JAPANESE EXHIBITION HOUSE OPENS IN MUSEUM OF MODERN ART GARDEN

A Japanese house with sliding walls, a tea ceremony room attached to the main building by a bridge, a curved roof of cypress bark, and broad verandas overlooking Japanese gardens and a pool will open to the public on Sunday, June 20, in the Museum of Modern Art Garden, 11 West 53 Street. The house, first built in Japan and then shipped to New York, will remain on view through October 12.

The exhibition house was designed by Junzo Yoshimura, leading Japanese architect and Professor at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts. It is sponsored by the America-Japan Society in Tokyo and private citizens in Japan and the United States and the Museum of Modern Art. It was reassembled in the Museum Garden under Mr. Yoshimura’s supervision with the aid of Japanese craftsmen.

The Museum of Modern Art selected an example of Japanese architecture, based on 16th and 17th century prototypes, as its third House in the Garden because of the unique relevance of traditional Japanese design to modern Western architecture. Arthur Drexler, Curator of Architecture and Design, points out in a leaflet the Museum has published for visitors to the exhibition that the four important characteristics which give Japanese architecture this relevance are post and lintel frame construction, flexible room arrangements, close relation of indoor and outdoor areas, and the ornamental quality of the structural system itself.

Visitors may enter at 4 West 54 Street, or through the Museum. Because the floors of Japanese houses are covered with fragile straw mats, called tatami, visitors must remove their shoes before entering the building. Paper slippers provided by the Museum may be worn inside the house and kept as souvenirs of the exhibition.

The house, which might have been built by a 16th or 17th century Japanese scholar, government official, or priest, contains a main room called shoin, a second large room, a 4-mat tea ceremony room built of cryptomeria, pine, bamboo and ochre-colored Kyoto earth, a bath with a sunken wood tub, a kitchen with a stove made of earth and waxed plaster, galleries, verandas, and a bridge connecting the tea ceremony room with the main section of the house.

Isolated columns of hinoki (Japanese cypress) support the massive curved roof which is covered with 20 to 50 layers of cypress bark. Sliding interior and exterior...
walls are fitted into the structural framework and can be removed entirely, thus making the house extremely flexible in plan. Interior wall screens made of paper, called fusuma, separate all the rooms. Sliding screens of white translucent paper, called shoji, together with sliding wood weather-doors, called amado, form most of the exterior walls.

Because the outer walls may be opened for the view or even removed completely, the garden around the house is surrounded by a plaster wall to insure privacy.

The Japanese garden is designed to be viewed from the house and is not intended as an outdoor living area. Therefore the broad verandas of the house are used as living space from which to view the garden. A waterfall is an important element in the plan because the sound of falling water is considered soothing and delightful.

The garden is executed in the sansui style, its theme being a Buddhist image of Paradise with heaven symbolized by a mountain in water. The garden is composed of stone formations in water, and cryptomeria, laurel pine, moss and white sand. The stones were selected for their sculptural qualities by Mr. Yoshimura, the architect, from the mountains near Nagoya and shipped to New York with the house.

By Western standards, the house is barely furnished, as the Japanese, when not using such equipment as bedding, boxes, low tables and chests of drawers, remove and store them. Square cushions covered with orange silk are placed directly on the floor for chairs, and in the main room, there is a built-in desk, built-in cupboards with small decorative sliding doors and open shelves. Moreover, the structure itself is decorative, as Mr. Drexler points out:

The nature of its design and the meticulous craftsmanship with which it is built make a Japanese house seem like a huge piece of furniture. Incorporated in the structure itself are many minor functions for which the West traditionally requires furniture and decoration. Of course the Japanese use paintings and small decorative objects, which they place carefully and frequently change. But, significantly, the empty interiors of a Japanese house are made decorative by the structure itself. Except for the roof beams every part of the structural framing is exposed, and even those parts which are not entirely necessary for structural purposes are made to look as if they were. In reality the exposed structural framework of a Japanese house includes decorative elements, so that the entire structure itself acquires the richness and variety of an ornament.

Landscape paintings in black ink, made by Kaii Higashiyama, decorate the sliding panels in both of the main rooms, and changing displays of paintings or flowers will be on view in the tea ceremony room, as the tea ceremony ritual is designed to encourage the contemplative and intelligent appreciation of works of art, including the objects used in the tea service.

Admission to the house is 60 cents for adults, 20 cents for children. The house is open during regular Museum hours, noon to 7 on weekdays, 1 to 7 on Sundays and holidays.
The Museum of Modern Art will present a special showing of the Japanese film, "Jigokumon" (Hell's Gate), in the Museum auditorium Tuesday evening, June 22 for invited guests and members of the press.

"Jigokumon," which won the highest award at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival, will be presented by its producer, Masaichi Nagata, president of Daiei Motion Picture Company, Tokyo. The Daiei Company also produced the Venice Festival Award film "Rashomon," which has already been shown in the United States, and "Golden Demon" which won the Golden Harvest Award (equivalent to the American "Oscar") at the first Film Festival of Southeast Asia, held earlier this year in Tokyo.

The first Japanese film to be photographed in Eastman Color, "Jigokumon" was produced by Mr. Nagata and directed by Teinosuke Kinugasa. It is based on the historic events at the beginning of the "Heiji era" (1195 A.D.) of Japanese history and was filmed, in part, on the island of Mayajima at the historic temple of Itsukushima.

Mr. Nagata will arrive in New York June 19 for a one week visit before returning to Japan via Los Angeles, where he will be the guest of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at a private screening of "Jigokumon."