



25-6 | HIMEJI CASTLE  
Hyogo, near Osaka. Momoyama period, 1601-09.

### Architecture

Today the very word *Momoyama* conjures up images of bold warriors, luxurious palaces, screens shimmering with gold leaf, and magnificent ceramics. The Momoyama period was also the era when Europeans first made an impact in Japan. A few Portuguese explorers had arrived at the end of the Muromachi era in 1543, and traders and missionaries were quick to follow. It was only with the rise of Nobunaga, however, that Westerners were able to extend their activities beyond the ports of Kyushu, Japan's southernmost island. Nobunaga welcomed foreign traders, who brought him various products, the most important of which were firearms.

European muskets and cannons soon changed the nature of Japanese warfare and influenced Japanese architecture. In response to the new weapons, monumental fortified castles were built in the late sixteenth century. Some were eventually lost to warfare or torn down by victorious enemies, and others have been extensively altered over the years. One of the most beautiful of the surviving castles is Himeji, not far from the city of Osaka (FIG. 25-6). Rising high on a hill above the plains, Himeji has been given the name White Heron. To reach the upper fortress, visitors must follow angular paths beneath steep walls, climbing from one area to the next past stone ramparts and through narrow fortified gates, all the while feeling as though lost in a maze, with no sense of direction or progress. At the main building, a further climb up a series of narrow ladders leads to the uppermost chamber.

There, the footsore visitor is rewarded with a stunning 360-degree view of the surrounding countryside. The sense of power is overwhelming.

### Kano School Decorative Painting

Castles such as Himeji were sumptuously decorated, offering artists unprecedented opportunities to work on a grand scale. Large murals on *fusuma*—paper-covered sliding doors—were particular features of Momoyama design, as were folding screens with gold-leaf backgrounds, whose glistening surfaces not only conveyed light within the castle rooms but also displayed the wealth of the warrior leaders. Temples, too, commissioned large-scale paintings for their rebuilding projects after the devastation of the civil wars.

The Momoyama period produced a number of artists who were equally adept at decorative golden screens and broadly brushed *fusuma* paintings. Daitoku-ji, a celebrated Zen monastery in Kyoto, has a number of subtemples that are treasure troves of Japanese art. One, the Juko-in, possesses *fusuma* by Kano Eitoku (1543-90), one of the most brilliant painters from the professional school of artists founded by the Kano family and patronized by government leaders for several centuries. Founded in the Muromachi period, the Kano school combined training in the ink-painting tradition with new skills in decorative subjects and styles. The illustration here shows two of the three walls of *fusuma* panels painted when the artist was in his mid-twenties (FIG. 25-7). To the



25-7 | Kano Eitoku **FUSUMA**  
 Depicting pine and cranes (left) and plum tree (right) from the central room of the Juko-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto. Momoyama period, c. 1563–73. Ink and gold on paper, height 5'9 1/8" (1.76 m).

left, the subject is the familiar Kano school theme of cranes and pines, both symbols of long life; to the right is a great gnarled plum tree, symbol of spring. The trees are so massive they seem to extend far beyond the panels. An island rounding both walls of the far corner provides a focus for the out-reaching trees. Ingeniously, it belongs to both compositions at the same time, thus uniting them into an organic whole. Eitoku's vigorous use of brush and ink, his powerfully jagged outlines, and his dramatic compositions all hark back to the style of Sesshu, but the bold new sense of scale in his works is a leading characteristic of the Momoyama period.

