

NATION, MODERNITY AND INTERIOR DECORATION

UNCANNY DESIGNS IN THE 1922 PEACE COMMEMORATION TŌKYŌ EXPOSITION CULTURE VILLAGE HOUSES

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Abstract: In 1922, *Bunkamura* ("Culture Village"), modern Japan's first model house exhibition, was held in Ueno Park in conjunction with the national *Tōkyō Peace Commemoration Exhibition*. The purpose of the exhibition was to suggest both an ideal domestic environment for the new urban middle class and, by extension, an ideal modern identity for those who might dwell in the spaces designed. As such, the fourteen "culture houses" that composed Culture Village are a concrete example of the Taishō-era belief in the power of design to shape identity through spectacle and prescriptive design, and of reformist desires to create a new "modern Japan" by remaking the spaces and practices of daily life.

Working from the assumptions that style functions as a language to construct and convey meaning or identity and that the built environment both reflects and shapes culture, this paper analyzes how the stylistic rhetoric of Culture House interiors translated and re-arranged a pre-set vocabulary of functional and aesthetic forms – classified as "Western" and "Japanese", "traditional" and "modern" – into uncanny hybrids that made the familiar strangely new, and the new oddly comfortable. But as model homes, the resulting spaces reflect less the actual conditions of modern metropolitan Japan in the early 1920s than they do designers' desires for the new hybrid, modern residents who were to populate it.

A well-designed Western-style house is certainly a pleasant place to dwell. And there is an air to the Japanese house, developed over many years on the Japanese land, which is hard to abandon. These things should be chosen according to one's lifestyle and taste.

Here, the 'culture house' is a new style of house, created to bring about an improvement in ways of living and a reduction in construction cost; if its structure and amenities make it no longer a Western house, neither is it a Japanese house.

("Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya", *Jūtaku*, May 1922 Special Edition)

The fourteen houses collected here right now are without a doubt Japanese architecture after all.

(Tanabe Junkichi: "Regarding the Culture Village Houses", *Kenchiku Zasshi*, May 1922)

1. NATION, STYLE AND SPACE

In May 1922, modern Japan's first home and lifestyle magazine *Jūtaku* ("The House") published a special issue devoted to a model house designed and built by *Jūtaku* editor and publisher Hashiguchi Shinsuke's housing company Amerika-ya.¹



Fig. 1: Cover, *Jūtaku* "Amerika-ya: The Culture House", Special Issue
Source: Bunka *Jūtaku* Amerika-ya (1922)

¹ This paper grew out of my M.A. thesis for the Department of Art and Design History and Theory at Musashino Art University. I would like to thank Kashiwagi Hiroshi and Hasegawa Takashi of Musashino Art University for their direction and criticism, Nicola Liscutin for the opportunity to refine my arguments at the Humanities Study Group of the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in June 2000, and Sven Saaler, an anonymous reviewer and Tana-ka Jun of the University of Tokyo for their comments and suggestions on the present version.

Described in terms of its “Japanese”, “Western”, “traditional” and “modern” origins, the Amerika-ya model house’s exterior, interior layout, structure and furnishings are introduced as the product of the selective incorporation of only the best qualities of Japanese and Euro-American housing. According to its builders, the resulting “culture house” was “no longer a Western house, neither [was] it a Japanese house”; rather, the text boasted of an altogether “new style of house” (*Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya* 1922: 4).

The Amerika-ya house was one of fourteen houses making up “Culture Village” (*Bunkamura*), a model home exhibition organized by the Architectural Institute of Japan in conjunction with the Tōkyō Peace Commemoration Exhibition then on display in Tōkyō’s Ueno Park. Running from 10 March to 31 July 1922, the Peace Commemoration Exhibition celebrated the fifth anniversary of the end of the First World War. Organizers hoped that the exhibition would stimulate a depressed postwar economy by increasing the production and consumption of those goods associated with the exhibition (Takanashi 1924: 3). Drawing on contemporary interest in home design and housing reform, Culture Village was a popular addition to the exhibition’s pavilions. As the interior decoration and furniture design journal *Mokuzai Kōgei* (“Woodcraft”) put it: “With its actual exhibits of cultural houses promoted under the aegis of the Architectural Institute of Japan, Culture Village is one of the star attractions of the exhibition.” (*Mokuzai Kōgei* 1922: 22) However, Culture Village’s crowds were not compelled to visit by a pure interest in housing alone – the sheer novelty of the Culture Houses’ combination of traditionally Japanese and recently imported Western building styles and design details was also a powerful draw.

As in the *Jūtaku* special issue, promotional materials described Culture Village’s model houses in terms of the national origin of their parts, offering examples of “Western-style seasoned with Japanese style” (the Tatsuya model house) or “an English cottage with contemporary taste added” (Zenitaka model house) (Takanashi 1924: 6–7). Several years later, architect Yokoyama Makoto summarized the model houses as “Western-style with Japanese-style incorporated; the exteriors were entirely Western-style, but interiors incorporated Japanese-style rooms or included Japanese taste.” (Yokoyama 1926: 47) In other words, the houses were interpreted as the fusion or conglomeration of parts from a pre-set vocabulary of functional and aesthetic form whereby all parts are identified by national origin. With the majority of Japanese still living in housing derived from pre-Meiji vernacular forms, such ideas for living space with identifiably new, non-Japanese or nontraditional forms were definitely something to see.

The model houses of Culture Village are an example of *wayō setchū* (literally “blending of Japanese and Western”) eclecticism, a popular domestic architectural discourse at the time. Eclecticism cuts off design from its root, makes features transmutable, applicable to any situation; by separating designs from their cultural, geographic or temporal origin, it renders them elements in a stylistic vocabulary to be employed as desired as the architect concocts the perfect house.² Thus Yokoyama would read the use of a decorative wood-beamed ceiling (*maruta meshoto-tsuki yane-kei ita-bari tenjō*) in a predominantly Western-style house as “the designer’s desire to taste Japanese flavour (*kokufū*) in this area.” (Yokoyama 1926: 54) With forms imported from Europe and North America most often signifying modernity and indigenous Japanese forms carrying a sense of tradition, Culture Village publicity material prescribed “American-style architecture that symbolizes modern taste” should a sense of modernity be desired; for a peaceful, relaxing atmosphere, “a quiet Japanese-style bedroom” was offered (Takahashi 1924: 1, 27). However, while deployed for specific effect, the result of this stylistic lexicon was a plethora of new hybrids that combined Japanese and Western, blending old and new elements into new forms.

If, as Henri Lefebvre so famously pointed out in *The Production of Space* (1974), we produce the space in which we live and thus imbue it with our desires and ideologies, then spatial formations – how we shape and live in the spaces of daily life – reflect our identifications, our desires, and our ways of seeing self and other. Architects of 1920s eclecticism were particularly conscious of this role: as architect Kataoka Naoki described the taste for eclectic interiors in the January 1922 issue of *Jūtaku*:

For today’s Japanese, even the most advanced person does not seem interested in a purely Western-style life; the majority of people prefer a *wayō setchū* house, in other words a house that, if it has Western rooms, will also have Japanese rooms (*Nihonkan*) with *tatami* flooring and a *tokonoma* decorative alcove. I think that this is one style of housing which, as something that speaks clearly to contemporary Japanese civilization and the tastes of contemporary people, will be powerful material for researchers of cultural history in the years to come to study the contemporary age. For this reason, questions of improvement aside, *wayō setchū* style has many interesting aspects as something, which expresses the trends of thought of the age. (Kataoka 1922: 18)

² According to design historians such as Adrian Forty (1986) and Kashiwagi Hiroshi (1979), the deracination of style is a trait of modernity, or of modern design.

By looking at spaces, Kataoka recognized, we can extrapolate the structures, desires and ways of thought that compose the social and cultural context in which they were produced and used; at the same time, we can also use our knowledge of social contexts to explain particular designs.³ As model dwellings, the houses of Culture Village were especially revealing artifacts; “built as models by professionals to be appropriate for the current of the times”, they were prescriptions for how to live, designers’ ideals for modern Japanese dwellings and dwellers (Yokoyama 1926: 44). So what can we read from the spaces designed and built for the Culture Houses? If style here functions as a language to construct and convey meaning or identity and the built environment both reflects and shapes culture, how and why did the rhetoric of style deployed in culture house interiors fashion the hybrid identity of “modern Japan” into concrete form?

By concentrating on designs themselves, this essay addresses only one facet of the Culture Houses as cultural object. To fully understand the houses, it is necessary to look not only at their design, but also at their designers, the process by which they were created, and their reception. In other words, any comprehensive study of the Culture Houses as designed objects would need to examine not only the objects themselves but also their conditions of production, representation and use. In addition, while employing the Culture Village model houses as case studies by which to triangulate possible answers to larger questions of modernity and identity in design runs the risk of falling into micrology, or by becoming bogged down in the fetishism of one object. And yet there is a need for micrology or local knowledge – albeit a need tempered with contextualization. As this paper will show, the interiors of the Culture Village model houses are exactly this: microscale “on paper”, in actual practice they are one way to understand a fragmented, multi-vocal and rarely harmonious school of thought in the specific conjuncture of space and time known as modern metropolitan Tōkyō circa 1922. In addition, they prefigured the designs for and debates over the design and use of domestic space that would dominate discourse on housing in Japan for the following eighty years.

³ The analysis of home layouts (to fall in line with the literary turn in anthropology and architectural history pointed out by James Clifford and others, i.e. to “read” layouts) is a well-established practice in anthropology, sociology, social history, architectural and design history. In Japan, architect and socio-cultural critic Kon Wajirō (Kon and Yoshida 1930) and *minzokugaku* (ethnology) founder Yanagita Kunio were among those who initiated the study of building designs as way to understand society. Architectural historian Nishiyama Uzō (1976) laid the ground rules for postwar analyses of dwelling space summarized in the three-volume *Nihon no sumai* [The dwellings of Japan].

2. CULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR CULTURAL HOUSES

Begun in the Meiji period (1868–1912), by 1922 urban Japan's implementation of Western spatial structures, political and social philosophies, and practices of daily life was well underway. While the degree to which new practices and materials were adopted, adapted, and implemented varied widely according to such characteristics as gender, class, occupation, region and age, these new products, habits, and ways of thought had been to some extent adapted or incorporated into all areas of daily life. However, while public transportation, offices, schools, government buildings, and entertainment spaces in urban centres like Tōkyō and Ōsaka were already predominantly chair space (i.e. were designed for the use of chairs), homes remained the domain of *tatami*. This fostered a multiplicity of spatial and corporeal practices as well the creation of a division between public space – gendered as male and figured as Western-style in clothing and furnishing – and private domestic space gendered primarily as female and figured as employing “Japanese” or “traditional” clothing and furnishings.

However, as new ideologies of family, household, home, and nation arose in the 1910s, the introduction of chair-style living space accompanied the intrusion of the public into the domestic sphere (a shift also interpretable as the inclusion of the home in the public sphere). In practice, *wayō setchū* in the home meant not only two aesthetics but also two ways of living: most simply, Western-style meant a life lived on chairs on hard floors, whereas Japanese-style meant sitting on *tatami* floors. Eclectic designs employing both styles were seen either as culling the best of two traditions for maximum comfort and practicality, or as a wasteful doubling that only meant twice as much expense, space, material, time and effort as inhabitants readied clothing and furnishings for both ways of life. However, while some architects and reformers criticized eclectic interiors and the “double life” (*nijū seikatsu*) they engendered, others recognized that it was easier to add on to existing structures and habits than to change them entirely, and accepted the “double life” as a stepping-stone along the route to introducing Western furnishings into the daily life of the urban Japanese population.

The Culture Houses not only shaped space but also ordered the body living within that space, enabling and facilitating the rise of a new lifestyle known as *bunka seikatsu* (literally “cultural” life). As Yokoyama explained, “houses must evolve as houses to become appropriate for the cultural life.” (Yokoyama 1926: 45) With state interest shifting from the Meiji era promotion of “civilization” (*bunmei*) to the Taishō period (1912–1926) endorsement of “culture” (*bunka*), educators, reformers and women's magazines began marketing “the cultural life” and its relations “the simple life”

(*kan'i seikatsu*) and “the tasteful life” (*shumi no aru seikatsu*) as ideal for the new urban white-collar middle class.⁴ According to the *Jūtaku* special edition on the Amerika-ya model house, Culture Village’s houses were “appropriate for the new lifestyle of the modern age, which has seen remarkable economic, social and cultural change; an inexpensive and beautiful house of one’s own is the most fervent demand of today.” (Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya 1922: 1, italics in the original)

Adherents of the cultural life aside, more pressing issues needed to be solved: the decade from 1912 to 1922 was marked not only by intense social change, from urbanization to the appearance of the nuclear family and the middle class, but also by severe housing shortages in major urban centres. After the University and High School Laws opened up higher education to a broader spectrum of the population in 1917, Japan saw an increase in educated middle class and white-collar workers. This new managerial class concentrated in the cities, where “salarymen” married full-time housewives and created two-generation nuclear families of husband, wife, two or three children, and possibly a maid. With students, white-collar employees, and factory workers gathering in cities, major metropolitan centres saw a dramatic increase in population – the population of Tōkyō grew by 14.5% in 1917 alone (Sand 1996: 271). This demographic shift meant a severe housing shortage. In Tōkyō, for example, where in the late 1910s an estimated 85% of bank employees and 90% of company office workers were leasing their accommodations, rents increased by 250% between 1914 and 1922 (Sand 1996: 271). To ease the housing shortage, as well as profit from it, speculators began developing suburban residential areas for white-collar families. These developments moved families out of cramped urban flats and into single-family homes, effecting a shift from rental to ownership. The housing crisis also inspired government measures such as a Housing Association Law designed to ease the crisis by helping urban middle-class families finance the construction of their own home. Modeled after the British Housing Association Law of 1920, this new legislation went into effect in July 1922.

Running from March through July 1922, Culture Village was timed to coincide with the introduction of the Housing Association Law. The Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ), creator of Culture Village, hoped that the exhibit would not only kindle interest in housing, but also influence the kind of houses potential beneficiaries of the new law might desire to

⁴ Sand 2000 and Nishikawa 2001 offer excellent discussions of “culture” as conceptualized and popularized in the 1910s and 1920s. See Jinno (1994) for a discussion of the definition and promotion of taste in early 20th century Japan.

have built.⁵ The *Jūtaku* special edition on the Amerika-ya model house explained this logic as follows:

It is obvious that new wine should be stored in new wineskins; in the same way, a new lifestyle demands first and foremost a new house. Dickens' words 'Reformation begins with the reform of the house' are still fresh today [...]. Housing improvement – new culture will come entirely from this. (Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya 1922: 1)

In other words, the goal of organizers and exhibitors was not only commercial but also reformist. It was not enough merely to build a new house – rather, new houses were to be designed, built and used according to the principles of rationality, without wasting effort, time or materials. In this way, the AIJ also used Culture Village as a vehicle for the promotion of *seikatsu kaizen*, literally “lifestyle improvement.” Simultaneous with daily life reform and rationalization movements in Great Britain and the United States, prominent educators, architects and officials in the Ministry of Education had begun campaigning for the reform (*kairyō*) or improvement (*kaizen*) of the spaces, furnishings and customs of daily life in the late 1910s.⁶ Influenced by American Christine Frederick and other household efficiency experts, groups like the Amerika-ya-associated Housing Improvement Association and the Ministry of Education-related Daily Life Reform League promoted economy, practicality and rationalization in clothing, food, housing, and social customs. In addition to adopting Western forms seen as more sanitary, efficient and practical, recommended housing reforms centered on the incorporation of chair-style living space into the home, as well as on a shift from putting the comfort of guests first to providing a comfortable, healthy environment for residents. In the words of Tanabe Junkichi, “chairs are imperative if we are to increase the efficiency of society as a nation (*kokumin*). If we do not start with chairs in the home, our attitude is too conservative for us to be the people of the new Japan.” (Tanabe 1922: 34)

Highly performative, reform logic proposed that “acting modern” brought modern characteristics into the self, thus making the self modern. However, acting modern required an appropriate stage and appropriate props; in other words, the spaces and furnishings of daily life. Furthermore, in the extension of the public sphere into the home characteristic of 1920s and 1930s nationalism, a modern people meant a modern nation. However, whether in the adoption of chairs or in other modifications to

⁵ Ikegami *et al.* 2000 and Mizuno *et al.* 2000 document and analyze the implementation of the Housing Association Law in urban areas around Japan.

⁶ For the Daily Life Reform League and other reform movements in the 1910s and 1920s, see Sand 1996 and Kashiwagi 1998.

the spaces of daily life, the desire to change was prerequisite. For this reason, the need to modernize, change, or reform the object of desire preceded all other aspirations. According to reformers, visual displays of ideal domestic space taught the public not only how to construct, furnish and live in chair-based living spaces, but also – above all – to desire such spaces. A combination of commercialism and enlightenment mentality, Culture Village followed a path blazed by previous national exhibitions, department store showrooms, visual advertising, and mass media (most notably women’s magazines and newspapers aided by advances in photography, engraving, and mass printing), in order to encourage the incorporation of chair-based living habits and create and stimulate consumer desire for furnishings.⁷ Thus Culture Village was one crystallization of reformers’ belief in the social power of prescriptive design and visual display for moral persuasion. Reflections of their architects’ desired ideals for living space and the lifestyles and identities of imaginary residents, the model houses’ motto might have been, not “if you build it they will come”, but rather “if you build it they will become”.

Culture Village began as an AIJ proposal for an exhibition of model homes to be held in conjunction with the Tōkyō Peace Commemoration Exhibition slated for the spring of 1922. An AIJ committee chaired by Tanabe Junkichi, also vice-chair of the Daily Life Reform League’s Housing Reform Committee, drafted guidelines for the design and construction of the houses. The guidelines encouraged the construction of houses that would be financially accessible to white-collar workers and that corresponded to lifestyle improvement campaign suggestions for the rationalization, economization, and improvement of both the use and production of Japanese housing:

1. Homes must fit within the spaces provided and not harm the trees already in place on the site.
2. There is no limit on the size of homes, provided that they fit on site, but anything over 20 *tsubo* is to be discouraged.

⁷ Domestic interiors as visual entertainment in modern Japan began with model rooms displayed at the 1915 Taishō Exhibition. The subsequent year saw model rooms displayed at the *Kokumin Shinbun*’s Household Exposition, reminiscent of the Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition held in London from 1907. The 1919 Daily Life Improvement Exhibition, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, included model rooms designed by educators and architects; this led to the formation of the Daily Life Improvement League in 1920. A rich body of literature exists in Japanese and English on visual spectacle and the rise of commodity culture in department stores and national exhibitions. See, for example, Kashiwagi 1983, Yoshimi 1992, Hatsuta 1993, Jinno 1994, Aso 1997 and Sand 1996.

