seicha](#), [MARUtCHA sàrl](#), [ITO EN Europe](#), [Jugetsudo Paris](#), [KOSYUEN Paris](#), [TAMAKI TEA](#), and [Wakohen](#).

Agenda

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AGENDA

✓ Stay tuned!

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO’s core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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