

# THE OLYMPUS PURSUIT

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On July 30, 2000, Toshikazu Koike, Muneaki Yoshida, Yoshihisa Maitani, Katsuhiko Tsunefuji, and Kunio Shimoyama (left to right) gathered at the Utsugi Technology Research Institute to examine a camera that had been sealed in a time capsule for 30 years. The camera was an Olympus Pen FT, and as they held it in their hands, you could sense the pleasure that they felt — as engineers, and as craftsmen.

Because these were the men who had built this camera, and in the process, a company.

The story of the Olympus Pen FT's genesis is a fascinating one. And at Olympus, it is one that is being repeated every day...

**OLYMPUS®**



# History in the making: 35mm photography then ...and now.

*On July 31, 2000, a rather unusual meeting was held at the Olympus Technical Research Institute at Utsugi, on the outskirts of Tokyo. Gathered together were five people who were deeply involved in the development of the Olympus Pen FT, a camera that played a vital role in Olympus history. It was a meeting which offered deep insights into the values and personalities that have made Olympus what it is today.*



*An Olympus Pen FT on display at Zuikodo, the Olympus museum of photographic and optical technology.*

*(A related article appeared in the Updates section of Pursuit Vol. 19 No. 3)*

The year was 1970, and the world was a rapidly changing place. The Boeing 747-100 jumbo jetliner had made its first commercial flight, floppy disks had just been invented (although hardly anyone noticed), and Diana Ross and the Supremes performed together for the last time.

And at a special ceremony at EXPO '70 in Osaka, Japan, two time capsules were buried underground in a special sealed chamber. Inside, was a little piece of Olympus history.

The contents of the two capsules were identical, and consisted of items carefully selected to represent the lifestyles and technological achievements of the age. One of the capsules was to be dug up after 30 years to check the condition of its contents; it would then be buried again and reopened once a century thereafter. The second capsule was designed to remain undisturbed for 5000 years. Although each capsule contained

over 2000 items, only one camera was included: the Olympus Pen FT.

In March of this year, the time finally came to check the condition of the first capsule. From inside, there emerged an Olympus Pen FT, as shiny and new as the day it was manufactured. The camera was sent to the Utsugi Technology Research Institute to be checked and tested, and the men who had given birth to it gathered to examine this remarkable milestone in photographic history.

Present for the occasion were Yoshihisa Maitani, creator of the Pen, Pen FT and OM series cameras, Kunio Shimoyama and Muneaki Yoshida, who had assisted with design, and Toshikazu Koike, who had been in charge of production. Joining them was Katsuhiko Tsunefuji, the current head of the Quality Assurance Department.

As the key players in a drama of photographic innovation that continues even today, the individuals involved in the Pen FT's birth truly represent the Olympus spirit. And as they examined the resurrected Pen FT and recalled the early days of its development, their camaraderie and love of photography were evident in every word.

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Yoshihisa Maitani, a legendary figure not only at Olympus, but among camera designers worldwide, had been handed the task of designing the original Olympus Pen as his first assignment when he joined the company. At the time, photography was still considered a