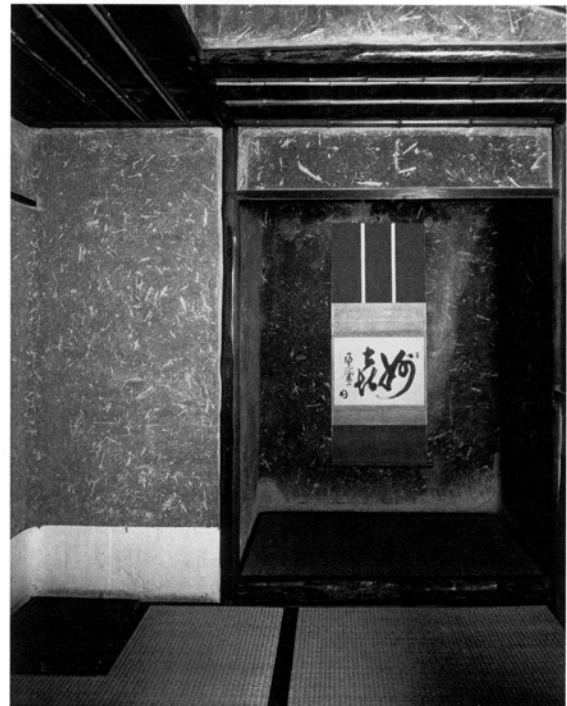
### The Tea Ceremony

Japanese art is never one-sided. Along with castles, golden screens, and massive *fusuma* paintings there was an equal interest during the Momoyama period in the quiet, the restrained, and the natural. This was expressed primarily through the tea ceremony.

The term "tea ceremony," a phrase now in common use, does not convey the full meaning of *cha no yu*, the Japanese ritual drinking of tea, which has no counterpart in Western culture. Tea itself had been introduced to Japan from the Asian continent hundreds of years earlier. At first, tea was molded into cakes and boiled. However, the advent of Zen in the late Kamakura period (1185–1392) brought to Japan a different way of preparing tea, with the leaves crushed into powder and then whisked in bowls with hot water. Zen monks used such tea as a mild stimulant to aid meditation, and it also was considered a form of medicine.

**SEN NO RIKYU.** The most famous tea master in Japanese history was Sen no Rikyu (1522–91). He conceived of the tea ceremony as an intimate gathering in which a few people would enter a small rustic room, drink tea carefully prepared in front of them by their host, and quietly discuss the tea utensils or a Zen scroll hanging on the wall. He did a great

deal to establish the aesthetic of modesty, refinement, and rusticity that permitted the tearoom to serve as a respite from the busy and sometimes violent world outside. A traditional tearoom is quite small and simple. It is made of natural materials such as bamboo and wood, with mud walls, paper windows, and a floor covered with tatami—mats of woven straw. One tearoom that preserves Rikyu's design is named Tai-an (FIG. 25-8). Built in 1582, it is distinguished by its tiny door (guests must crawl to enter) and its alcove, or *tokonoma*, where a Zen scroll or a simple flower arrangement may be



25-8 | Sen no Rikyu **TAI-AN TEAROOM**  
 Myoki-an Temple, Kyoto. Momoyama period, 1582.

displayed. At first glance, the room seems symmetrical. But the disposition of the *tatami* does not match the spacing of the *tokonoma*, providing a subtle undercurrent of irregularity. A longer look reveals a blend of simple elegance and rusticity. The walls seem scratched and worn with age, but the *tatami* are replaced frequently to keep them clean and fresh. The mood is quiet; the light is muted and diffused through three small paper windows. Above all, there is a sense of spatial clarity. All nonessentials have been eliminated, so there is nothing to distract from focused attention. The tearoom aesthetic became an important element in Japanese culture, influencing secular architecture through its simple and evocative style (see “Shoin Design,” page 860).

## EDO PERIOD

Three years after Tokugawa Ieyasu gained control of Japan, he proclaimed himself shogun. His family’s control of the shogunate was to last more than 250 years, a span of time known as the Edo period (1615–1868) or the Tokugawa era.

Under the rule of the Tokugawa family, peace and prosperity came to Japan at the price of an increasingly rigid and often repressive form of government. The problem of potentially rebellious *daimyo* was solved by ordering all feudal lords to spend either half of each year or every other year in the new capital of Edo (present-day Tokyo), where their wives and children were sometimes required to live permanently. Zen Buddhism was supplanted as the prevailing intellectual force by a form of neo-Confucianism, a philosophy formulated in Song-dynasty China that emphasized loyalty to the state. More drastically, Japan was soon closed off from the rest of the world by its suspicious government. Japanese were forbidden to travel abroad, and with the exception of small Chinese and Dutch trading communities on an island off the southern port of Nagasaki, foreigners were not permitted in Japan.

Edo society was officially divided into four classes. Samurai officials constituted the highest class, followed by farmers, artisans, and finally merchants. As time went on, however, merchants began to control the money supply, and in Japan’s increasingly mercantile economy they soon reached a high, if unofficial, position. Reading and writing became widespread at all levels of society. Many segments of the population—samurai, merchants, intellectuals, and even townspeople—were now able to patronize artists, and a pluralistic cultural atmosphere developed unlike anything Japan had experienced before.

