

JAPAN HOUSES


IDEAS FOR 21ST CENTURY LIVING



by Marcia Iwatate and Geeta K. Mehta

photographs by Nacása & Partners Inc

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TUTTLE Publishing

Tokyo | Rutland, Vermont | Singapore

2004 Lucie (Shibuya-ku, Tokyo), Maimon (Kita-ku, Osaka)

2005 Sora Togetsuso Kinryu (Izu, Shizuoka Prefecture)

Hisanobu Tsujimura was born in Kyoto in 1961. He set up his own studio in 1995 after working at Livart from 1983 to 1995, and established his own furniture line, under the *icon* label, in 2002. He is well known for his interior designs for retail and restaurant establishments. He currently lectures at Kyoto Prefectural University and Kyoto Seika University. In his projects, Tsujimura tries to create a controlled environment by reducing the number of design elements to the absolute minimum. He believes that if a concept is strong and well executed, such spaces can be changed over time without diluting the concept, especially if the user has an understanding and appreciation of the essential parameters of the design intent. His current projects include Okabe Day-Care Condominium for the elderly, scheduled to open in 2007, and the renovation of the service facilities at Kyoto Station. He has received many awards, including the Grand Prix Nashop Lighting Contest; the Second Prize JCD (Japan Commercial Design) Award in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2002; and the Professional Award for the 4th International Design Resource Award in 2001. Also recognized for his furniture design, Tsujimura has been regularly exhibiting his prototype furniture at "Wa-Qu Exhibition-Japanese Creation" in Milan since 2002 and during Designer's Week since 2000. He showcased his work at Tokyo Designer's Block in 2001. He is an active member of *SOU-SOU*, a designers' group producing modern designs based on Japanese traditions.

Tomoyuki Utsumi

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Selected projects

- 2000 House in Nakaikagami (Ota-ku, Tokyo)
- 2001 House in Sakuragawa (Itabashi-ku, Tokyo), Inner Skin House (Shibuya-ku, Tokyo)
- 2002 Nooks (Saitama, Saitama Prefecture), House in Senzoku (Meguro-ku, Tokyo), House in Hiroo (Minato-ku, Tokyo), Studio Flat & Passage (Minato-ku, Tokyo)
- 2003 House in Furuichiba (Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture), Assortment House (Minato-ku, Tokyo), Skip Flat (Minato-ku, Tokyo), Dental Clinic at Ueki (Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture)
- 2004 Towered Flats (Kita-ku, Tokyo), Forest of Steel (Nakano-ku, Tokyo), Tavola (Saitama, Saitama Prefecture), White Ribbing (Meguro-ku, Tokyo)

Tomoyuki Utsumi was born in Mito in 1963. He graduated from the Royal College of Arts in London and in 1991 received his MA from Tsukuba University. After working in the architectural design division of Taisei Corporation from 1992 to 1997, he established his own practice under the name Milligram Studio, in 1998. The focus of Utsumi's work is single-family housing, retail outlets, apartment buildings, clinics, and offices. His conceptual work and temporary installations include a collapsible

cottage using the "membrane system," whose framework allows the entire cottage to fold into a flat surface that can be stored underground when not in use. He has also designed a spiral wood-framed tent in London. Utsumi has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the AJ/Bovis Award for Architecture for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1992. He was also the winner of the Membrane Structure Design Competition, sponsored by Shinkenchiku-sha and Taiyokogyo, in 1993; the Architecture and Environment Design Competition, sponsored by Tokyo Gas, in 1994; and the Tokyo Society of Architects & Building Engineers Award in 2002. His work has been widely published in international and local publications such as *Tokyo Houses*, *Detail*, *Jutaku Kenchiku*, *Shinkenchiku*, *Casa Brutus*, *Pen*, and *Esquire Japan*.

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Selected projects

- 1999 NT (Chiba Prefecture)
- 2000 SZ (Sakura, Chiba Prefecture), TN (Tokyo)
- 2001 TO (Tokyo), NN (Ibaraki Prefecture)
- 2002 HK (Kamigori, Hyogo Prefecture), SN (Nagano Prefecture), NY (Kanagawa Prefecture)
- 2003 SS (Shiroishi, Miyagi Prefecture), QF (Doha, Qatar), KK (Tokyo)
- 2004 EA (Tokyo), ML (Kanagawa Prefecture), MC (Chiba Prefecture)