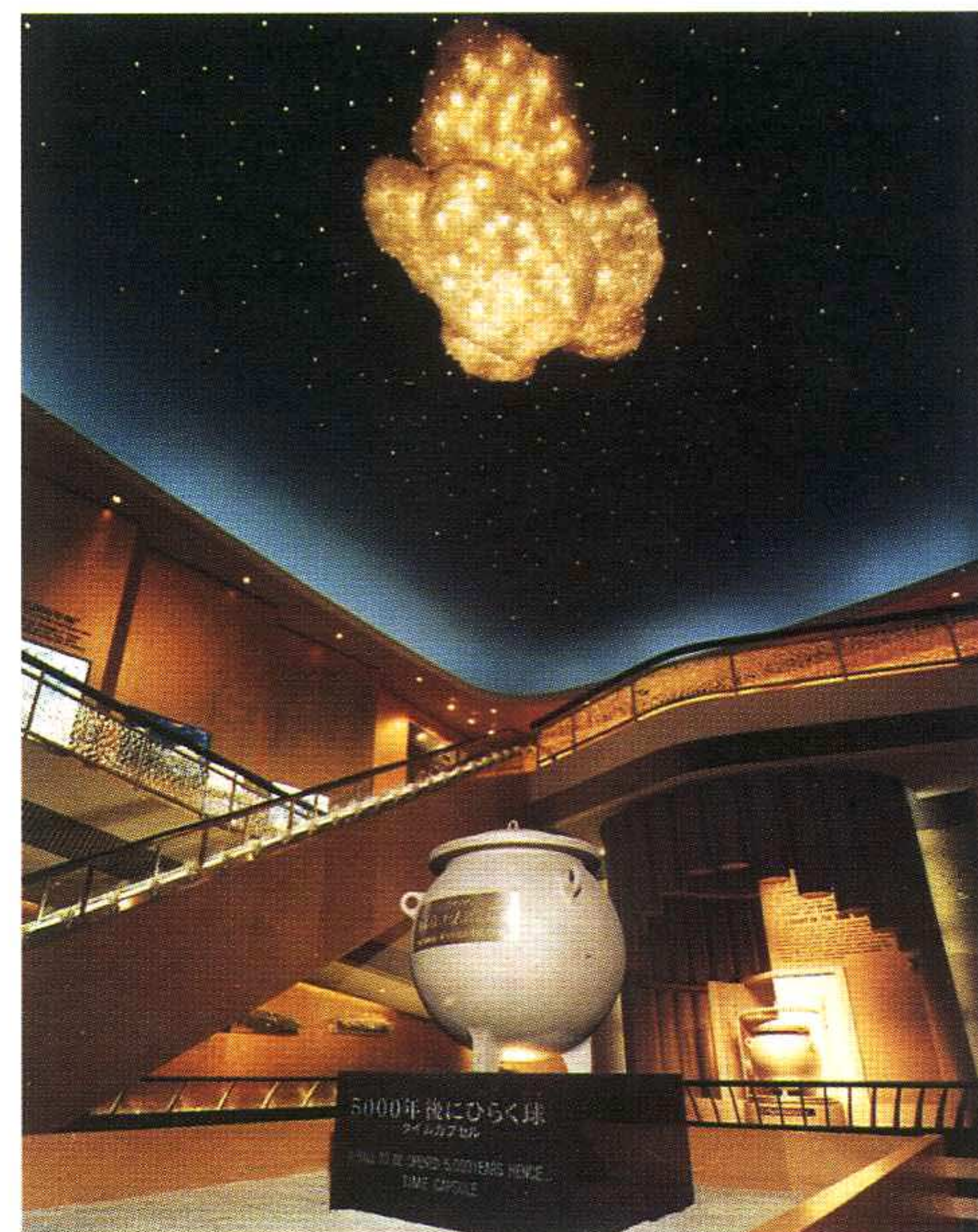
rather esoteric art, and cameras were a luxury that few could afford.

"People thought of photography as something very difficult and expensive. Cameras were as confusing to people then as personal computers are to many people today," says Maitani. "So with the original Pen, our primary goal was to

*"It was a camera that really turned people's heads around. It changed everything that came after it."*