### The Tea Ceremony

The rebuilding of temples continued during the first decades of the Edo period, and for this purpose government officials, monks, and wealthy merchants needed to cooperate. The tea ceremony was one way that people of different classes could come together for intimate conversations. Every utensil connected with tea, including the waterpot, the kettle, the bam-

## Sequencing Works of Art

1582	Sen no Rikyu. Tai-an tearoom, Myoki-an Temple, Kyoto
1601–09	Himeji Castle, Hyogo
17th century	Tawaraya Sotatsu. Matsushima screens
Late 17th–early 18th century	Ogata Korin. Lacquer box for writing implements
Mid-18th century	Suzuki Harunobu. <i>Geisha as Daruma Crossing the Sea</i>

boo spoon, the whisk, the tea caddy, and, above all, the teabowl, came to be appreciated for their aesthetic qualities, and many works of art were created for use in *cha no yu*.

The age-old Japanese admiration for the natural and the asymmetrical found full expression in tea ceramics. Korean-style rice bowls made for peasants were suddenly considered the epitome of refined taste, and tea masters urged potters to mimic their imperfect shapes. But not every misshapen bowl would be admired. An extremely rarified appreciation of beauty developed that took into consideration such factors as how well a teabowl fit into the hands, how subtly the shape and texture of the bowl appealed to the eye, and who had previously used and admired it. For this purpose, the inscribed box became almost as important as the ceramic that fit within it, and if a bowl had been given a name by a leading tea master, it was especially treasured by later generations.

One of the finest teabowls extant is named **MOUNT FUJI** after Japan’s most sacred peak (FIG. 25–9). (Mount Fuji is



25–9 | Hon’ami Koetsu **TEABOWL, CALLED MOUNT FUJI**  
Edo period, early 17th century. Raku ware, height 3 3/8”  
(8.5 cm). Sakai Collection, Tokyo.

Connoisseurs developed a subtle vocabulary to discuss the aesthetics of tea. A favorite term was *sabi* (literally, “loneliness”), which refers to the tranquility found when feeling alone. Other virtues were *wabi* (literally, “poverty”), which suggests the artlessness of humble simplicity, and *shibui*, (literally, “bitter” or “astringent”), meaning elegant restraint, and said to be exemplified by the color of the inside of an old teapot.