3. Building costs must be less than 200 yen per *tsubo*.
 4. Home exteriors can be Western or Japanese as the builder likes, but they should avoid decoration. Windows should abolish traditional *amado* [heavy wooden shutters affixed to the exterior wall] and *shōji* [sliding paper-clad windows] and employ methods that will protect against the elements and burglary.
 5. There is to be no gate or wall.
 6. The living room, guest room and dining room must be chair-style, other rooms are left up to the discretion of the builder.
 7. The kitchen must be suitable for practical use in cooking and washing, with sink, stove, cupboards and shelves.
 8. The AIJ prefers that homes incorporate the newest of washrooms and bathrooms.
 9. Toilets should be fully functional.
 10. Interiors should contain appropriate furniture, lighting fixtures, bells and shading from the sun.
 11. The AIJ prefers that homes incorporate a practical garden.
 12. Numbers 7–10 should be no more than one-third the total cost of building.
 13. Construction must conform to current building codes.
 14. All homes must be commercial products, and builders ready to take orders and to provide prices for homes and their parts.
 15. Building dimensions should follow the standardized dimensions set out by the Architectural Materials Board.
- (Takahashi 1924: 4–6)

In some places a radical departure from both the form of preexisting dwellings and the ideology implicit in them, the guidelines not only reflected the AIJ committee's ideals for modern metropolitan middle-class housing, but also indicated guidelines for the composition of the modern metropolitan middle-class itself. Guidelines 1–4 concerned the economy of production – this not only followed reformers' discourse of rationalization, but also ensured affordability and thus accessibility to the new middle class. Guidelines 4–11 borrowed from Reform League ideals and rhetoric to extend the rationalization of production and use to daily life – in particular to housework – demonstrating an emphasis on utility over decoration, on the replacement of floor-based living with chair-based living, on sanitation through modern facilities, and a concern with providing well-equipped, practical spaces for housework.⁸ Of particular importance

⁸ Beginning with committee chair Tanabe, the organization and guidance of Culture Village had strong ties to the reform movements, and Culture Village design guidelines bore a clear debt to the Housing Reform Committee's 1920

was the mandatory implementation of chair-style space in family areas – modernization was to occur first and foremost by the adoption of a chair-based lifestyle. Finally, guidelines 13–15 firmly established the model homes as mass-production commodities created through standardized production methods and purchased like any other consumer goods by the homeowner-to-be. In practice, the costs, specifications, and builder of each home were displayed on-site, as well as in commemorative books. Another manifestation of the Culture Village’s combination of display and commodification, this practice followed Peace Commemoration Exposition policy that all objects displayed must be for sale.

The majority of model houses followed most of these guidelines, and as commodities (if one tenet of modern consumer culture is that commodities must show superficial difference in order to attract customer interest) varied in construction, style and size. Exteriors ranged from derivations of Swiss chalets and American “cottages” to bungalowesque interpretations of traditional *chashitsu* for tea ceremony, while construction methods varied from ready-cut 2x4 timbers to concrete blocks to traditional beam and post construction. The intended occupants were most often a two-generation family of four or five – office worker husband, homemaker wife, two or three children, and sometimes a maid – but also ranged in number from two to six or seven. Promotional literature rarely mentioned three-generation families or the presence of elderly relatives, but rather described the homes as sets for the orchestration of the nuclear *kazoku danran* or “family circle”. Builder rhetoric also mentioned economy of production and use, simplicity and a tasteful modern life, and improvements in lifestyle, hygiene and fireproof construction.⁹ These translated into interiors with sim-

guidelines for housing reform: “1. Living style must be chair-style; 2. Shift from guest-centered- to family-centered; 3. Sanitation and fireproofing; 4. Garden should be use-centered; 5. Consider primarily the actual use of furniture; 6. Help the development of public housing and garden cities.” The League condensed these guidelines into the following four rules for its Culture Village entry: “1. Homes must be entirely chair-style; 2. Layouts must shift from guest-to family-centered; 3. Construction should eschew decoration for sanitation and fire prevention; 4. Gardens should not be swayed by the tradition of decorative gardens for gazing, but should place emphasis on health and fire prevention.” (Uchida 1992: 96)

⁹ For example, the titles of each design as given by its builder are as follows: 1. A one-room house to accommodate a family with several members; 2. A middle-class eclectic house that is pleasant to live in; 3. Fire-resistant architecture made with reinforced concrete blocks; 4. American-style architecture that symbolizes modern taste; 5. A Western-style home with the elegance of a chalet; 6. A stylish

ple wooden chair-style furniture, some *tatami* rooms, and standing kitchens arrayed around a living room or central hallway.¹⁰

Rooms had a clear breakdown of function, design, and intended user, and the layout and design of individual rooms accorded with these factors. The model house sponsored by builder Zenitaka Sakutarō included the following rooms: a Western-style entrance leading into a central hallway with a Western-style living room and study, a children's room, and a "housewife room" (*tatami shufushitsu*) along one side, and a standing-style kitchen, bathroom, toilet, *tatami* maid's room, and staircase leading up to the second floor arrayed around the rear and opposite side on the first floor. The second floor had two *tatami* bedrooms.¹¹

This layout obeys the guideline that the living room, dining room, and kitchen – the home's "family spaces" – must be chair-style; all other rooms were either *tatami* or done in new materials for hybrid, multi-use function. Interestingly, the design rhetoric of the rooms that together formed the core living space – the living room and study, children's room and housewife's room – varied widely, with each room representing a different register of modern and traditional, "Western" and "Japanese" style.

Furnished with rattan table and chair sets and finished with rugs on a wood floor and walls that combined post and panel, painted paneling, and wallpaper finishes, the living room was chair-style. The children's room was also chair-style and furnished with a low table and chairs, but used cork flooring and wallpaper.¹² Far from "out of sight, out of mind" or "chil-

home enwrapping Western-style living; 7. A chair-style simple and small house for the general public; 8. An earthquake-resistant house in ready-cut style; 9. A tasteful suburban house centered on the family; 10. A Japanese bungalow made into a tearoom; 11. An economical house with thorough sanitary amenities; 12. A model for wood architecture employing the metric system; 13. An "improvement house" that refines the double life; 14. A simple, shining house with a trim exterior (Takahashi 1924: 1–2).

¹⁰ Of the 14 builders, nine were general contractors or architects; contributors also included materials suppliers, prominent interior decoration firm Ozawa Shintarō Shoten (Ozawa Shoten), the Daily Life Reform League, and Amerika-ya. The AIJ organizing committee was responsible for the design of two houses, including that of Ozawa Shoten; all others were designed by their exhibitors (Uchida 2000: 266). While sponsors were responsible for the construction and maintenance of their houses, the origin of interior furnishings and amenities is unclear – Amerika-ya and Ozawa Shoten had their own furniture departments, and the other model homes were most likely furnished with contributions from department stores and appliance suppliers.

¹¹ For reasons of length, this paper does not address the design of service areas like kitchens, bathrooms, and lavatories.

¹² With the Meiji era "discovery of the child", furniture makers and department

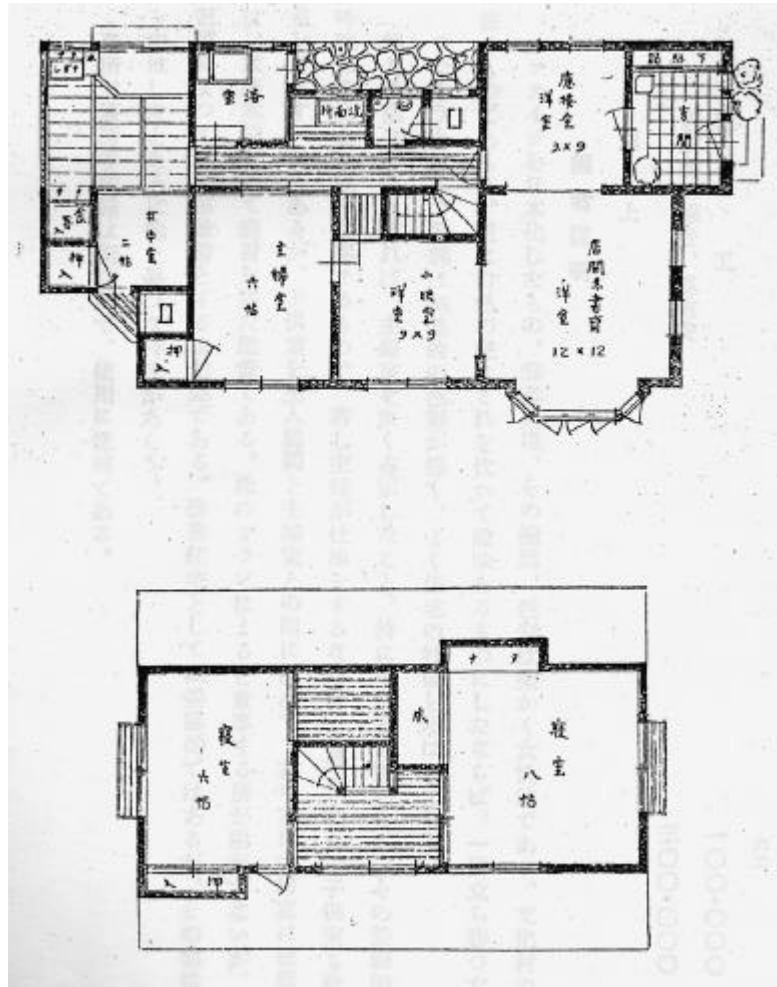


Fig. 2: Floorplan, Zenitaka model house

Source: Takahashi 1924: np

stores began producing children's furniture specifically for children's rooms. Chief among these new commodities – the discovery of the child was also the discovery of the child as consumer – were table and chair sets at which children could continue the corporeal development and habit formation begun with desks or tables and chairs at school as institutional schooling became the norm (Jinno 1998, Sand 1996). As Sand phrases it, "the children in a house properly equipped would be at home studying under their mother's watchful eye when not at school." (Sand 1996: 364) This is literally true in the Zenitaka model house.

