

So many Koi, but where would you start!? Not all of these Koi will become wonderful Jumbo Koi, but with careful studying of each candidate, you could be off to a good start.



real beauty is skin deep

"The apples don't fall far from the tree." This quote is a good way of explaining the relationship of parent koi to their offspring - want to know more?

The Japanese and Europeans have different ways of looking at koi. When it comes to Tategoi the Japanese look at full potential whereas we tend to want instant beauty. So how can you spot potential? What do you look for? Where do you start? It seems beauty really is skin deep...

Top hobbyists in Japan are very serious about koi, but they are also incredibly patient people. When an experienced Japanese koi keeper buys a small koi, he/she is inevitably looking upon the koi in question as a clean canvas, something to work on for the coming years. They will spend hours studying the koi, carefully watching the behaviour, and the way the fish swim, whilst trying to imagine what each koi will look like in many years time.

They will then bowl and view their potential Tategoi, and study the qualities of each individual fish before finally finding the fish that steals the heart. They will then take this fish home, nurture it, and try to build it to become the fish that they imagined when they first chose it. As much as they will try to

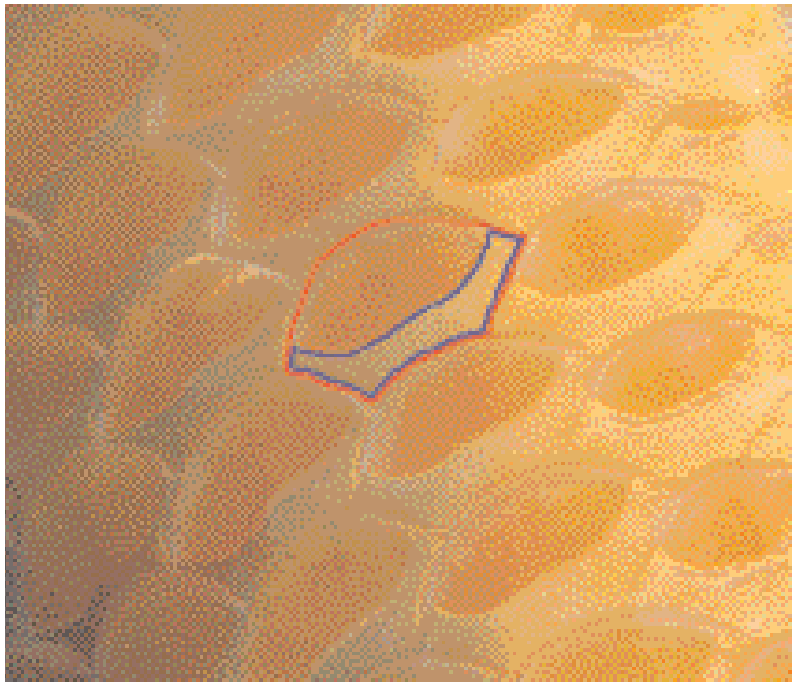
grow the fish as big as possible, they will also try and control its development along the way, in order that the koi will attain it's maximum quality/beauty. Once they are satisfied with the fruits of their work, they will often pass the fish on, and start again with a new canvas, a new project.

the japanese way

Choosing koi with a future is a little different to choosing a koi to win at shows, but ultimately, there is much more pleasure to be gained from buying a koi to 'work with' as a project for several years ahead. Many Japanese breeders are disappointed at the impatience of European koi keepers, as most will buy a koi with which they have the intention of seeing 'instant' results, whereas the Japanese will aim to grow a koi to its full



The fukurin is the soft area of skin (nanshitsu shinpi) that is shown just outside the edge of each scale, (outlined in blue) making the scales appear embedded into the skin.



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to grow a big koi, these two aspects must be carefully considered. Head shape and proportion must be assessed at the same time.