# Elements of Architecture

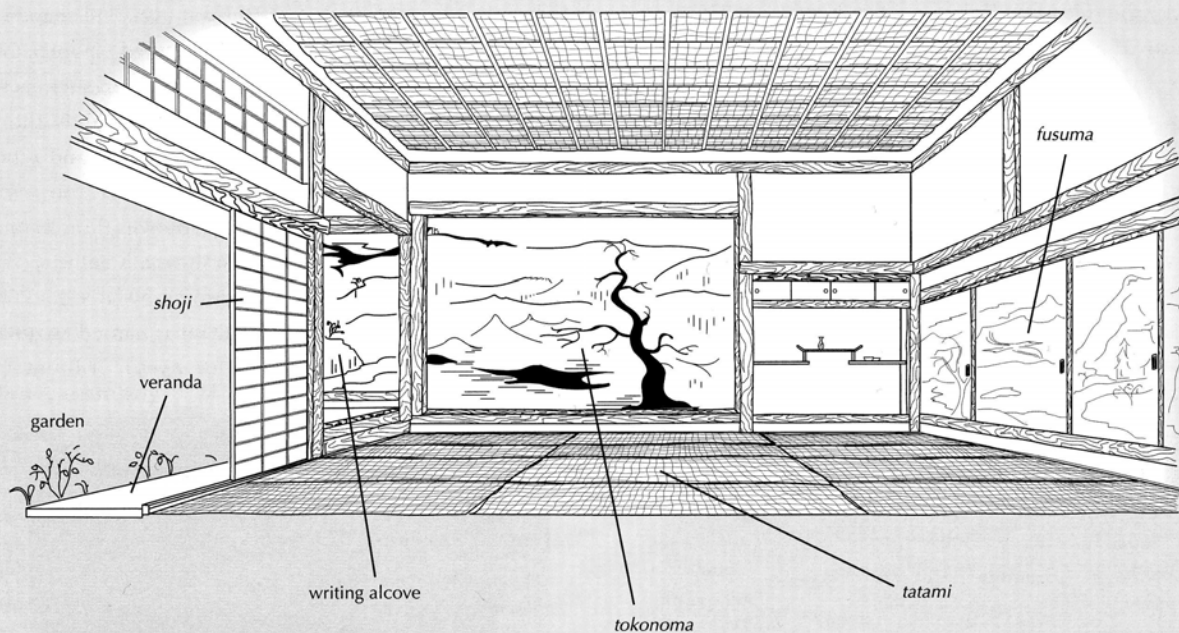
## SHOIN DESIGN

Of the many expressions of Japanese taste that reached great refinement in the Momoyama period, *shoin* architecture has had perhaps the most enduring influence. *Shoin* are upper-class residences that combine a number of traditional features in more-or-less standard ways, always asymmetrically. These features include wide verandas, wood posts as framing and defining decorative elements, woven straw *tatami* mats as floor and ceiling covering, several shallow alcoves for prescribed purposes, *fusuma* (sliding doors) as fields for painting or textured surfaces, and *shoji* screens—wood frames covered with translucent rice paper. The *shoin* illustrated here was built in 1601 as a guest hall, called Kojo-in, at the great Onjo-ji monastery. *Tatami*, *shoji*, alcoves, asymmetry, and other features of *shoin* are still seen in Japanese interiors today.

In the original *shoin*, one of the alcoves would contain a hanging scroll, an arrangement of flowers, or a large painted

screen. Seated in front of that alcove, called a *tokonoma*, the owner of the house would receive guests, who could contemplate the object above the head of their host. Another alcove contained staggered shelves, often for writing instruments. A writing space fitted with a low writing desk was on the veranda side of the room, with *shoji* that could open to the outside.

The architectural harmony of *shoin* was based on the proportionate disposition of basic units, or *modules*. In Japanese carpentry, the common module of design and construction is the *bay*, reckoned as the distance from the center of one post to the center of another, which is governed in turn by the standard size of *tatami* floor mats. Although varying slightly from region to region, the size of a single *tatami* is about 3 by 6 feet. Room area in Japan is still expressed in terms of the number of *tatami* mats, so that, for example, a room may be described as an eight-mat room.



**GUEST HALL, KOJO-IN, ONJO-JI MONASTERY**  
Shiga prefecture. Momoyama period. 1601.

depicted in FIGURE 25–1.) An example of *raku* ware—a hand-built, low-fired ceramic developed especially for use in the tea ceremony—the bowl was crafted by Hon’ami Koetsu (1558–1637), a leading cultural figure of the early Edo period. Koetsu was most famous as a calligrapher, but he was also a painter, lacquer designer, poet, landscape gardener, connoisseur of swords, and potter. With its small foot, straight sides, slightly irregular shape, and crackled texture, this bowl

exemplifies tea taste. In its rough exterior we sense directly the two elements of earth and fire that create pottery. Merely looking at it suggests the feeling one would get from holding it, warm with tea, cupped in one’s hands.