Makoto Shin Watanabe was born in Maebashi in 1950 and received his MA from Kyoto University. He did post-graduate work at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in 1979. Watanabe worked for Arata Isozaki & Associates from 1981 to 1987. He is currently a professor at Hosei University. Yoko Kinoshita was born in Tokyo in 1956 and graduated from Stanford University. After receiving her MA from Harvard University in 1980, she worked for Shozo Uchi & Associates until 1987. Watanabe and Kinoshita established ADH Architects in 1987. Kinoshita served as a jurist at the AA School in London in 1993 and currently lectures at Nihon University, the University of Tokyo, and Tokyo University of Science. Watanabe and Kinoshita are also visiting associate professors at the School of Architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. ADH Architects have been developing the concept of CPS (Common spaces, Passages or transient spaces, and Satellites or private spaces) for homes for "non-nuclear" families. Watanabe and Kinoshita have received numerous awards, among them the JIA (Japan Institute of Architects) Best Young Architect Award in 2000; First Prize for the Shiroishi Elderly Housing Competition in 2002; and the Best Energy Conservation Award from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2003.

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Masashi Yagi, born in Kanagawa Prefecture in 1968, received his MA from Shibaura Institute of Technology in 1993. On graduation, he worked for Arata Isozaki & Associates until 1999 when he established his own practice. Konomi Yagi was born in 1968 in Tokyo and received her MA from Shibaura Institute of Technology in 1995. She worked for Ogitsu Architects Studio from 2000 to 2001 before becoming an associate principle of Yagi Architectural Design. The house featured in this volume is the very first project for this studio. The design philosophy of both architects is to explore and articulate the subtle nuances of the client's lifestyle, values, and sensibilities into a tangible architectural form. They refer to these nuances as the "fourth-dimensional flow." In the house featured in this book, the architects have skillfully used the scenic view of the forest as an integral part of the house by glazing the entire west side of the building. The personality of the owner has also been very well reflected in the house, while the exterior has been carefully designed to complement the house's surroundings.

Makoto Yamaguchi

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Selected projects

- 2000 Villa in Nakayama (Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture)
- 2001 Ghost—chair, (produced by WATERSTUDIO, manufactured by Arflex Japan)
- 2004 House in Shinsen (Shibuya-ku, Tokyo), 0.6km—side table (produced by ribbon project)
- 2005 Apartment in Ebisu (Shibuya-ku, Tokyo), House in Todoroki (Setagaya-ku, Tokyo)

Makoto Yamaguchi was born in Chiba Prefecture in 1972. After graduating from Aoyamagakuin University in 1994 with an economics degree, he decided to pursue a career in architecture and studied at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Upon receiving his MA in 2001, Yamaguchi established his own studio under the name Office of Makoto Yamaguchi. Although his designs are quite dramatic, Yamaguchi claims that his aim is not to shock. His intention is to thoroughly interpret and address specific requests from each client and to provide a unique solution to each site and situation. Yamaguchi readily admits that people other than the client may consider his designs strange or inconvenient. His work has been awarded the special prize for the INTER INTRA SPACE Design Selection in 2001. He was also selected as one of five finalists for the JIA (Japan Institute of Architects) Award Best Young Architect in 2001. Other awards he has received include the Highly Commended a+r+d awards (The Architectural Review, UK) in 2003 and the Best Residential Project Design Awards (Wallpaper, UK) in 2004. International publications featuring his work include *Spazi minimi*, *casa D*, *SPACE*, *Japanese Design Solutions for Compact Living*, *Abitare*, *Wallpaper* and *The Architectural Review*. He lectures at Kyoto University of Art and Design and the Shibaura Institute of Technology.

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New Japan House in the 21st Century

by Geeta K. Mehta

The Japanese house provides a valuable paradigm in the search for new directions in residential architecture in the 21st century. Japan is a wealthy nation of innovative people and highly developed architectural traditions. The outstanding features of Japanese design at its best continue to be the same as they have been throughout history; contemporary materials now give the design a new vigor, rendered with a characteristic Japanese panache. A sense of flowing space, integration of the interior with the exterior, materiality that expresses the essence of each material, and a strong tradition of exquisite craftsmanship—these timeless principles come alive again in the new Japanese house.

In some ways, the contemporary architects whose work is featured in this book work in an environment relatively free of the technical and economic constraints present almost everywhere else. Considerations such as a structure's longevity and its size and comfort—the main design criteria in most other countries—are not high priorities in Japan. The constraints on Japanese design arise primarily from the scarcity of land and the small sized residential lots typical of this heavily populated island nation. The homes in this book have managed to overcome the challenge presented by limited space, either because they are located outside crowded cities, or because of the design strategies that eliminate the visual clutter of the surroundings to create havens that are serene and inspiring.

