

Sumptuous and Sublime:



Two Japanese Rooms

TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Background information in this teacher's guide is adapted from material prepared by Matthew Welch, Curator of Japanese and Korean Art at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



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A Brief Summary of Japanese History

Prehistoric

Jomon ca. 10,000 B.C.-ca. B.C. 300
Yayoi ca. 300 B.C.-ca. A.D. 300
Kofun ca. 300-710

Prehistoric clans or tribal kingdoms ruled by priest-chiefs evolve into a unified state patterned after China. Origins of imperial dynasty.

Ancient

Nara 710-94
Heian 794-1192

Power centered around imperial court. All aspects of court culture influenced by T'ang Dynasty China. Buddhism adopted as state religion. Monasteries increase in power.

Middle Ages

Kamakura 1192-1333

Military dictatorship of shoguns established. Emperor stripped of any real power.

Northern and Southern Dynasties 1333-92
Muromachi 1392-1573
(Warring States 1482-1573)

Civil wars among private samurai armies of feudal barons (daimyo). Birth of middle class with rise of manufacturing and trade. First contact with Europeans (1542).

Premodern

Azuchi-Momoyama 1573-1603

Edo 1603-1868

Shogun reestablishes control over whole country. Rigid social hierarchy ensures a period of stability and peace. No contact with foreigners allowed. Japan forced to open to trade with foreigners by Adm. Perry (1854).

Early Modern/Modern

Meiji 1868-1912
Taishō 1912-26
Shōwa 1926-89
Heisei 1989 to present

Shogunate collapses. Emperor "Meiji" restored to power as head of nation-state.

Audience Hall (Shoin)



A new style of architecture emerged in Japan during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). As local warlords grew more powerful during this era, they eagerly built lavish palace-castles to demonstrate their new power and importance.

The new style of building came to be known as the shoin (sho-EEN) style after the most impressive rooms within these palatial interiors. Shoin literally means “writing hall” or “study,” but such rooms were frequently used to receive important guests and for formal ceremonies.

Shoin Essentials:

tokonoma

a raised alcove for the display of hanging scrolls and other works of art

chigaidana

built-in staggered shelves for displaying art objects

tsukeshoin

low built-in desk, usually incorporating a window to take advantage of outside light

fusuma

plain or decoratively painted sliding doors that divide rooms

tatami mats

floor covering made of straw covered with rush matting

The most formal room in a shoin-style structure typically contained several fixed elements: a decorative alcove (tokonoma), staggered shelves (chigaidana), a built-in desk (tsukeshoin), and decorative doors and sliding wall partitions (fusuma). Wall-to-wall tatami mats, finely woven straw covered with rush reeds and edged with silk brocade, covered the floor, making it more comfortable to sit on since the Japanese did not customarily use chairs. (A room's dimensions are measured in tatami mats, each 90 x 180 centimeters, in Japan even today.)

The most impressive shoin rooms were constructed within the palace-castles of Japan's great warlords. The enormous dimensions of these rooms (as large as 80 tatami mats), their gilt walls and painted sliding doors, and the sumptuous display of Chinese art objects in the tokonoma and chigaidana reflected their owner's power and prestige. Less flamboyant but equally elegant rooms were constructed within the abbot's quarters of Buddhist temples and in the homes of high ranking government officials.

At 10 tatami mats, the museum's audience hall is a replica of a shoin room within the abbot's quarters of the Konchi'in, a sub-temple in the vast Zen monastery of Nanzanji in eastern Kyoto built in the second quarter of the 17th century. It represents the jodan, the most formal shoin room. The sliding doors opposite the tokonoma would have opened onto a slightly less formal room, the chudan. When receiving an audience, the temple's abbot would have sat alone with an attendant in the jodan looking out into the chudan, where the other participants sat along the side walls in rows determined by their rank and status.

Where's the tsukeshoin?