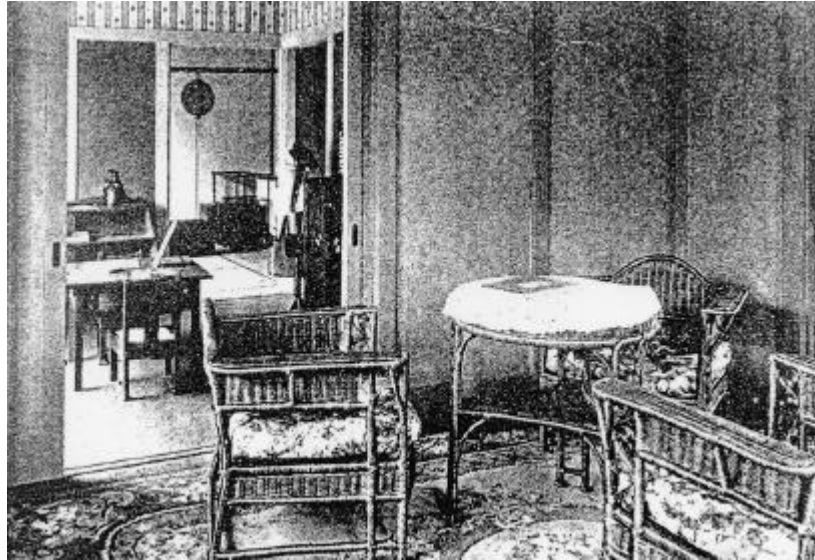


Fig. 3: Living area, Zenitaka model house

Source: *Kenchiku Zasshi* 36 (1922), 427: np

dren should be seen but not heard”, the Zenitaka designer placed the children’s room between the living room and housewife room so that parents could watch their children while working or relaxing in their own spaces. The focal point of the interior thus shifted from the *tokonoma* (ornamental alcove) and other decorative elements in the *zashiki* (best room) of pre-Meiji architecture to the children’s table and chairs at the centre of both the children’s room and the downstairs interior as a whole. This reflects the 1920s nascent emphasis on privacy and parenting and demonstrates a shift from visitor- to family-centered design.

In contrast to “the Western-style” living room, study, and children’s room, “the interior of the housewife room is a *zashiki* furnished in standard Japanese construction. The ceiling is *saobuchi* [ceiling boards supported by many thin ornamental beams 4–5 cm apart running perpendicular to the boards], the side walls plaster, and the ornamental alcove finished with *tessha* [blackish- or reddish-brown] pigment.” (Takahashi 1924: 59) The housewife’s room clearly demonstrated modern design’s use of nation as adjective, as well as the influence of contemporary ideology concerning gender and family on spatial design. Positioned at the rear of the home by the kitchen and maid’s room and finished in *tatami*, the housewife’s room was convenient for cooking, sewing Japanese-style clothing (an activity

which required a *tatami* surface) and other housework.¹³ And, whereas rooms meant for visitors, children and adult male residents – assumed to wear the Western-style clothing that matched chair-style living – were decorated in Western or *wayō setchū* style with chairs for the occupants, rooms for women, for domestic work, and for such private activities as sleeping – occupants and functions related to traditional Japanese clothing that were assumed to be incompatible with chairs – were finished in *tatami* (placed between the front and back rooms and furnished with hybrid materials like cork, the children’s room occupies a liminal position). Of the Culture Village houses, one- and two-story houses with both chair-style and *tatami* rooms placed chair-style rooms in the front of the house nearest to the entrance and Japanese-style rooms to the rear. The arrangement of rooms for company in the front and rooms for family members only in the back shows the influence of front parlour layouts in 19th and early 20th century British middle-class urban housing, and breaks with traditional pre-Meiji bourgeois layouts that placed the *zashiki* in the furthest depths of the house. Finally, like the Zenitaka entry, most two-story houses tended to place chair-style rooms on the lower floor and *tatami* rooms upstairs, and to emphasize the chairs.

The Tōkyō Peace Commemoration Exhibition and Culture Village ran from 10 March to 31 July 1922. Visitors to the exhibition as a whole numbered 100,000 by May, and AIJ committee head Tanabe estimated visitors to Culture Village alone as in the tens of thousands (Tanabe 1922: 32). The houses were recorded in commemorative publications including *Bunkamura no kan’i jūtaku* (The Simple Houses of Culture Village), a compilation of interior and exterior photographs, floor plans and explanatory text, and *Bunkamura jūtaku sekkei zusetu* (Construction Drawings for the Culture Village Houses), a collection of floor plans and design specifications. These publications allowed those who could not make it to the exhibition grounds to “see” the homes, and the detailed floor plans, photographs and descriptions meant that the designs could be reproduced or ordered from the builders. The exhibition was also recorded and extensively publicized in *Jūtaku*, AIJ journal, *Kenchiku Zasshi* (Journal of the Institute of Japanese Architects), and other specialist architectural and interior design publications, and received attention from the mass media, with review articles appearing in most major newspapers and women’s magazines. Organizers’ hopes notwithstanding, public and peer opinion of the exhibition was predominantly lukewarm, with the houses criticized for shoddy construction, impractical layouts, unpleasant colour schemes, and inordinate cost

¹³ Sand 1996 includes an excellent discussion of the relation between women, sewing and other domestic work, traditional Japanese dress and *tatami* rooms.

and luxury well beyond the reach of the “average middle-class consumer” they were supposed to reach.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, while the houses – like all other items displayed at the exhibition – were for sale, only the lone “traditional Japanese-style house” sold during the exhibition.¹⁵

However, while the homes were not well received at the time of the exhibition, they prefigured the designs for, and debates over, housing in Japan in the 80 years that have followed. While the Culture Village’s progressive ideology of rationalization was often diluted and elements contrary to the design guidelines like elaborate gates and *tatami*-floored family rooms reintroduced, “culture houses” nonetheless sprang up in the Tōkyō suburbs as new commuter rail lines made suburban dwellings accessible just in time for the exodus out of the city centre after the Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Mejiro Culture Village in western Tōkyō opened in June 1922, and by 1930 “culture villages” had spread as far as Kyūshū in the south of Japan. The culture house ideal was perhaps most evident in the compact “modern living” bungalows of postwar Japan, but its family-centered layouts, emphasis on privacy, and standardized methods of production can be seen in the “nDK” layouts of postwar public housing and *manshon* condominiums of today. Culture Village has also lived on in scholarship, where researchers like Nishikawa Uzō, Uchida Seizō, Yoshi-mi Shun’ya, Kashiwagi Hiroshi, Fujiya Yōetsu and Jordan Sand have recognized the houses’ influence on subsequent developments in 20th century Japanese domestic architecture and analyzed the representations of ideology residing in the homes’ design, rhetoric and public reaction.

3. MODERNITY, THE UNCANNY AND THE DOMESTIC INTERIOR

If Culture Village was not well received by visitors and the press, this negative response stemmed in large part from the model houses’ extreme difference from most contemporary urban middle-class housing. Praised as the ideal towards which Japanese housing should evolve, the homes nonetheless seemed foreign to most viewers. As one reviewer wrote:

¹⁴ Fujiya 1982 and Teasley 2000 discuss media and public response to Culture Village.

¹⁵ The other houses were dismantled after the exhibition, and with one exception (the builder’s daughter and son-in-law received it as a wedding present several years later) their fate is unknown (Uchida 2000: 268). In comparison, the 27 houses built for the similar Housing Reform Exhibition (*Jūtaku kairyō kai*) in Ōsaka from October–December 1922 were built on-site; the sales rate for these was much higher, and most continue to be lived in today.

The interior is mainly Western-style, and its layout and furnishings are all quite vivid. Cozy, it wastes no movement, is sanitary and is, I believe, appropriate for running a simple life [...]. As a house for the Japanese and for the purpose of lifestyle reform, this must be near perfection. Thus ideal improvement by the appropriate application of corrections to the forms of Western houses is rather the simplest and easiest, and does not require any special considerations. However, from the point of view of the average way of life today, it is quite hard to say whether this could be accepted or not. If this is indigestible for the stomachs of the Japanese, then both lifestyle improvement and its main points will not be realized to their full extent. (Takahashi 1924: 47)

For reformers' suggestions to make inroads, they needed to be digestible to their target population. In other words, reformist architects needed to retain familiarity even in a changed environment.

While daily life reformers emphasized the necessity of adopting a chair-based lifestyle, the ubiquity of *tatami* (which popular wisdom held as incompatible with chairs), the low rate of actual home ownership, the sheer cost of remodeling or rebuilding housing from earlier eras, and an attachment to a familiar floor-sitting lifestyle born out of centuries of experience, meant that in 1922 chair-style living had generally failed to make inroads into all but the wealthiest homes. During the Meiji period, building a "Western-style" home (*yōkan*) next to the already existing "Japanese-style" family home was in vogue for wealthy industrialists and the nobility. By the 1910s, this had translated into the addition of an *ōsetsushitsu* (visitor's parlour), a wood-, cork- or linoleum-floored Western-style room furnished with a table and chairs and located just inside the entrance hall of an otherwise Japanese-style house constructed for professionals, white-collar families, and others aspiring to upward mobility. However, such obviously "Western" additions remained in the minority. Even the majority of the educated, suburban, white-collar nuclear family middle-class targeted by reformers and interior design shops as ideal chair-style residents continued living in homes that retained an *engawa* verandah encircling the house, *shōji* sliding window-doors with heavy *amado* shutters, *hibachi* charcoal space heaters, *tatami*-finished rooms that functioned equally for daytime and sleeping use, and other features originating in pre-Meiji housing.¹⁶

¹⁶ Inouye Jukichi's *Home Life in Tōkyō* (1910) is an excellent contemporary description in English of the metropolitan bourgeois home in the 1910s.