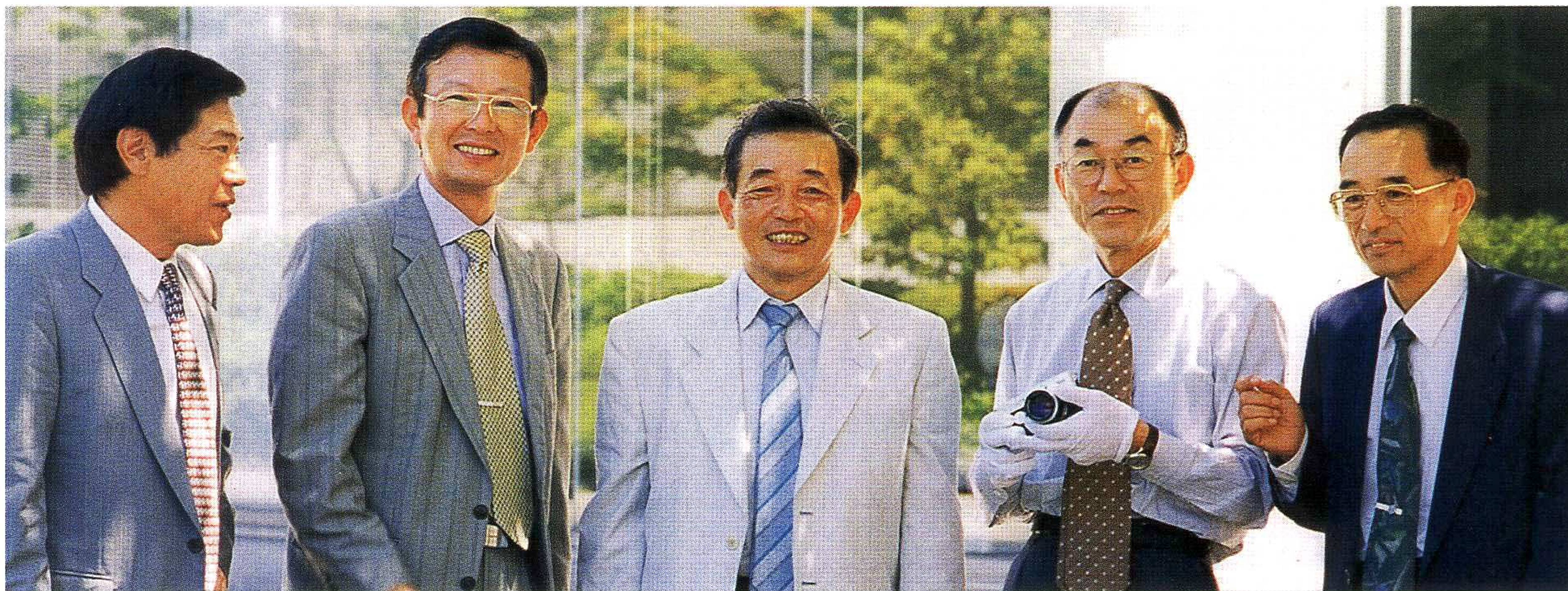
make photography more accessible."

And they did just that. The Pen's inno-



*The time capsule in which the Olympus Pen FT is stored, shown on display at EXPO '70 in Osaka.*





Toshikazu Koike, Muneaki Yoshida, Yoshihisa Maitani, Katsuhiko Tsunefuji, and Kunio Shimoyama. (from left to right)

vative 35mm half-frame format overcame the high cost of film and film processing, and while the camera itself was also very affordable, it featured an uncompromisingly sharp lens that produced superb photos. Add ease of use and compact size, and you have the winning formula that continues to sell cameras today.

"There's an interesting statistic that indicates the impact the Pen series had," Maitani adds. "Before the first Pen was introduced in 1959, camera ownership among Japanese women stood at a little over 1%. But after the Pen EE was introduced in 1961, that figure grew to almost 34%."

It was from this heritage that the Olympus Pen FT's predecessor, the Pen F, was born in 1963. By this time, the Pen had evolved to an entirely new level.

Koike describes it this way, "The Pen F wasn't just the world's first half-frame SLR. It was a camera that really turned

people's heads around. It changed everything that came after it."

Tsunefuji adds, "Not only did it have the first rotary shutter — the shutter was made of titanium! Back then, nobody was using titanium. Maitani got the idea from reading an article about the moon rocket, and they really had to hunt around to find any. In the end, they managed to buy some from a company that manufactured jet engine turbine blades."



But there is always room for refinement, and in 1966, the Pen F was followed by the Pen FT. A camera that ranks as a true classic, the Pen FT is still very much in demand. In fact, if you are lucky enough to find one, it will probably be selling for something like five times the camera's original retail price!