The model for the museum's audience hall includes all the typical elements of the Shoin style. The replica room is missing the tsukeshoin, or desk, which would have been located against the wall left open in the gallery installation, adjoined by a veranda.

The tokonoma and chigaidana served to display treasured collections of Chinese art. The works of art on display—typically painted hanging scrolls, ceramics, and bronzes—were not admired merely for their beauty. They were as well a measure of an individual's power and status. The Japanese warrior class looked to Chinese philosophy, government, and culture as models for reshaping their own culture (and asserting their authority to rule) after the frivolous excesses of the Heian imperial court. Extensive collections of Chinese art were a powerful status symbol and the subject of competitive connoisseurship.

The museum's Shoin room showcases a masterpiece from the permanent collection, a set of four painted screens dating from around the time of the construction of the original room. Although unsigned, the set is believed to be painted by Kano Sansetsu (1589-1651) who succeeded his father, Sanraku, as head of the Kano school in Kyoto after Sanraku's death in 1635. The Kano school painters were favorites of the warrior rulers as they decorated their castles. Like other Kano artists, Kano Sansetsu often painted Chinese-inspired themes, rendering them with heavy ink outlines. Nevertheless, Kano artists developed a bold, decorative style (sumptuous colors, relatively flat pictorial space, and extensive use of gold leaf and sprinkled gold) that reflects Japanese tastes. While Kano school artists often painted powerful tigers or massive pine trees, here Kano Sansetsu has taken the theme of eight legendary Chinese Taoist immortals in a garden setting. The screens would have helped create an exotic, otherworldly atmosphere entirely appropriate for the abbot's quarters at Gyokurin-in (Myoshinji temple) in Kyoto, where the screens originally stood.



Kano Sansetsu (Japan, 1589-1651), **Taoist Immortals**, ca. 1647
Ink, colors and gold on paper
The Putnam Dana McMillan Fund 63.37.1

The immortals, from right to left:

Liu Hai. Liu Hai was a Grand Councillor during China's Five Dynasties period who became skilled at herbal medicine and the secrets of Inner Alchemy. According to legend, he once caught a white toad while drawing water from a well, and the two became inseparable companions. Shown in the Institute's screens playfully dangling a string with coins attached before his toad.

Lan Ts'ai-ho. Sometimes represented as a woman in a blue gown, shown in the MIA screens as a man with a blue cape. Is said to have wandered the streets as a beggar while beseeching people to abandon fleeting passions and attend to their salvation. Her attribute is a basket of flowers.

Li T'ieh-kuai. Said to be able to exhale his soul from his body and thus travel great distances. Once when his soul had been gone for several days, his young disciple assumed that he had abandoned his mortal body, so he cremated it. When Li T'ieh-kuai's soul returned, it had no place to reside and had to settle for the recently deceased body of a beggar. Hence, he is always shown in tattered clothes and with his crutch.

Han Hsiang-tzu. A famous scholar who is said to have lived in the 9th century. He was believed to make flowers blossom out of season. Was taken to the peach tree of immortality of Lu Tung-pin. His attribute is a flute and he is the patron saint of musicians.

Chung-li Ch'uan. Considered to the leader of the Eight Immortals. Typically depicted as a robust strong man with his chest exposed and wearing a skirt or cape of leaves.

Chang Kuo-lao. A gifted magician, supposedly lived hundreds of years and is thus shown as an old man.

Lu Tung-pin. Renowned scholar who is said to have learned the secrets of Taoism from Chung-li Ch'uan, leader of the Eight Immortals. He overcame any number of temptations through the power of his supernatural sword, shown in the MIA screens strapped to his back. He is shown preparing to burn incense.

Ts'ao Kuo-chiu. Said to have been the brother of Empress Ts'ao Hou of the Sung dynasty, and is thus shown in court robes and a scholar's cap. He is typically depicted holding a pair of clappers or castanets.