As new materials and ideologies gave rise to new forms and brought new twists to old ones, the breakdown of the social status system released layouts from class-based restrictions and the layout of former *samurai* class homes became the standard to be emulated by the middle-class (and its aspirants). Furnishings like the *chabudai*, the low, often round dining table placed in the centre of the room that replaced individual meal trays, reflected an emphasis on the nuclear family as the basic social unit, while the substitution of glass panes for paper in *shōji* revealed the impact of new ideologies and materials on design. Also reflecting new social ideals and concerns were the appearance of the *chanoma*, a room for the family circle to gather, and a shift to favoring family space and privacy in room layouts. For example, designs whereby family living areas were placed on the north side of the house and *zashiki* for visitors on the south, with passage only possible through individual rooms, were supplanted by layouts with a central hallway or family room dividing service areas on the north side of the house and family living areas on the south.¹⁷

The Culture Village model houses took these developments several steps further, combining whichever traditional features designers felt were modern enough to retain with new innovations derived from the design of the bungalows then popular for middle-class housing in England and the United States.¹⁸ As the *Jūtaku* copy for the Amerika-ya model house states, “the structure of our culture houses should by no means be confined to traditional Western methods, nor is it necessary to conform to Japanese forms; rather, we should progress through attention paid to the strong points of both and through constant research.” (Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya 1922: 6) Reformers were particularly proud of progress made through changes in floor plans, namely in the introduction of central hall or central living room layouts.

¹⁷ Nishiyama 1976, Uchida 1992, Sand 1996 and *Zusetsu Nihon no “madori”* 2001 provide concise and detailed outlines of domestic architecture and interiors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

¹⁸ Growing out of the housing improvement movement, the need for new housing for middle-class families, an emphasis on the nuclear family and the family circle, and the growth of suburbs, contemporary American and English bungalows were similar not only in design but also in context. In England, government subsidies for returning soldiers after the First World War provided similar help as the Housing Association Law in Japan, and interest in efficiency of production and consumption and in rational planning for efficient housework resulted in and gained momentum from The Daily Mail’s Ideal Labour Saving Home competition in 1921 and a Bungalow Town at the 1923 Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition (Ryan 1997: 42). Conscious of these similarities, Japanese architects and planners looked to American and British bungalows for examples.

The product of American domestic reformers' call for a space for family to gather, the central living room was translated by Taishō-era builders and reformers intent on making the nuclear family the base unit of social life into the stage for the appearance of the *kazoku danran*. Found in seven of the 14 houses of Culture Village, the central living room collapsed the functions and intended occupants of multiple rooms into one space. As the Amerika-ya model house description in *Jūtaku* crowed: "The living room: It is a study, a room for visitors, a dining room and a living room, and all home life takes place here." (Bunka *Jūtaku* Amerika-ya 1922: 9) Whether visitor or inhabitant, male or female, child or adult, work or leisure, all persons and activities could find a place in the living room. Thus the Yoshinaga, Maeda and Zenitaka model houses combined the hall and the study, bringing the visitor's parlour, once located just inside the front entrance, into the hallway from the entrance to the rest of the house. Other model houses employed various combinations of parlour, sitting room, drawing room, dining room, living room, study, verandah and music room.

The Yoshinaga Kyōzō home combined the living room with a verandah to allow residents to be inside and outside at the same time, and Tatsuya Hiroshi's one-room bungalow amalgamated the living room, dining room, study, visitor's room and bedroom into a *shushitsu* main room which, like other multiplex living rooms in the Ozawa and Shimada houses, could be divided into smaller spaces as necessary by curtains.

This modular economy of space preempted the need for many single-function rooms or for both small and large rooms. Translated into a traditional design aesthetic, such interiors functioned much as traditional interiors with small rooms divided by sliding *fusuma* walls. The key difference was that traditional interiors took small rooms as the fundamental unit to be added together as necessary, whereas the central living room layout posed one large room as the fundamental unit to be broken down into smaller rooms for privacy or warmth as necessary. This followed reform movement instructions to place multi-purpose space for the whole family at the centre of the house, but also allowed for the partition of space into smaller rooms with specific functions, such as for doing homework, or for specific occupants, such as overnight visitors. Flexible hybrids, these central living rooms provided an economic way of ensuring privacy in a small floor plan when individual rooms were not an option.

A feature of early 20th century American and British bungalows, the central living room was promoted by bungalow architects as negating the need for the impractical and wasteful separation of family and visitor spaces, whereby the best room was saved for guests and never used. The collapsing of visitor and family functions into the same space was also

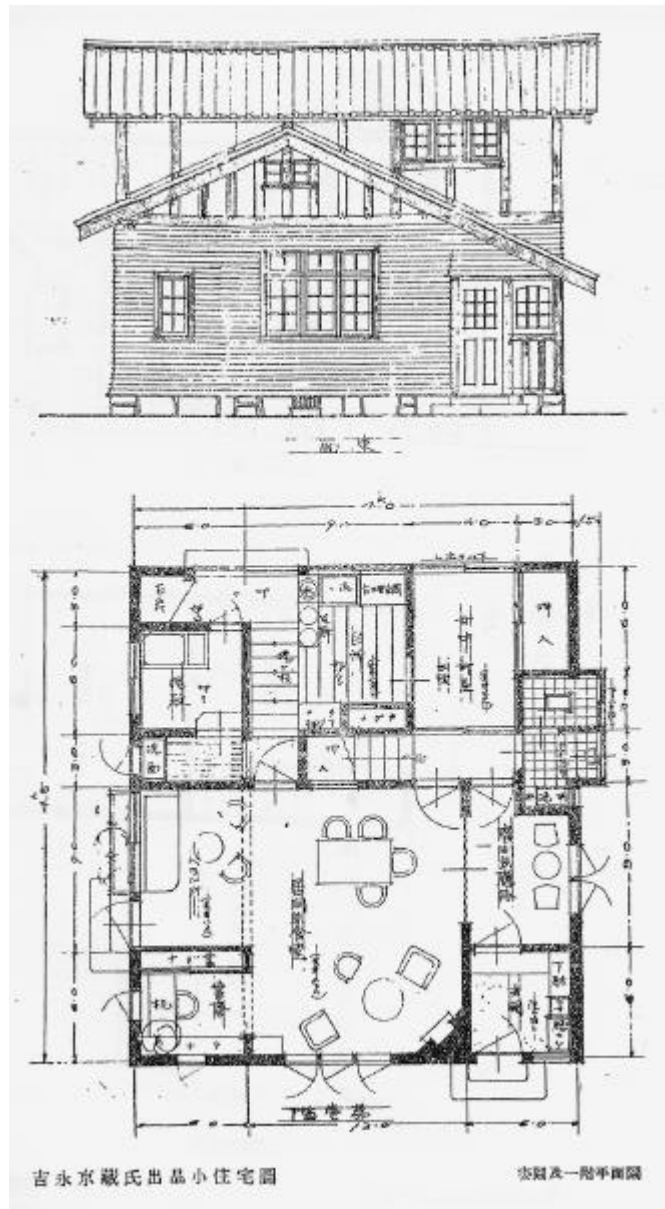


Fig. 4: Floorplan, Yoshinaga model house

Note: The verandah on the left is separated from the living room by a clotted line.

Source: *Kenchiku Zasshi* 36 (1922), 427: np

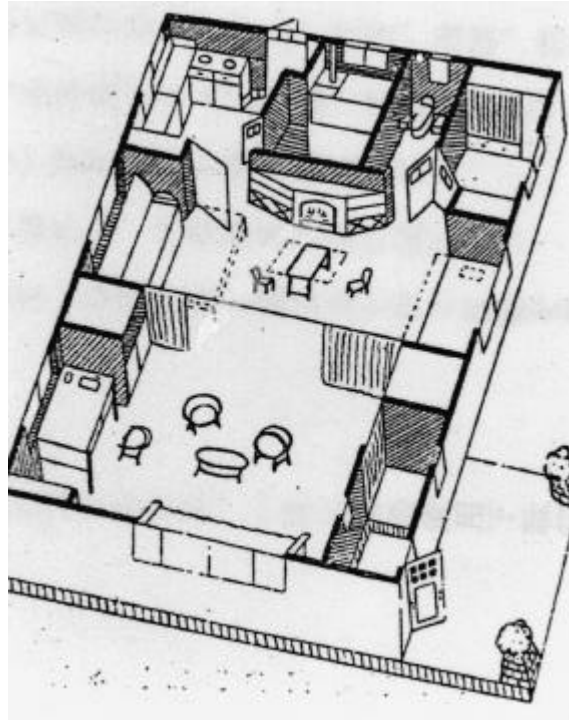


Fig. 5: Floorplan, Tatsuya Hiroshi model house

Source: Takahashi 1924: np

novel for Japanese housing derived from pre-Meiji *samurai* dwellings, and fulfilled the requirement to move from visitor-centered to family member-centered layouts. However, such multi-purpose rooms also recall traditional Japanese rooms. As Amerika-ya designer Yamamoto Setsurō explained: “The convenient thing about Japanese style is that one can combine the living room, *chanoma*, visitor’s parlour and bedrooms etcetera.” (Yamamoto 1922: 22) The second-floor *tatami* rooms of the Yoshinaga model house were lauded as “not only a resting place for relaxation, but [...] also suitable as a workspace or for inviting family members to visit.” (Takahashi 1924: 30) For eclectic spaces like the Culture Village model houses, *tatami* also allowed its occupants a choice of chair- or floor-style living. Thus one critique of the Iida house mentioned that the builder had chosen *tatami* bedrooms so that inhabitants could choose to sleep Western style (in a bed) or Japanese style (on a *futon*) (Kano 1922: 30). However, while both *tatami* rooms and the central living room offer multiple lifestyle options,

their capacity for multiple use varied in provenance: where in traditional Japanese domestic interiors the multiple functionality of *tatami* enabled plural usage, the central living room achieved multi-purpose use through the accumulation of specific furnishings for a variety of specific uses, such as a table and chairs for dining and visiting, or a hearth and chairs for relaxing.