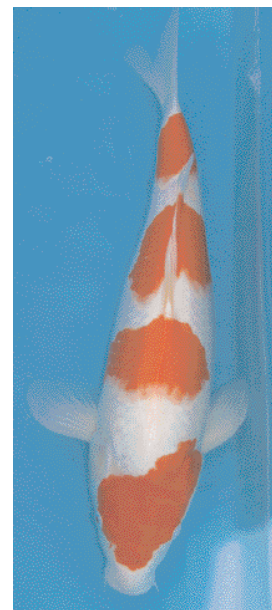
- Check for sumi quality.
- Make sure that the koi has no faults or deformities in the body or fins.

meet the parents

Koi keeping is a little different in Japan, where size is everything! Nowadays, a koi isn't considered big unless it grows beyond 80cm. This is becoming almost expected as the norm, whereas koi destined for Europe are more predominantly pretty koi, from smaller (cheaper) parent koi.

It is important to bear in mind that a parent of perhaps 85cm and eight years old, that is still growing, will perhaps cost 20,000,000 Yen (approximately £100,000), whereas a koi of perhaps seven years old and 70cm simply isn't going to produce big offspring, and may well cost as little as 500,000 Yen (approximately £2,500). It is to be expected that the offspring from the bigger parent will command a much higher price than those smaller from the smaller parent, as firstly the offspring will become bigger, and secondly, the breeder has to sell the offspring and recoup the money invested in the parent. ►

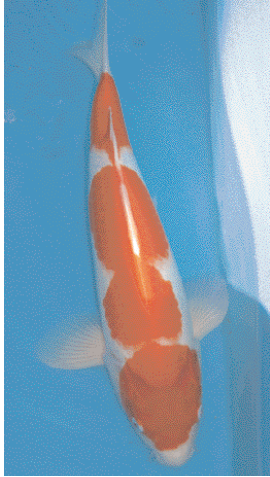
Bought as Tosai, but now 46cm, Nisai, female, and heading in the right direction. Note the wonderful soft even Hi, with scales that barely stand out. Sashi is uniform, and Kiwa is nice and sharp. Also note how the fins display the same bright white as the scales, and face. Note the underlying Hi which is shining through the scales near the back end of the fish. Not a good thing but hopefully when the koi gets older the white skin will thicken to cover it.



potential, whilst at the same time carefully controlling its development in order to stop the koi from finishing too soon. A high-class koi that blossoms later in life at a big size, will ultimately achieve greater beauty. Tategoi are not ugly fish, but fish that must possess outstanding qualities, and long term potential. Such qualities are not easily missed.

So, this brings us to the starting point of what to look for when trying to choose a koi for the future.

- Take a look at the parent koi, and be sure to find out the parent size, and age.
- Skin and hi quality must be good, and also observe sashi and kiwa. Skin quality is the main foundation, as without it the koi has no future.
- Study the body shape. Frame can be seen within the body shape, and in order



This Kohaku was also bought as Tosai, now Nisai and measured 45cm when the picture was taken. Notice how the Hi glows where the sun hits it. This is a Kohaku that has it all!

apples and koi

Of equal importance is parent quality and condition. The famous phrase 'The apples don't fall far from the tree' is also used in Japan. In short, as breeders like Momotaro, Wakabayashi, and Takeda have stressed, "If the parent has a deformity, disappearing hi, hikui, or shimis, the chances are that the offspring will go the same way when they get older". So, find out parent age, size, and general quality before buying the offspring.

It is also important to look at bigger koi from the same parent so that you can observe the growth rates and development characteristics of the koi, which hence, will give you an idea of what to expect from your koi. To quote the words President Maeda (Momorato) said last year for a short video

Just because you think that a breeder is famous, don't assume that all of, or any of his parents are big koi. Not many breeders can justify the expense.

size is everything

I often hear many people in England say that they don't mind about the parents being small, as they aren't worried about the koi not growing big. Quite frankly, with this outlook, you could easily buy koi that won't grow at all. In my first year as a dealer, I bought some Showa from a part time breeder in Hiroshima prefecture. This breeder was extremely proud of the koi he was producing, and his female parent was stunning, but only about 70cm. Needless to say, that to this day none of the koi from that particular breeder have shown any significant growth here in the UK, although they are very attractive and very capable of winning in the smaller sizes at koi shows.

