

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

No. 57a

May 1956

## DESCRIPTION OF THE JAPANESE EXHIBITION HOUSE

ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

DURING THE SUMMERS OF 1954 AND 1955

The Japanese exhibition house was designed by Junzo Yoshimura, leading Japanese architect and Professor at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts. This example of Japanese architecture, based on 16th and 17th century prototypes, was selected by the Museum of Modern Art as its third Exhibition House in the Garden because of the unique relevance of traditional Japanese design to modern Western architecture. Four important characteristics which give Japanese architecture this relevance are post and lintel skeleton frame construction, flexible room arrangements, close relation of indoor and outdoor areas, and the ornamental quality of the structural system itself.

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.

Slender columns of hinoki (Japanese cypress) support the massive curved roof, which is covered with 20 to 50 layers of cypress bark shingles. 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 called fusuma, made of opaque paper, separate all the rooms. Sliding screens of white translucent paper, called shoji, together with sliding wood weather-doors, form most of the exterior walls.

Because the floors of Japanese houses are covered with fragile straw mats, called tatami, visitors, observing Japanese custom, removed their shoes before entering the building. Paper slippers were provided by the Museum, and all visitors entered the house through a special structure in which the slippers were distributed.

Since the outer walls of the house may be opened for the view or even removed

more.....

completely, the garden around the house is enclosed by a wall to insure privacy. The Japanese garden itself was designed to be viewed from the house rather than to be used as an outdoor living area. The broad verandas of the house are used as living space from which to view the garden. A waterfall was an important element in the plan because the sound of falling water is considered soothing and delightful.

The garden was executed in the sansui style, its theme being a Buddhist image of Paradise with heaven symbolized by a mountain in water. The garden was 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 Arthur Drexler, Museum Curator who directed the exhibition, says:

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 Kaiti Higashiyama, decorate the sliding panels in both of the main rooms. Changing displays of paintings or flowers were 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.

The exhibition house was sponsored by the America-Japan Society in Tokyo, private citizens in Japan and the United States, and the Museum of Modern Art. It was ~~assembled in~~ the Museum Garden under Mr. Yoshimura's supervision with the aid of Japanese craftsmen.

more.....

The house was open to the public from June 20 to October 31 in 1954 and then closed for the winter. New tatami (mats) were placed on the floors, the gardens replanted and the house scrubbed, waxed, and polished before it was reopened on April 27, 1955. The first summer 121,187 people visited the house and 101,937 the second summer, making a total of 223,124.

Admission to the house was 60 cents for adults and 20 cents for children.