Along with the multi-functionality of *tatami*, central living room layouts also contained vestigial remnants of the *tsuzukima* layout of pre-Meiji domestic architecture. Meaning literally “successive rooms”, the *tsuzukima* of samurai or wealthy urbanite homes consisted of a series of rooms of similar width whose *fusuma* walls could be opened up to create one large space for ceremonies and festive occasions.

Tsuzukima style spread to middle-class homes in the Meiji period after the abolition of class restrictions on architecture, and was continued in the Tōkyō Zaimoku Monya Dōgyō Kumiai entry, described as “the only [...] house entered that is a normal Japanese house like those up until now” (if traditional houses had *chanoma* and were built according to the metric system, making all dimensions larger than usual) (Tanabe 1922: 35).

With its living room and study opening into the children’s room and sightlines continuing on to the housewife room in the rear, the Zenitaka model house also employed a variant of *tsuzukima* form. However, differ-



Fig. 6: *Tsuzukima* interior, Sugimoto-ke (1870), Kyōto

Source: Author

out placed the visitor reception area at the front of the house in a fashion resembling the parlour of a 19th century English or American house or the living room in a bungalow. A vestigial version of the *tsuzukima* form was retained, giving some familiarity to the space, but at the same time rearranged and used in an unfamiliar way. The arrangement of rooms on the floor plan might have been familiar, but both the intended users and uses were new.

Combining the functions of a central living room and a central hallway, both *tsuzukima* and central living room layouts were criticized as lacking in privacy because residents had to pass through the central room to move anywhere in the house. The central hallway layout, the other dominant floor plan found in the Culture Houses, solved this problem. Typical of contemporary British bungalows and American prefabricated housing, the central hallway layout emphasized the privacy of rooms by making it unnecessary to pass through one room to get through to the next one, and by separating family areas from service areas. The Tōkyō Zaimoku Monya Dōgyō Kumiai entry converted the *engawa* into a hallway for resident and guest privacy. This redirected use of the *engawa* gave a new, unfamiliar flavour to familiar space, as did the application of metric system standard lengths to familiar dimensions. A reinterpretation of traditional, accustomed spaces in modern dimensions and functions, the Tōkyō Zaimoku Monya Dōgyō Kumiai house may have been “the lone traditional Japanese house”, but only in relation to the flashier geographical eclecticism of the other homes. Familiar but not entirely so, new but not entirely unfamiliar, the house was nothing but uncanny.

In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny”, Freud writes of the uncanny as the *unheimlich*, literally the unhomely, that state or turn when the familiar is suddenly unfamiliar, the homely suddenly not so. As architectural historian and theorist Anthony Vidler describes the uncanny turn in modern architecture, the uncanny is “the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream.” (Vidler 1991: 7) Familiar but not quite right, the uncanny is supposedly unknown, yet still seems familiar, arising “from the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not so, from the *heimlich*, that is, into the *unheimlich*.” (Vidler 1991: 6) What could be more homely than daily life, and what more habitual than the domestic space in which it is practiced day in and day out? In the Culture Houses, designs for living were at once habitual – the spaces of daily life – and unusual – new forms and ways of ordering the body and new social divisions of space. With designs employing vocabulary from the language of both Japanese and Japanese “Western” aesthetics, the houses wavered ambiguously in style between Japanese and Western, familiar and unfa-

miliar, traditional and modern. Always neither one nor the other, “seen by the average Westerner, they must feel Japanese; seen by the average Japanese, they must feel Western.” (Yokoyama 1926: 63) Spaces like the Zenitaka housewife room kept the appearance of a pre-Meiji room, but functioned within a new social economy of full-time housewives and nuclear families. At the same time, chair-style living rooms that should have been entirely new kept vestigial traces of older, more familiar equivalents.

With the home as the site of daily life, the uncanny in daily life appears as a doubling of an older, accustomed lifestyle and a newly translated one, the simultaneous presence of old spaces, functions and corporeal practices that “come without thinking” and newer ones either recently naturalized or yet to be naturalized. Similar but not the same, this sense of difference collapses everything into twos – the one and the other, the familiar and the new, the homely and the unhomely – but twos that like Naoki Sakai’s formulation of languages in translation exist only in opposition and depend on a relation to the other for their identity. But what functions does this serve? Why build uncanny spaces? And was the Culture Houses’ eclecticism on purpose or unconscious? What other uncanniness lurked in the Culture House designs, and what did it mean?

From overall design to specific details and ornaments, perhaps the houses’ most uncanny trait was their predilection for concatenations of visibly “Japanese” and “Western” forms and functions in one space or element which, according to builder rhetoric, would accommodate a diversity of lifestyles or corporeal habits of any possible inhabitants. Such “additional” or “parallel” hybridity describes the homes as a whole, but also occurred on the level of individual rooms. Thus builder Maeda Kinzō furnished his entry’s dining room with both chairs and a raised platform to accommodate “women and children” not accustomed to sitting in chairs (Takanashi 1924: 31). Incidentally, the Maeda dining room prefigures architect Fujii Kōji’s later experiments in domestic architecture, for example the parlour with a raised *tatami* platform for visitors in Japanese clothing in Fujii’s *Shochikusō* experimental house (1928). Similarly, the architect for the Kenchiku Kōgyō living room laid *tatami* mats side by side with wood flooring for an interior described as “Western-style with Japanese-style skillfully added [...] there is a visitor’s parlour-study to the right, which is chair style, and across from it is an interesting experiment: a verandah put together with a living room. Part of the floor has been converted to *tatami*.” (Takanashi 1922: 12)

While the Maeda dining room brought standard “Japanese” and “Western” ways of sitting together into the same space and the Kenchiku Kōgyō entry provided for both ways of sitting in the living room, the Reform League entry’s sleeping room, a raised wood platform finished in cork on

which to lay a *futon*, employed new materials to allow plural use of one feature. Interpreted by critic Yokoyama as “consolation until the custom of bedrooms is adopted”, this and other Reform League designs allowed for the possibility of Japanese-style living in a Western-style environment (Yokoyama 1926: 60). This residual familiarity of use would, designers hoped, make the home more palatable to potential buyers and imitators. As one description explained, “in particular, the children’s room and bedroom are Western rooms but the sleeping place has been raised one level in a fashion the Japanese people will like.” (Takanashi 1924: 41)

The wedding of familiar use and unfamiliar form was enabled by a new, unfamiliar material: cork. Hailed as possessing both the resilience and comfort of *tatami* and the durability and hygiene of wood flooring or linoleum, cork flooring was promoted as the ideal material for the modern Japanese urban lifestyle. Softer and thus safer than wood, tile or linoleum and more hygienic than *tatami*, cork was safer for children’s play; at the same time, its durability accommodated chair and table legs which would rip, scuff and scar softer *tatami*. With these attributes, cork flooring was also used in rooms where being on the floor was unavoidable, such as the children’s room in the Zenitaka home, or a possibility, as with the sleeping rooms in the Reform League and Ozawa home (Nose 1923: 14). While visibly unfamiliar, cork allowed for both familiar and unfamiliar functions as its user desired. Thus builders attempted to use the functionality of cork to endow new forms with a sense of familiarity and thereby facilitate their adoption. Similarly, interior designers for the exhibition tempered unfamiliar furnishings like chairs and tables with familiar materials to cast chair-style living in familiar light. In particular, the rattan chair and table sets found in many houses including the Zenitaka entry were to imbue a “Japanese feel” to chair-style rooms.

Rattan furniture sets were first recommended for use in middle-class homes when the interior decoration department of the Mitsukoshi department store introduced Taiwanese-made rattan chair and table sets for use on *tatami* or *engawa* in 1911. Light and inexpensive, the chairs also carried the added charm of coming from Taiwan, then under colonial Imperial Japanese rule and thus perceived in one subsuming move as more “Oriental” or “Japanese” than equivalent styles from Europe or North America. Articles like Akiyama Tetsuo’s 1923 “Western Furniture Appropriate for Japanese Rooms” depicted rattan furnishings as harmonious with the aesthetic of traditional Japanese homes, promoted these hybrids of modern chair-style living produced in a Japanese nativist aesthetic as an easy step toward achieving the culture life, and taught consumers how to incorporate Amerika-ya, Mitsukoshi and other rattan furniture into a traditional Japanese home. And yet, true to Amerika-ya roots, rattan furniture

was also a central element of Craftsman furniture, where it arose from the American taste for *japonisme*. Props for chair-style living designed with a Japanese or *japonesque* (depending on origin) aesthetic to harmonize with interiors built for floor-style living and produced either in a Japanese colony or in the United States, rattan furniture possessed an eerie multi-sighting that reflected the multi-origin, multi-formed nature of Japanese modernity itself.

On a simpler level, however, the primary function of rattan furniture in the Culture Houses was to impart an aesthetic familiarity to functionally unfamiliar chair-style spaces. *Shinkabe*, the “true walls” found in all but the cement-block house of Japan Cement, also performed this role. Constructed through a traditional Japanese post-and-panel method in which a wood structure is filled in with plaster, *shinkabe* were described in promotional literature as particularly Japanese, as opposed to the Western European and North American *ōkabe* “great walls” in which walls were filled in around pillars, making the woodwork invisible. For the Culture Houses, builders employed stylistically traditional *shinkabe* regardless of the floor or chair-sitting orientation of a room. In builder Kado Yoshisaburō’s dining room, *shinkabe* post-and-panel walls complete with traditional *Ōtsu-nuri* finish and *tenbukuro* storage spaces co-existed with dining chairs and table, built-in cupboards fixed at heights appropriate for chair-style living, and a Japanese woodblock print framed and hung Western-style.

