

The Kikkoman Soy Sauce Bottle

I know of no other package that works so successfully in so many ways. The Kikkoman bottle defines the brand, for a start. You think: if this product is good enough, unique enough to merit being sold in this extraordinary container, then it must be special indeed.

The bottle is, of course, objectively beautiful —with the refinement of form, proportion and materials you'd expect (and often not get) from a consumer product rather than a pack. The only clue to its package-ness, apart from the sauce inside, comes from the printed graphics, but these are in monochrome amber, screen-printed directly onto the glass, so the effect is bold and iconic (the amber matches perfectly the colour of the tiny bubbles which can crowd the liquid's surface). But the cap is surely the best part of the whole show. Formed in heavy red plastic, it has two identical, opposed spouts that grow directly down from the gloriously flat and featureless top surface. Because the spouts are parallel to the table, pouring Kikkoman is an elegant, wrist-rotating, tipping motion, the sauce pouring evenly and easily as air is let into the bottle through the unused spout. With any competitor, by comparison, you must up-end the bottle and shake the product, agitated bubbles and all, onto your food.

The Kikkoman bottle was designed by Kenji Ekuan, designer of the Akita bullet train and Japan's most celebrated industrial designer. According to accounts it took him two years and a hundred prototypes. The bottle was launched in 1961 and remains unchanged.

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