

The Wonders of Japanese Architecture & the Japanese Garden

Japan, approximately 75% of which is covered with mountains and hilly areas, has long been blessed with extensive forest resources. With these geographical conditions, our forefathers formed a wood culture unparalleled in the world, which has been passed down over the centuries and is epitomized by wooden architecture. It is no exaggeration to say that the term 'wooden architecture' is synonymous with 'Japanese architecture'. Wood abounds with vitality, and the pliancy of wood makes it ideally suited to the climate of Japan, where the degree of dryness and humidity differs widely with the season. It is perhaps out of necessity that the Japanese have relied largely on the use of wood for buildings, tools and crafts.

Japanese architecture dates back to the 6th Century when Buddhism was first introduced into Japan from the continent of Asia. Architects called 'Kōshō' (master artisans), who came to Japan via the same route as Buddhism, undertook the construction of temples based on Chinese-style wooden architectural techniques. Timberwork forms the basic structure, and the wooden architecture developed with the passage of time, giving rise to diverse new styles such as *Sukiya-zukuri*, and the traditional techniques of elaborate precision and the formal beauty of Japanese architecture continued to mature. Eventually, such Japanese architectural styles also became widely used for the construction of ordinary residences, yet always at the pinnacle and serving as the model throughout all eras were the shrines and temples of Kyoto and Nara, some of which are registered as World Heritages, the grand mansions of the Imperial family, aristocrats, local ruling families, samurai families and long-standing families, and also the castles of the feudal lords. In the case of shrines and temples, the construction works were undertaken by 'Miya-daiku' (carpenters trained in the ancient art of Japanese shrine and temple carpentry) who possessed the ultimate techniques of Japanese architecture. As the years rolled by, the traditional skills of the *Miya-daiku* were conveyed like river water flowing downstream, and came to be increasingly adopted in the construction of ordinary residences.

Beginning with the Horyu-ji Temple, which is the oldest wooden surviving building anywhere in the world, Japan still has many wooden structures dating back more than 1,000 years. This in itself clearly demonstrates

the superiority of wooden architecture, able to withstand the many earthquakes that strike Japan. Naturally, techniques of Japanese architecture are extensively incorporated in the buildings of Japanese ryokans, too. In recent years, a fusion between traditional Japanese architecture and modern architecture has been taking place, and ryokans now have highly reliable disaster and fire prevention systems, have installed the latest facilities including air-conditioning, and have steadily been making refurbishments to create a more barrier-free environment. Quite a few ryokans have been pursuing a new form of Japanese architecture of high perfection, having both functional beauty and pleasant dwelling conditions. Please observe and enjoy the superior quality of the ryokan also as a piece of hardware.

The Japanese garden, which is another fixed feature of the Japanese ryokan, is not something totally independent from Japanese architecture; rather, the two are deeply intertwined in a harmonious union.

It is believed that the origins of the Japanese garden lie in the deification and worship of natural rocks exposed on mountain sides and of artificially arranged stones, way back in the remote past. The art of landscape gardening, which attempted to intentionally express a religious view of the world based on some kind of concept, first emerged in the Asuka Period (592-710). Here again, similar to the architectural techniques, motifs based on the culture as well as religious and philosophical ideas introduced from the Continent gave birth to the Japanese garden, which can be described as a spatial art unique to Japan that was to be systematized in later years.

In the Heian Period (794-1191), the aristocrats' mansions, which were built in the so-called '*Shinden-zukuri*' style, had gardens where water flowed from the *yarimizu* (a shallow, curving garden stream) into a pond which had a *nakajima* (small island floating in the center), and parties such as *kyokusui* (literally, 'meandering stream' party) were held in these gardens. Scenes of such parties are depicted in '*Genji Monogatari*' ('The Tale of the Genji'). In the latter half of the Heian Period, landscaping techniques such as *jiwari*

(allotment of land), *ishigumi* (stone arrangements), creating waterfalls and *yarimizu* streams, and *shokusai* (planting of plants and trees) were compiled into a book of secrets entitled '*Sakuteiki*' ('The Art of Designing a Garden'), and the *Jōdo-shiki* garden designed in the image of the Buddhist-style paradise known as 'The Pure Land of Bliss' (*Gokuraku-Jōdo*) became immensely popular. In the Muromachi Period (1333-1573), landscaping techniques improved, and as successive Shoguns were fond of beautifully designed gardens, many fine gardens were produced during this era. Furthermore, there spread the *karesansui* (dry landscape) style in which flowing water such as ponds and streams were depicted by arranging stones without actually using water, and the *chashitsu* teahouse and *roji* (a pathway leading to a teahouse in a garden) were introduced into the gardens under the influence of *Sadō* (the art of tea ceremony). In the Edo Period (1603-1867), many *kaiyū-shiki* teien (wet gardens with promenades) were built, and once in the Modern Age from the Meiji Period onward, the gardens owned by *zaibatsu* (financial cliques), politicians, families of old standing, and reputable families became well-known, and quite a number of these gardens were later turned into parks open to the general public.

It is an indisputable fact that the Japanese garden, in concert with Japanese architecture, owed much of its development to temples and shrines, to those holding power and to the wealthy of each era. Such beauty of the Japanese garden can be fully appreciated today in the gardens of Japanese ryokans. You will surely be captivated by these works of three-dimensional art; the scenes of all four seasons are conceptually created with an underlying sense of awe towards nature, and the gardens take on diverse expressions produced by the dexterous arrangement of *nakajima* islands, rocks, trees, plants and flowers centered around the *tsukiyama* (artificial miniature hills) and ponds utilizing the undulations of the land.



モダンな格子の障子
A *shōji* (sliding paper screen) with a modern latticework.



和と洋が混在する現代の旅館
A contemporary ryokan with a harmonious blend of Japanese and Western elements.



茶室に続く飛び石の露地
A *roji* path with stepping stones leading to the teahouse.



客室と日本庭園
A guestroom and a Japanese garden.