Builders’ predilection for *shinkabe* came partly from necessity. Since the model houses were only temporary, frame construction was easier and cheaper to dismantle at the end of the exhibition. *Shinkabe* also took advantage of carpenters’ experience with wood frame construction and economized on actual construction costs and materials (Takanashi 1924: 21). However, the aesthetic familiarity of *shinkabe* also functioned to temper the practical, corporeal unfamiliarity of chair- and table-style dining rooms and to claim this chair-style space as “Japanese”. As one exhibition critic wrote, “I would like to see the walls of traditional Japanese rooms (which is to say floor-sitting rooms) used in chair-style rooms (I do not like the appellation ‘Western rooms’) (this is because the structure of the walls of tearooms in particular are superior).” (Hirose Yōsuku in Ema *et al.* 1922: 12)

While builders like Zenitaka and Kado employed traditional *Ōtsu-nuri shinkabe* in their Western-style rooms, others selected Westernized variants that cited primarily not indigenous styles but rather the *japonisme* of contemporary European and American domestic interiors. In Europe, exposed post-and-panel construction was a standard design element in Secession, *art nouveau*, and British arts and crafts architecture. In the United States, Frank Lloyd Wright’s dark woodwork set off against light wall pan-



Fig. 8: **Dining Room, Kado model house**

Source: Takanashi 1924: 37

els translated into the mass market Craftsman bungalows that spread throughout California and the Midwest in the first decade of the century. Thus Gustav Stickley, publisher of eponymous Craftsman-style bible *The Craftsman*, described one *shinkabe*-style wall finish as “a typical Craftsman scheme for decorating and furnishing a sleeping room. Note the division of wall spaces into panels by strips of wood. The panels are covered with Japanese grass-cloth.” (Stickley 1909: 18)

In the Culture Houses, the walls of the Amerika-ya model house were finished with dark wood-stained posts dividing white distemper panels.

Reminiscent of *art nouveau* proportions, as in the hallways of Charles Rennie McKintosh’s 1904 Hill House, the Amerika-ya entry interiors referenced *japonisme*’s appropriation of *shinkabe* style. This rendered familiar beam-and-timber style uncannily unfamiliar, and in doing so brought a new “foreign” taste to this most familiar of constructions. Described in *The Simple Houses of Culture Village* as “Japanese taste added to the latest American style” (Takanashi 1924: 18), the design corresponded to the exotic yet

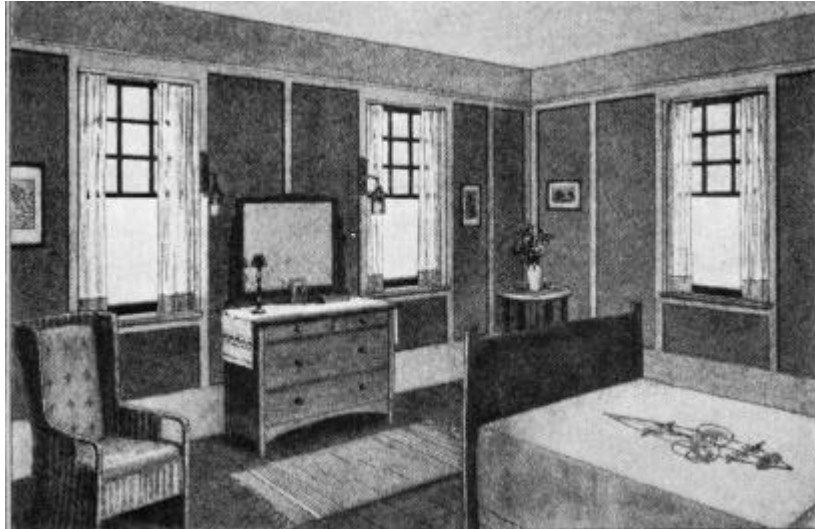


Fig. 9: Craftsman wall panels

Source: Stickley 1909: 18

approachable image Amerika-ya marketers wished to convey. When Amerika-ya was first incorporated in 1909, owner Hashiguchi specialized in imported American ready-made housing. However, when the uncompromisingly chair-style interiors proved more popular with resident foreigners and the former feudal nobility as well as with wealthy Japanese industrialists who desired stylish summer houses in the American tradition, Amerika-ya gradually began including *tatami* and other traditional features in its designs (making the *shinkabe* in the Amerika-ya Culture House most likely also a bow to consumers' habits).²⁰ At the same time, however, Amerika-ya had to uphold its stylish, exotic and modern image through its designs. By quoting the foreign, Amerika-ya *shinkabe* were at once fashionable yet familiar. This doubling-back or *mise en abyme* corrupts even the supposedly "familiar" element itself.

Shinkabe could have other uses as well. Described as "Japanese taste added to English-style half-timber", the half-timber walls, heavy ceiling beams, gabled roof and diamond-paned leaded casement windows of the Tatsuya house quoted English vernacular or Tudor revival architecture as

²⁰ Uchida (1987: 201–207) demonstrates how Yamamoto developed this design philosophy in Amerika-ya architecture.

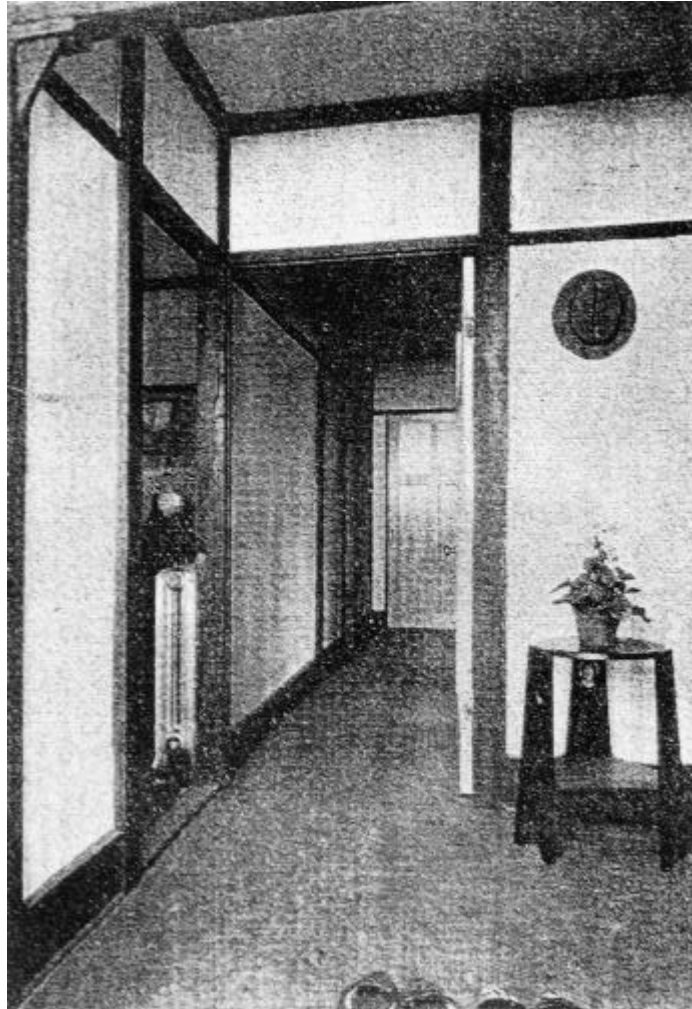


Fig. 10: **Hallway, Amerika-ya model house**

Source: Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya 1922: 9

typified in late Victorian homes by Voysey, Lutyens and Baillie-Scott, and in contemporary British “tudorbethan” bungalows (Takanashi 1924: 6).

However, Tatsuya’s half-timber construction contrasting dark stained pillars and beams with white-washed walls was also a clear reference to the Japanese *minka* farmhouses then being rediscovered by the *min-*

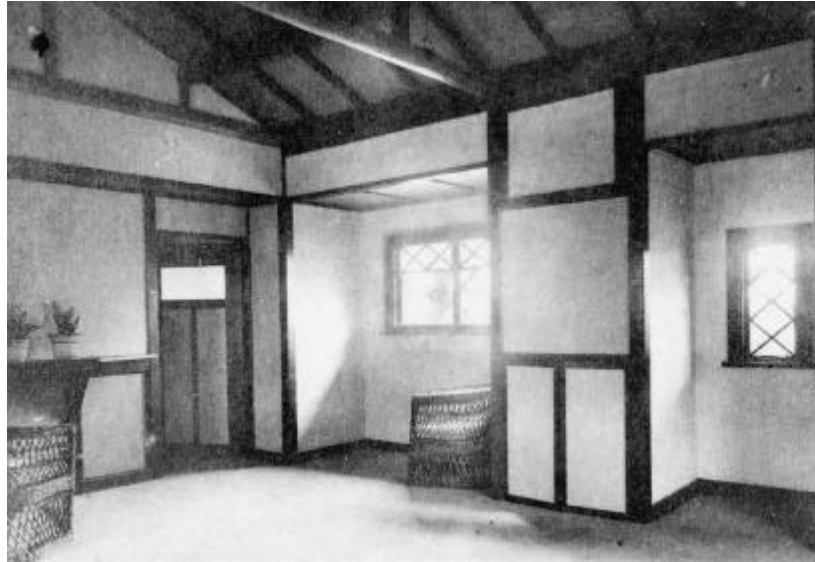


Fig. 11: Living room, Tatsuya model house

Source: Takanashi 1924: 7

zokugaku ethnology movement, in particular through Kon Wajirō's 1920s survey of *minka* (1989), and soon to be reified through the *mingei* folkcraft movement. Thus Yokoyama calls Tatsuya's design "almost entirely Japanese", mentioning exposed decorative ceiling beams reminiscent of traditional *sukiya* architecture and the contrast of white plaster walls and dark woodwork (Yokoyama 1926: 51–52).

