

Buyer Invitation Program in Osaka (2012)

JETRO's buyer invitation program is a trade promoting program which invites buyers from various countries to Japan for free; to meet with and discuss possible trade ventures with specially selected local companies in certain regions in Japan. The goal of the program is to match up the businesses between Japanese SMEs and foreign buyers, to promote export of Japanese SMEs.

In November, JETRO Osaka and JETRO Kyoto hosted the Buyer Invitation event and a 5 day showcase of their regions SMEs in the domain of "Interior Decoration and Kitchen Equipment". The JETRO offices in Japan collaborated with JETRO offices overseas in North and South America, and with JETRO Offices in London and Brussels to bring together companies to enhance trade between Japan and other countries.

The November 2012 edition of the Buyer Invitation Program brought together 37 Participants from Osaka and 27 participants from Kyoto. JETRO Brussels selected its candidate several months ago after a rigorous research phase and nominated *Home Faktory* to go to Japan. *Home Faktory* is an interior decor outlet, located in the Quartier Bailli in Brussels. The owner Mr. Eric Degove owns and runs the shop. Mr Degove chooses the merchandise in his store based on an ethic of design and utility. The flavor of the store is halfway between vintage style Americana and modern designer chic, and contains an eclectic mix of merchandise from kitchenware, bathroom articles, phone and laptop covers, and a variety of things in between. *Home Faktory* imports mostly from the USA and China.

Below is the interview with Mr. Degove after his return from the Buyer Invitation Program.



JETRO: How do you feel the Buyer Invitation Program went?

Eric DEGOVE: Well first of all I feel incredibly privileged and grateful. The Program was well organized, and everything was truly as I had hoped.

JETRO: What did JETRO do well or badly?

Eric DEGOVE: I felt JETRO organized everything very well. The translation was excellent, the hotels and restaurants were really flawless, and the business-matching was brilliant. If I had one criticism to make, and I don't think it's really possible to change this, it's that there was not much 'free-time' although as the Program is only a few days long I can see how it all the time was used effectively.

JETRO: Which products did you like best?

Eric DEGOVE: Actually there were four or five companies that I really liked. One makes picture frames, they are very design oriented metallic and quite mathematical with polygon shapes. They were fun. Another makes and designs greeting cards, in fact there was a French man working there with them, the designs are really original and vibrant, I felt they captured a lot of energy. Another that caught my eye makes small bags, beaded purses and they come in a variety of colours and really looked great, they are original and I have never seen a product similar to this in Europe. I had a request of JETRO before I left which was to find a company that made designer storage boxes which were stackable, and they found a company that fit the profile, when I met with them I really liked their products, I am so glad I asked about this. And the last one that I truly loved was a very young dynamic company that makes fashion statement earphones in these really bright colours. As you can see the things that attracted *Home Factory* are pretty varied. I think these were really the products that captivated me most, and I am contacting three of the companies at present to work out some future partnership.



JETRO: So you plan to have contracts with several of the Japanese participants?

Eric DEGOVE: Yes, the only issue for me at the moment is that our purchases for this year have already been completed so until January I am just discussing without ordering. It's mainly asking about pricing and transport at this stage. However when the re-stocking occurs early next year I hope to have finalized a contract with at least three of the companies I mentioned.

JETRO: What did you think of the products generally?

Eric DEGOVE: Well actually I was quite surprised at some of the products; they were a little old fashioned. I like really fun modern designs but some of the products I saw were quite passé and didn't really fit the style of my store. Of course there was also some beautiful artisanal interior décor which was very ethnic and rustic, however not at all in-keeping with the aesthetic of *Home Faktory*.



JETRO: Would you recommend the Program to other Belgian companies?

Eric DEGOVE: Definitely, for me at least in my domain, I can say that I would never have found these companies on my own. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. As an SME it is very hard to meet with foreign producers and import because I don't have the opportunity to meet the other SMEs normally. This means you either do business with no one or with really big international players who often find it a hassle to work with SMEs. The Buyer Invitation Program not only allows me to meet Japanese SMEs in my domain but also shows me a whole gamut of products I would never see before. I feel it's mutually beneficial to Japanese and Belgian companies and I am really happy to have been able to participate in this Program.