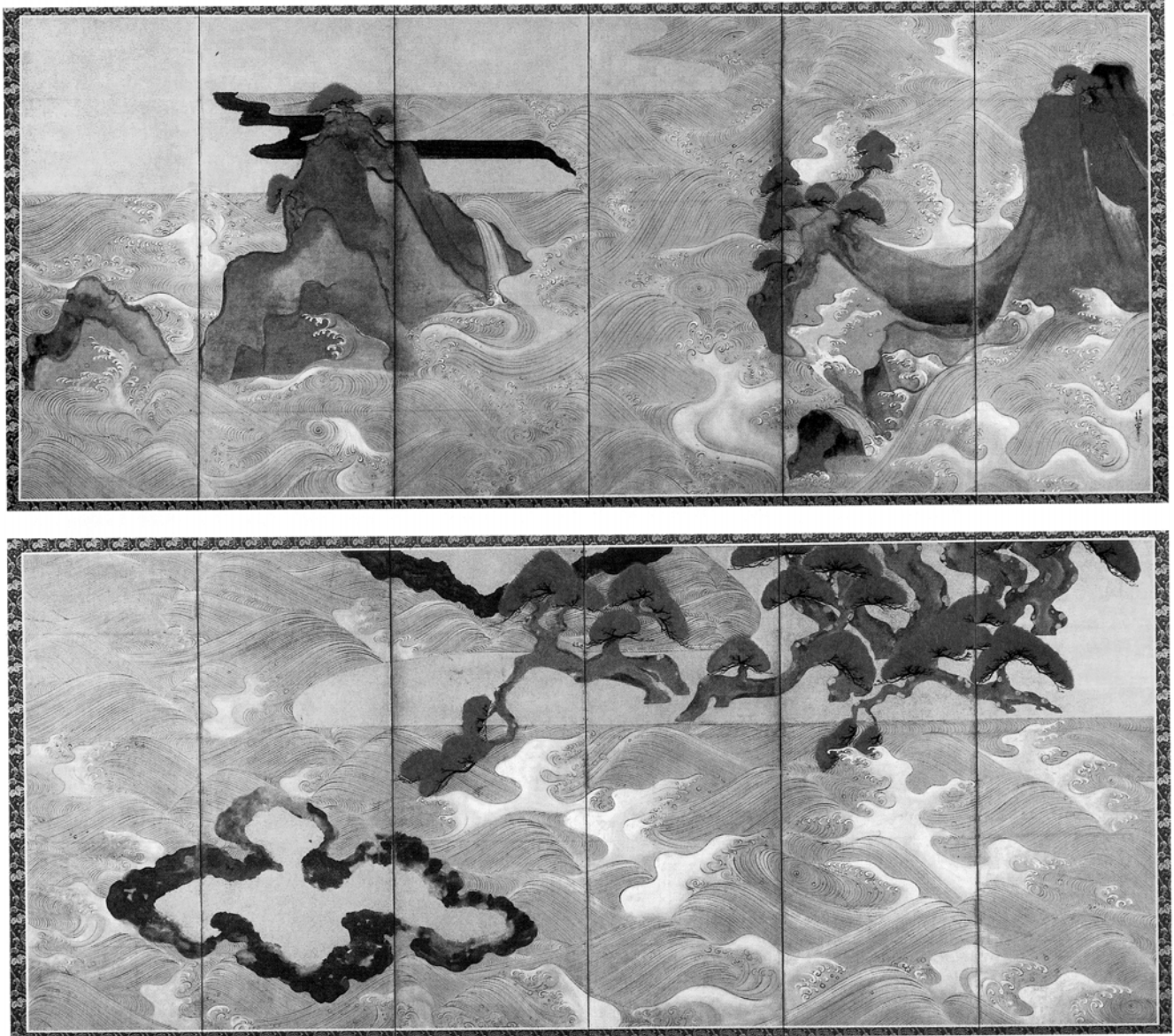
### Rimpa School Painting

One of Koetsu’s friends was the painter Tawaraya Sotatsu (active c. 1600–40), with whom he collaborated on several

magnificent handscrolls. Sotatsu is considered the first great painter of the Rimpa school, a grouping of artists with similar tastes rather than a formal school, such as the Kano school. Rimpa masters excelled in decorative designs of strong expressive force, and they frequently worked in several mediums.

Sotatsu painted some of the finest golden screens that have survived. The splendid pair here depict the celebrated islands of Matsushima near the northern city of Sendai

(FIG. 25-10). Working in a boldly decorative style, the artist has created asymmetrical and almost abstract patterns of waves, pines, and island forms. On the right screen (shown here on top), mountainous islands echo the swing and sweep of the waves, with stylized gold clouds in the upper left. The left screen continues the gold clouds until they become a sand spit from which twisted pines grow. Their branches seem to lean toward a strange island in the lower left, composed of an



**25-10 | Tawaraya Sotatsu PAIR OF SIX-PANEL SCREENS, KNOWN AS THE MATSUSHIMA SCREENS**

Edo period, 17th century. Ink, mineral colors, and gold leaf on paper; each screen 4'9 7/8" × 11'8 1/2" (1.52 × 3.56 m). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1906.231 & 232)

The six-panel screen format was a triumph of scale and practicality. Each panel consisted of a light wood frame surrounding a lattice-work interior covered with several layers of paper. Over this foundation was pasted a high-quality paper, silk, or gold-leaf ground, ready to be painted by the finest artists. Held together with ingenious paper hinges, a screen could be folded for storage or transportation, resulting in a mural-size painting light enough to be carried by a single person, ready to be displayed as needed.