Like the bungalows of post-World War I England, the house's half-timbered walls and exposed ceiling beams suggest the vernacular; however, as a fusion of English folk architecture and familiar Japanese style both pre-existing and arising from the ahistoric pastiche of the 1920s, vernacular here is devoid of spatial or temporal anchor. It is "nowhere vernacular", "anyplace", a desire for "tradition" that, as plotted by Vidler (1991), Ivy (1995) and others, arises in reaction to uncanny modernity or the violence of modernization seemingly out of control. Reviewing Culture Village, architectural critic Nishizawa Isaku wrote that housing is about comfort, and that comfort derives from familiarity and nostalgia. Praising the homes based on older forms of Western architecture, he writes:

A dwelling is not only a vessel in which to place the body, but a place to rest the spirit (calm the soul). Thus all of a house's form and mate-

rials must have a sense of nostalgia. The roof, exterior walls and interior should employ the style of traditional Japan as much as possible. Whether tiles or wallboards, ways of painting the walls, the ceiling or the floor, we must use things we have had existed in our country since times long past and contrive to use them in making a new house. (*Mokuzai Kōgei* 1922: 24)

If the vernacular induces familiarity and the familiar comfort, and the point is to cushion the shock of modernity as much as possible, then in this triumph of the image, it doesn't matter which vernacular, which tradition, it refers to, just that it does. In contrast to this interpretation based on the aesthetics of the image, Uchida (1987) argues that *shinkabe's* greatest impact was to emphasize not the Japanese-ness of ostensibly Western-style rooms but the utilitarian rationalism of their design:

Shinkabe construction *yōshitsu* western-style rooms did not correspond to the image of the 'Western room' (Western-style room) held by the general public. [The Amerika-ya *shinkabe* Western-style room] abandoned the popularly-held symbolism of the *yōkan* western-style house in favour of emphasizing its utilitarian side. For this reason, we can say that this 'Amerika-ya style house' was an extremely new style of housing. (Uchida 1987: 214–215)

This was perhaps also true for the wooden sliding doors used throughout the Culture Houses. A hybrid descendent of *fusuma* (papered sliding panels) and wooden doors, wooden sliding panels took the spatial economy of *fusuma* and the insulating qualities of wood to give rooms both privacy and openness. Similarly, the *hikichigai mado* horizontal sliding windows found in most houses also took the best features of Japanese *shōji* and Western glass sash windows. A combination of Western vertical glass-paned sash windows, impractical because their construction requires *ōkabe* walls, and Japanese *shōji*, criticized for not keeping out cold and burglars, horizontal sliding windows reflected the model houses' emphasis on rational production and living by combining the space-saving elements of *shōji* with the strength and protection from the elements and robbery afforded by glass windows. In addition, they could be substituted for *shōji* in older Japanese homes, making it possible to acquire the light and ventilation propounded as necessary for the modern home without having to rebuild the house. Thus Amerika-ya designer Yamamoto recommended *hikichigai* windows along with *shinkabe*: "I believe that Japanese middle-class homes from now on will develop by carrying on the lineage of *shinkabe* walls and *hikichigai* windows." (*Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya* 1922: 7)

A symbol of the fusion of tradition and modernity, Japan and “the West” that is modern Japan, *hikichigai* windows were praised for their practicality, and claimed in *Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya* as a product of specifically Japanese modernity that could break any exclusive association of modernity and “the West”:

Hikichigai windows are an exclusively Japanese method and also extremely economical. They do not clatter in the wind and waste space like casement windows. We have made other kinds of windows as models in the Culture Village house, but a house of 200 *tsubo* should be entirely of *hikichigai* windows. (*Bunka Jūtaku Amerika-ya* 1922: 7)

That said, in the Culture Houses they were often hidden to the back and sides of houses, with fashionable, identifiably foreign casement or sash windows displayed on the facade where they could be seen by passers-by. This distinction in use continued into interiors, where more practical *hikichigai* windows found use in family spaces and casements and sash windows were deployed in more formal areas for male residents and visitors. With *shōji* banned by the design specifications, designers employed all three in rooms coded as Japanese; distinctions in use depended rather on the intended user and degree of formality of the room. However, the way in which “Western” windows were incorporated most often adhered to traditional aesthetics. In other words, Western-coded details were employed not only for their usual functions, but functioned also for decorative effect within a traditional economy of style. The Kenchiku Kōgyō house featured “*zashiki*” bedrooms, but replaced the usual *chigaidana* shelves, *kakimono* scroll and flower arrangement of the *tokonoma* alcove with a large bay window.

Resituated to enact the function of the *tokonoma*, the bay window gathers occupants’ gazes to focus on the view from the windows and the windows themselves. With such exotic, unfamiliar window frames, whether the gaze passed through the windows on to the outside world or not might have been a moot point. Imported lighting fixtures like the *mise-en-abyme* domestic *japonisme* of the *daimyō-shiki* [“lord-style”] chandelier, a once export only design recustomized for domestic consumption by the peerage and the wealthy from the 1870s, performed the same decorative function, imparting a sense of wealth and elegance simply by being the exclusive dominion of those wealthy or well-connected enough to purchase one.²¹ Employed in the Kenchiku Kōgyō bedroom, a *daimyō-shiki* chandelier gave a feel of exclusivity and style without being entirely foreign. That said, its ornate styling, obvious luxury, and bows to assumed Western

²¹ Thank you to Jordan Sand for pointing out the *daimyō-shiki* chandelier.

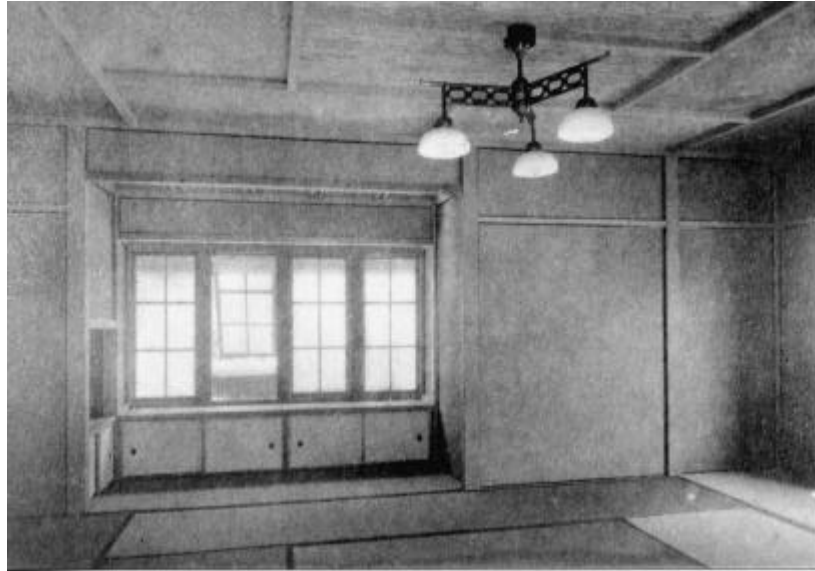


Fig. 12: Bedroom, Kenchiku Kōgyō model house

Source: Takanashi 1924: 14

tastes not only made it incongruous in an otherwise ordinary Japanese-style room but also placed it well out of reach for the middle-class consumers who formed the bulk of visitors to the exhibition. By quoting a quotation and collapsing the entire range of “Japan” into one style regardless of class and other considerations, the chandelier destabilizes the room, making it almost-but-not-quite-right, uncannily familiar yet uncomfortable.

Such doubling back is also apparent in interior ornament like the Craftsman-style Japanese lantern-inspired lighting fixtures, framed *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, and other “oriental” art pieces and knickknacks of builder Higuchi Hisagorō’s dining room and study.

Adorned with Japanese art objects, the Higuchi study and dining room bring a “Japanese” feel to their chair-style spaces, yet at the same time, Japanese prints were a standard of contemporary British bungalows. As one 1920 bungalow stylebook put it, picking up also on the reverse use of *japonisme* in Europe and North America to impart a sense of the exotic modern, “Japanese prints or some of the modern lithographs can be very effectively used for decorating the walls of a bungalow.” (Philips 1920: 42) Like the *daimyō-shiki* chandelier, these traces of “Japan” and its presence in Asia cited through an import-export looking glass make the room more “Japanese”. However, the “Japan” produced was not the familiar one



Fig. 13: Dining room, Higuchi Hisagorō model house

Source: Takanashi 1924: 49

lived daily by exhibition visitors, but one seen through the eyes of designers conscious of the eyes and living rooms of Europe and North America. Through framed *ukiyo-e* and lanterns that were only shadows of their former selves, the Higuchi interiors witched up an uncanny, unsettling “Japan as adjective,” as foreign to viewers as it would have been familiar.

In 1922, in the midst of such uncanny doublings of familiar and unfamiliar, metropolitan domestic interiors were hybrids whose multivalent shadings of familiarity and unfamiliarity depended on builder and dweller. Rising out of a movement to theorize, strategize and rationalize domestic space as a stage for the debate between “Japanese” and “Western” ways of life, the Culture Village model houses-cum-ideals for living were shaped by and reflected back this hybridity. Given the Tōkyō Peace Commemoration Exhibition’s ultimately commercial nature, the homes also had to be both familiar and unfamiliar enough to sell. In other words, both the houses’ practical and aesthetic functions had to be homely enough to be approachable, but unhomely enough to be sexy. Playing the uncanny registers of national style provided builders with one way to do this.

Whether the uncanny erupted in use or in appearance, the homes were designed to house and to shape an ideal “modern Japanese family”, the

perfect hybrid for living in hybrid times. Problematic contributions to a yet unfinished history that pits the homely, the domestic, the nostalgic, against their ever-threatening, always invading, and often subversive 'opposites' (Vidler 1991: 13), the design and discourse on design of the Culture Houses were one way for the literal "architects of tomorrow" to negotiate an uncertain, instable and always uncanny modern world.

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