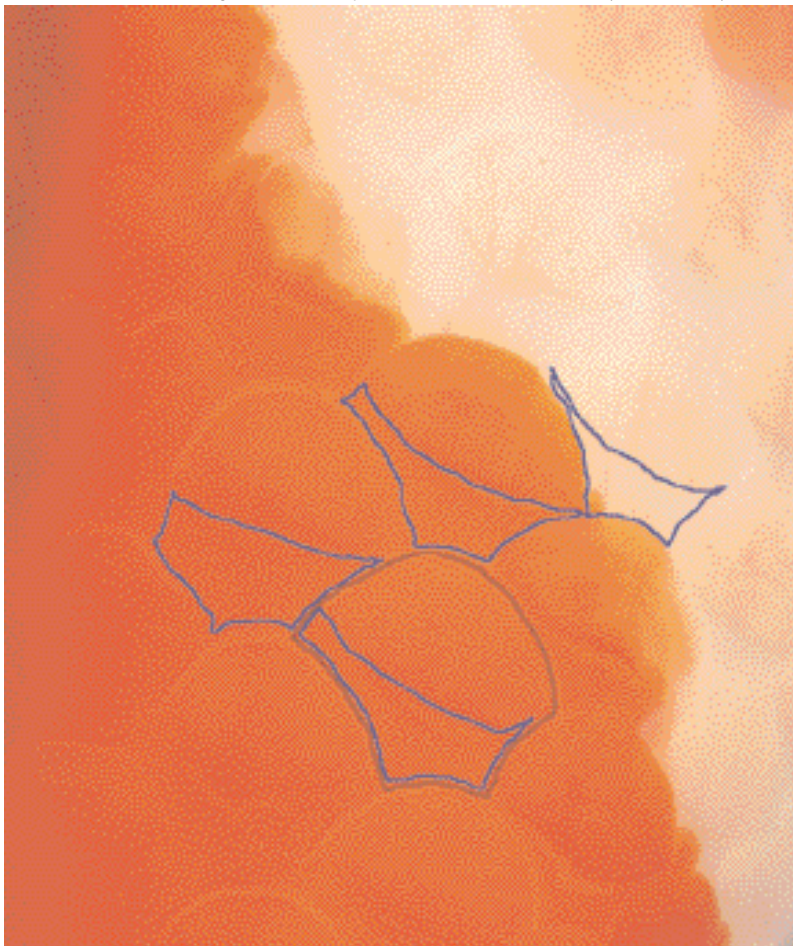
He/she is inevitably looking upon the koi in question as a clean canvas, something to work on for the coming years

interview I had with him, "If the breeder won't show you his parent koi, don't buy the offspring, no matter how pretty they look!"

skin and hi quality

In order to understand the skin and hi of the fish, it is important to understand the make-up of the skin of fish, and where hi develops. I'll try to keep this brief, as it is really a topic all of it's own.

In Go Sanke fukurin only occurs when the nanshitsu shinpi (middle skin - outlined in red) grows out from between the scales as the koi grows, and covers part of the surface of the next scale.(outlined in blue).



surface skin (Hyouso Shinpi)

This is the fine surface tissue that grows on the surface of the scales. This skin is responsible for the skin's appearance and shine (Tsuya), it also contains the pigment cells where hi develops. Soft water affects the appearance of the pigment cells, causing lustre (Teri) to improve.

It has been said that hard water makes the pigment cells lie flat (as if to protect the skin from damage), and that soft water allows the cells to stand up, and hence appear more beautiful. Hi pigment cells develop on the surface skin and have a tendency to develop more so, where the scale is exposed to oxygen. Nanshitsu shinpi (middle skin) is the elastic layer of skin which grows and wraps part of the scale where it is embedded into the koi.

Pigment develops here too, and is responsible for sashi. Sashi is where the leading areas of the scales at the front of a pattern have colour that underlies white scales, causing the hi to faintly shine through. Bearing in mind that only about one third of each scale is exposed (not overlapped by another scale), it is desirable to have sashi in young fish that appears to run one to one and a half scales deep.