But that really shouldn't be surprising, Shimoyama notes. "The FT pushed the envelope not just in terms of design, but

in materials and production technology. The shutter, the shutter governor, the springs and gears ...it was a metallurgical wonder. In an era of precision instruments, it was the ultimate precision instrument. It would be impossible to produce a camera like the FT at a realistic price today."

"Maitani was a real stickler for design, and he was very good at convincing the factory to do what was needed," Koike remembers.

"I just supplied the ideas," protests Maitani.

"Yes, and when things didn't work out, we *all* got in trouble," replies Shimoyama to general agreement and much laughter.



The Olympus Pen FT marked an important milestone in Olympus history not just because it was a great camera — it was also a truly *original* camera.

Maitani remembers the 60s, "It was the

## Photographic Milestones

The history of Olympus cameras is a history of innovation, and the milestones that mark its course are known worldwide for their quality and originality. Today, that tradition continues, earning us the No.1 position in compact camera markets in the United States, Great Britain, Hong Kong, China, and — what is probably the most hotly contested market of them all — Japan. We're also giving the competition a run for their money in other markets as well. The silver-halide camera business is alive and well, and we plan to stay on top for a long time to come.

# 1959



### Olympus Pen

An innovative and compact 35mm half-frame camera with the world's first rear-mounted film winding system. A defining moment in Olympus history.

# 1972



### Olympus OM-1

The lightest and most compact SLR of its time, the OM-1 was supported by a full-range of professional-quality lenses and accessories.





The Olympus Pen FT was a hit not only in Japan, but around the world. The originality of its design and the quality of its construction were so universally acclaimed that the camera practically sold itself. One look, and the customer was in love with it — it was a salesman's dream-come-true.

*"The important thing is our continued ability to recognize the value of imagination"*

decade when 'Japanese quality' finally started to gain international recognition. But it was also when Japanese manufacturers began to be criticised for making 'copycat' products. And that's where we came in — it's what set us apart. We had a commitment to make things that were truly innovative, truly new. They had to have that special something, that seductiveness, that distinguishes a truly origi-

nal work. It's an appeal that is timeless."

"Timelessness is the key to lasting success," agrees Koike. "And we always designed for the world market. When we were working on the OM [1972], whenever a visitor from overseas stopped by R&D, we would have them grip a lump of clay. We had literally hundreds of handprints and grip-prints lying around."

Shimoyama explains, "Preferences with regard to colour and form can vary from country to country, of course, and these need to be respected. But design alone is never enough. It's the superior functioning of a well-designed tool transcends national boundaries. Take the XA [1979], for example. Sure, the design was radically different, but it was the functionality of the camera — high-quality,

capless and caseless — that really set it apart. If a camera succeeds as a tool, the battle is basically won — you have product that's going to be an international best-seller."

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With the past there before them, the future of silver-halide photography was also very much on everyone's mind.

Tsunefuji puts it this way, "I think that in the short term, digital photography is going to hold the spotlight. But as a tool for serious imaging, silver-halide will always have a role to play."

"To me, the most significant thing about digital photography is not the medium itself, but the tremendous increase in the volume of available image information that it has brought about," Shimoyama says. "The fact is, digital cameras still have a ways to go before they can be considered 'real tools.' It's a question of quality versus quantity" ■

## Photographic Milestones

# 1979



### Olympus XA

Featuring the world's first sliding lens barrier, the exceptionally compact XA was a hit with both amateur and professional photographers.

# 1991



### μ[mju:] -I (Infinity Stylus in the Americas)

The ultracompact and lightweight 35mm camera that started a revolution in compact camera design — a million-seller many times over.

# 1998



### μ[mju:] -II (Infinity Stylus Epic in the Americas)

Second-generation μ[mju:] performance at its finest. Smaller and lighter than its predecessors, with a bright, F2.8 lens and auto color-balancing flash.