Many of these homes are vacation homes built in settings of great natural beauty. They are noteworthy for the innovative ways in which they open to nature, building on traditional elements and techniques. In addition to windows, they feature entire walls that slide away to open the room to the outdoors. Inside, the rooms themselves often open one into another, blurring the demarcation between spaces, both interior and exterior, and inviting the landscape and seasons to flow in. This merger is

in part accomplished through the use of extending the floor and ceiling materials from the interior to the exterior of the house. Doorframes and sliding rails are embedded into the floor and ceilings to guide the eye effortlessly from the interior to the exterior. This is how the Zig House & Zag House (page 32) and I House (page 142) invite their lush surroundings in. On the other hand, the tiny Engawa House (page 52) uses these same techniques to successfully expand its sense of space.

A flowing sense of space, even when the area is small, is also enhanced by the creation of uninterrupted surfaces in soft natural colors that expand the line of sight, instead of drawing the eye inwards, towards objects such as windows, artwork, fussy moldings or hardware. Traditional Japanese craftsmen excelled at simplifying details, and exaggerating a few selected joints or details for aesthetic effect. These same principles are now being applied to new materials such as textured or tinted concrete, large tempered glass surfaces, fiberglass and fiber-reinforced plastics. Materiality is a forte of Japanese architecture. The time-honored high standard of workmanship that is still available today, albeit at a price, has been coupled with exciting new materials, resulting in a recognizable style that is Contemporary Japanese. Most homes in this book were designed by relatively young architects willing to experiment with materials and detailing that, though new, underscore traditional concepts. The poured concrete floors of the Karuizawa Gallery Villa (page 148), the dark stained concrete exterior of the Roundscape House (page 112) are good examples of this.

Things usually taken for granted in a private home, such as the functionality of the kitchen and bathroom, are challenged and reinvented in several houses in this book, with privacy often given a lower priority, as in the Karuizawa Gallery Villa (page 148). Unlike in the West, privacy and comfort in Japan are negoti-



Page 6: The block-like, windowless façade of the Habikigaoka Residence (page 136), which has been designed around an inner garden, screens out neighboring views and noise and contributes to the feeling of serenity within.

Left: Situated on a spectacular seashore away from the bustle of big cities, I House (page 142), with its concrete slabs folded like a giant origami form, is a stage for the act of living, rather than a mere collection of functional rooms.

Right: With its white colors, clean lines, and simple surfaces, the open-plan kitchen in the Abstract House (page 26), like the rest of the interior, is a study in “elimination of the inessential.”

able in the quest for an aesthetic living environment. This may in part be because over time the Japanese have developed social mores that allow individuals relative privacy even in public spaces. The same considerations allow for personal privacy even when the living room, bedrooms, and other areas in a Japanese home flow into each other, as in the Engawa House (page 52) and Roundscape House (page 112). Space constraints are further reflected in the small or open kitchens common in contemporary Japanese homes. Many houses, including some of the luxurious ones in this book, only have one bathroom to serve the whole family. Indeed, having any bath in a house is a luxury that became common only in recent decades. Long after World War II, public baths (*sento*) have continued to fulfil this need in certain areas.

In Japan, where even the largest and most richly detailed building is worth only a fraction of the land on which it stands, structures are torn down and re-erected with relative abandon. An average building lasts only 20–30 years, serving only one-third of its potential useful life. Historically, such frequent rebuilding was necessary to replace wood that had rotted in the country’s high humidity, or had burned in frequent fires. The current frenzy for re-construction is, however, driven by Japanese construction companies that often deliberately build obsolescence into their structures and count on repeat business from loyal clients. The recent throw-away architectural culture is a regrettable development in a country where traditional homes were 100% natural, sustainable, and recyclable. Evolving earthquake laws are often used to justify the *tatekae*, or the rebuilding process now. The construction industry accounts for a whopping 12–14 percent of Japan’s GNP, compared with an average of 6 percent in other developed countries.

Japanese homes are small, partly due to successive subdivisions of land in residential areas as a result of high inheritance taxes.

