

Japan's Lucky Cats

The Maneki Neko figurine has brought good luck to Japanese homes for centuries.

By Brad Kollus

Cats have been popular around the world and throughout time. Nothing demonstrates this more than when the cat becomes part of a country's culture, history and mythology. A perfect example of this is Maneki Neko, the beckoning cat of Japan that brings good luck and fortune.

Maneki Neko is a white, tricolor or tortoiseshell cat statue or figurine with its paw raised, often found in Japanese businesses and homes. Many experts believe the cat depicted in the figurines is a Japanese Bobtail. The figurines are popular throughout the country and have important meaning for people.

"Japanese culture is one where objects hold meaning for absolutely everything. The smallest charms or folk sculptures are not just decorative but infused with various meaning," says Alan Pate, author of "Ningyo: The Art of the Japanese Doll" and the forthcoming "Collecting Japanese Dolls," and the owner and curator of the Akanezumiya Japanese art gallery in St. Ignatius, Mont.

Maneki Neko's paw is raised to beckon or welcome. A raised left paw signifies the beckoning of customers and brings good fortune or money to businesses, but also can indicate the beckoning of good luck. A raised right paw usually signifies the beckoning of good luck in people's homes, but can signify bringing about money and good fortune to people. Maneki Neko figures have been created for centuries and come in many sizes, colors and materials; some carry various lucky charms.

****For the full article, pick up the December issue of CAT FANCY****

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