As a koi gets older, the hyousou shinpi

(surface skin) thickens, causing the sashi to appear shallower. In koi of Sensuke bloodline, the sashi becomes very shallow as the koi get older, as the white skin becomes thicker than that of other bloodlines, and covers the sashi. If sashi isn't consistently visible, bend the koi to make sure that the colour lies also beneath the exposed area of scale.

last skin

The last skin is the bottom layer before the meat of the fish. This skin can also develop colour pigment, and is the reason that some cheap koi can sometimes have red areas shining through from beneath the scales on white areas of the koi. Koi with this should be avoided.

himura

This is when a koi has a thin and weak looking patch in the hi, often just behind the head. Avoid koi that possess this fault, as it will never improve.

fukurin

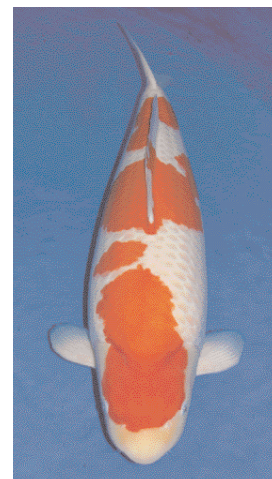
Fukurin is unfortunately one of the most misunderstood topics concerning koi. It has often been referred to as a shine on the scales, a bit like a very faint Gin Rin. This simply isn't the case. Fukurin is something that develops in koi as they



get older and bigger. It isn't seen in small or young koi, as it is something that a koi doesn't have, but can develop.

Not all koi will develop fukurin skin, but in the cases where it does appear, it is usually in koi of three years or older, and over 60cm. In the cases where fukurin does develop, it is very highly admired. The only koi that are born with fukurin are the metallic koi such as Kujaku and Ogons, plus Chagoi, Soragoi, and Ochiba Shigure. In these cases it is very easily identified, as in the case of Ogon, the fukurin is the soft area of skin (nanshitsu shinpi) that is shown just outside the edge of each scale, making the scales appear embedded into the skin.

In the case of Chagoi, it is responsible for the dark scale reticulation. In Go-Sanke however, fukurin only occurs when the nanshitsu shinpi (middle skin) grows out from between the scales as the koi grows, and covers part of the surface of the next scale. In these cases, it is much more easily seen if the koi are very big, and very mature. 鯉



A Kohaku of over 80cm, with extreme quality. The Japanese dream! Also note the Fukurin skin that has developed. This Koi would not be called a 'Fukurin Kohaku' however, but is merely a Kohaku with good Fukurin.

following on with fukurin... and kiwa

There is actually a second type of fukurin, which at a glance appears much the same as the first type, but the difference is that in the second case, the hyousou shinpi (scale surface skin) grows beyond the outside edge of the scale and laps onto the scale behind, giving a similar appearance but looking more as though the fukurin is following the radius of the outside edge of each scale.

kiwa

Kiwa is the back edge of each pigmented pattern. The kiwa should be sharp, not blurred. There are two types of kiwa; one type is 'maruzome', which follows the outside edge of the scales, and the second is 'kamisori', which is where the pattern cuts across the scale.

As far as hi is concerned, in smaller koi, it is desirable to buy koi with an orange-based hi, not a deep red, as it is far more stable. It is also important to see the koi in sunlight as this will vastly show the difference between fish with different levels of hi quality. Higher quality hi will shine better, and have better lustre to it when the sun hits it. The lesser hi may look weaker in the sun, and also may take on a 'mat' appearance instead of shining.

Good hi can be orange, but generally looks very thick, and if you study it closely, it should look as though it has a 'high resolution' look to the pigment (sorry, hard one to describe!). Extremely good hi will also look very soft and even across the scales, making the scales look inconspicuous, and should be of the exact same hue across its entire pattern. However, if small koi are grown very fast in a concrete pond, the hi can often appear a little weak from scale to scale, but shouldn't be a problem, as it will thicken again as the scales stop growing (or koi growth slows down). Basically, as the scale grows, it takes time, and plenty of oxygen for the hi to develop on the area of scale that has newly been exposed to oxygen. Hi develops much better in a mud pond, or green water.

The white skin of the koi should ultimately take on a creamy white appearance, with an almost reflective lustre. Again, when viewed in sunlight, the skin should virtually appear to almost 'glow'. It's not good to buy a koi with a grey look to the skin, or skin that looks like a mat finish. In short, if in doubt about skin and hi quality, direct sunlight should show up what would otherwise look like only a marginal difference.

This concludes part one. The other points such as shape/frame, and Sumi, will be covered in the next instalment.