Inheritors usually have to sell part of their land to pay so-called “death duties,” as Japan’s socialistic tax regime envisages the liquidation of all large land assets in about three generations. The result in most Japanese cities is a mosaic of small, densely packed lots. Cramming all the necessary spaces of a home into a small lot, while at the same time evoking nature and creating a feeling of spaciousness, is a huge challenge, one which is well met in several houses in this book, including the Aobadai House (page 94), the M House (page 118) and Kunitachi House (page 130). “Less can be more” in the hands of Japanese architects. While few people can afford a large house, many middle-income people do invest in vacation homes away from the cities to create their dream living environments.

In most homes today, traditional Japanese elements and *tatami* rooms are conspicuous by their absence. Traditional homes in Japan, as elsewhere, are losing popularity as people choose dwellings that are more comfortable, easier to maintain, and support modern conveniences like central heating and air conditioning. In Fukuoka, Arata Isozaki invited several well-known international architects in 1991 to design the best in public housing in a project called Nexus. While some architects incorporated traditional Japanese elements into their designs, most did not. The houses most in demand were those without *tatami* mat rooms and other Japanese elements. Yet the homes in this book use traditional Japanese elements in some form in a thoroughly modern way with great success. Examples of this are the *shoji* paper screens in IS House (page 18) and the façade and *tatami* room of the Koyama residence (Page 100).

Many houses featured in this book have special spaces reminiscent of the timelessness found in traditional Japanese homes. The hearth in Nojiriko Villa (page 46) and the pitched ceilings in M House (page 118) achieve this almost effortlessly. What is



Opposite: Dramatic views of the surrounding woods and the distant ocean can be enjoyed from the deck of the Katsuura Villa (page 88) as well as from the living room with its uninterrupted window wall. Traditional techniques have been employed for the Japanese cedar wood exterior, while a modern oil-based water-repellant stain protects it. Most interior surfaces are white in contrast to the dark exterior.

absent in a Japanese home is just as important as what is there. Elimination of the inessential has always been an intrinsic part of Japanese architecture. This sensibility still exists in many of the homes presented in this book, alongside the fashionable kitchen systems imported from Italy.

The allegiance to the masters of classical modern design is strong as seen in the Abstract House (page 26) and in many other homes in this book. The modern aesthetic is so close to the spirit of Japanese architecture that this fondness is not surprising. The slogans of Modernism, such as "form follows function" and "less is more," could well have originated in Japan, and were probably influenced by it via architects such as Bruno Taut and Frank Lloyd Wright, who were ardent students of Japanese architecture.

It is also important to put the beautiful houses in this book in the broader context of contemporary Japanese housing. Most Japanese do not live in houses of this quality. Over 35 percent of the population lives in small mid-rise apartments within large projects called *danchi*, built by the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO). Founded after World War II to shelter the thousands left homeless after the firebombs of 1945, HUDCO started with the ambitious goal of providing one-room units for all families. People ate, slept, and sometimes even cooked in these spaces. Bathrooms and community spaces were shared. Critics who called these spaces "rabbit hutches" missed the point that these small dwellings were complemented by increasingly superb social services, such as education, health care, and law enforcement. Housing projects similar in size and design to the low income public housing that prompted riots in the United States are considered middle-class housing in Japan, and have spawned a highly motivated and disciplined workforce that has turned Japan

into an economic superpower. The ability of people to live well in small homes is determined by the quality of the surrounding public spaces, and the municipal and commercial services. Such elements and facilities are extremely well managed in Japanese cities. The luxurious homes shown in this book do not feature large garages, basements full of storage, and multiple refrigerators, as their space programs are informed by the public amenities around them, often just a short walk down a pedestrian friendly street.

Contemporary homes and lifestyles in Japan and elsewhere continue to evolve as science and technology advance. Le Corbusier, the founding father of Modernism, once claimed: "If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to houses and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the House Machine." The houses in this book are *not* machines: they are poetry and sculpture. The N Guesthouse (page 76), I House (page 142), and Kiyosato Gallery (page 166) are soaring in their sculptural ambitions. In the 21st century, with machines available for everything else, the house does not need to be a machine, but rather a base from which to deal with the rest of the world and its changes. The quintessential Japanese house has always been that. Comfort is often sacrificed for poetry. Everything that can be eliminated is, and the calm space that is achieved is enhanced with a few symbols to evoke nature and beauty. Residential spaces conducive to contemplation, and nurturing of things sacred in life, like the traditional tea huts of Japan, are needed today more than ever before. Homes today must balance our rush for things bigger and better, our efforts to live effortless lives, and the stress we put on becoming stress free. The homes presented in this book are examples of that.

