

## Kikugetsu-tei & Shoen-kan of Lord Matsudaira Yorishige, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan, 17<sup>th</sup> Century

### Style: Sukiya

**Description:** The Kikugetsu-tei & Shoen-kan complex is a traditional Japanese villa built in the understated Sukiya style. It consists of several rectangular, independently-roofed single-storey structures connected together at their corners in an irregular, rambling arrangement. The building is embedded within a traditional Japanese-style garden, with the Kikugetsu-tei's southeast end overlooking the garden's pond. As with most traditional Japanese architecture, the primary structural arrangement is that of a large sloped roof (in this case a hipped design constructed of thatch) held up with wood columns over a wooden platform above the ground and floored on the interior with tatami mats. The walls, exempt from any load-bearing duties, are primarily of wood and *shoji*-paper sliding panels. These panels are removable to allow maximum ventilation in the hot, humid summers and to allow visual and emotional connection between the interior and the garden. When closed, the translucent lattice-backed shoji paper allows daylight to penetrate the building envelope. Rooms within each structure are articulated with similar panels, or alternately with equivalently-functional but opaque *fusama* panels. Although the house belonged to a Japanese lord, in keeping with the Sukiya style the building's materials are unadorned and unpainted, the villa's elegance arising from the simplicity and careful arrangement of its plain and plebeian materials.

### Visual Analysis:

- **Plan Configuration & Organization:** The villa's diagonal-axis design, typical of the Sukiya style, creates rambling structure out of interconnected rectangular segments joined at their corners. The sizes of each segment and its component rooms arises from its relation to other rooms, its interaction with the garden, and the size of the standard tatami mat size's "module". A veranda, protected by the wide eaves of the roof, wraps around most outer edges of the floor plan, forming an exterior circulation route in addition to passage through the rooms themselves. In keeping with the principles of Sukiya design, there is no focal point and no clear hierarchy; the architecture is designed for the experience of moment by moment exploration and appreciation of each unique position and view.
- **Structure & Materials:** The villa uses post-and-beam wood framing. Unlike earlier styles of Japanese architecture, the villa's Sukiya style uses uniformly-sized columns, again de-emphasizing any hierarchy to the point of dictating the structural system from its architectural goals. While the primary structural material is wood, which also forms the floors of the verandas, the interior flooring is made of rice-straw tatami mats, the few permanent walls either of wood or clay, and the rest with wood and paper panels in the form of *fusama* and *shoji* screens. The roof is thatch, and of a uniform style and height.
- **Exterior Elevations:** Like most East Asian architecture, the elevations emphasize horizontality over verticality, the raised platform of the floor and the triangular structure of the roof sandwiching the slender and delicate rhythms of the intervening columns and walls. Unlike more imposing formal structures, the roof is gently sloped to keep its massing in balance with the rest of the house below. The roof and wooden platform dictate its outline, while the walls of the

building retreat behind the veranda underneath its eaves. Due to the seemingly-random floor plan, repetitive modular walls, and even heights of the building, its exterior presents a largely uniform façade that blends together without distinction or focus, neither symmetrical nor (once orthographically-projected) emphatically asymmetrical. The interest of the exterior instead derives from its interleaved spatial relation with the garden.

- **Sections:** Sections emphasize the horizontality of the design, dominated by the parallel lines of the floor and ceiling, interrupted only by the slender walls and divisions between rooms. The vaulted space under the roof is hidden.
- **Axon:** The interior spaces function as wide, flat rectangular prisms with intersecting corners; the external massing as such spaces topped by the wide, likewise-intersecting triangular hipped-roof shapes. Unlike many more formal Japanese structures, the roof slope is shallow and its resulting mass does not overwhelm the livable space underneath.
- **Site:** The villa is embedded within and interleaved with its garden, each segment of the villa communing with both its adjacent and distant portions of the landscape.
- **Spatial Effect:** Calming uniformity of structure and material, interest provided by lack of order and changing perspectives as one moves through space.

**Conclusion:** Building is embedded in nature, built of it, and interleaved with it, encouraging its observation and its invitation into the living space itself. The spatial arrangement both allows for this interaction and also itself mimics in its floor plan the meandering interaction of a walk through a garden. Meanwhile the product of this floor plan and its uniform elevation yields a variety in uniformity of the villa similar to that of a stand of trees or patch of grass.

**Contextual Analysis:** Japanese architecture has for centuries used the East Asian template of base platform, columns, and post-and-beam construction to hold a (sloped) roof. This archetype arose from the materials available (mostly trees), from the structural requirement of earthquake resistance, from the roofing requirements of deep snows and typhoons, and from the desire to open up the building as much as possible to ventilation during the sweltering, humid summer heat. Post-and-beam construction released the walls from any need to bear the load, and thus the Japanese were able to develop for their building envelope their characteristic sliding doors and removable screens and panels, which maximize through their variety of configurations the inhabitants' control over the building's interior climate. Within this template, however, Japanese architecture exhibited a variety of styles across the centuries.

In 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century feudal Japan, the architecture of a lord's primary residence was largely dictated by his status, service requirements to his superiors, and the rigid societal and architectural hierarchy of the day. Large imposing audience halls, extravagant woodwork and paintings were the norm. Sukiya architecture, which was inspired by the tea ceremony and Sen no Rikyu's interpretation of its principles into the realm of architecture, brought a contrasting aesthetic and freedom to Japanese feudal architecture, but was necessarily relegated to villas and other informal construction where experimentation could be allowed. Its elegant simplicity and rustic charm created a sharp contrast with the baroque formal architecture of its day, and its emphasis on intentional lack of order and deliberate materiality created a new point of intellectual architectural contemplation for the upper class. Its freeform space-planning fully embraced the Japanese relationship to nature and its desire to integrate it with architecture and life, bringing permeability not just to the building envelope (as had always been the case) but now also to the building's spatial relationship with the garden as well. Sukiya-style's understated refinement created a backdrop for living that was both calming and curious, and its flexibility and accessibility allowed it to flourish throughout Japanese society, eventually to spread from private villas

and tea rooms, to the teahouses, restaurants, and brothels of town, and thence to the commoners, becoming an integral part of Japanese architectural vocabulary and, eventually, an inspiration for modern 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture worldwide.