Ho Hsien-ku. Said to have been a shopkeeper's daughter, who gained immortality by eating a supernatural peach, powdered mother-of-pearl, and moonbeams. She is depicted with a basket of ling-chi mushrooms, peaches, or a lotus flower. Her she is depicted as a man holding a lotus pod.

Teahouse (Chashitsu)



The tea ceremony has influenced Japanese architecture, garden design, painting, calligraphy, ceramics, lacquerware, flower arranging, and even food preparation since its refinement in Japan's Middle Ages.

The tea ceremony itself follows tightly prescribed formal rules. The actions of both tea master and guests are dictated by traditions that evolved in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, a tea master strives to make each tea ceremony a unique experience for the participants. He or she carefully orchestrates every detail, selecting appropriate wares and decorations that will reflect the tastes of the guests, the season, and even the time of day. Each tea ceremony becomes a unique and complex experience, with every aspect recorded by the tea master in a tea "journal." Yet at its core, the ceremony remains a simple act of sharing a bowl of tea in a calm and contemplative atmosphere.

Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism came to Japan from China. It differs from other forms of Buddhism in its central focus on the practice of meditation. The austere discipline and practical approach of Zen appealed to the warrior-rulers of Japan in the Middle Ages. The tea ceremony as such was not part of Zen practice, but its development was greatly influenced by Zen philosophy.

The Japanese Zen priest Eisai introduced the custom of drinking matcha, powdered tea mixed with hot water, in 1191 after a trip to China. At first, Japanese Zen monks drank this new form of tea during special religious ceremonies and as a means to stay awake during long hours of meditation. Gradually, the popularity of drinking powdered tea rose among Japan's military elite during the Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi (1333-1573) periods and lavish tea gatherings were held in the formal reception rooms (shoin) of their impressive residences. These tea gatherings were opportunities for showing off collections of fine Chinese treasures, while warrior-connoisseurs demonstrated their knowledge in lengthy and boisterous tea-tasting competitions.

Three renowned tea masters, Murata Shuko (1423-1502), Takeno Joo (1502-1555), and Sen Rikyu (1522-1591) reacted against the decadence of these events and advocated a solemnity more akin to the monastic tea rituals. These men developed an aesthetic known as wabi, variously translated as "poverty," "rusticity," and "imperfection," in which the serving of tea was greatly simplified. Although tea objects were still collected and admired, much less emphasis was placed on the material aspects of serving tea.

Japan's greatest tea master, Sen Rikyu, served the shoguns Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. In addition to staging grand tea ceremonies that reflected his warlords' flamboyant tastes, Rikyu further refined the wabi aesthetic. He, too, believed that an extremely rustic setting should be used, as well as such natural tea utensils as bamboo whisks and ladles and low-fired rough tea bowls.

Rikyu also championed the idea of a soan (so-AN), literally a "grass hut," as the ideal setting for tea. A soan was a detached structure in a garden setting, often not far from the grand Shoin-style structures of a warrior-ruler's estate. Small in scale and rustic in nature, the soan was built using easily obtained materials like local woods, bamboo and thatch. While some architectural elements were milled, others were left natural. In keeping with the humble spirit of wabi tea, Rikyu designed the nijiriguchi, a low entranceway (roughly 24 inches square) through which all guests had to crawl. The tokonoma and the use of tatami mats were adopted from shoin architecture, but the small scale of the teahouse limited the number of mats and greatly reduced the size of the tokonoma. Decoration, in any case, was limited to one or two objects.

Inspiration in Chinese art



Japanese tea masters found inspiration for the "grass-hut" style of teahouse in images of rustic huts in Chinese landscape painting, like the one shown in this detail. The life of an isolated hermit was idealized in Chinese philosophy and art.

Besides the works of art on display in the tokonoma (commonly a scroll with a Zen teaching and a vase with seasonally appropriate flowers), the tea master carefully selected utensils for all aspects of the tea ceremony. Items such as tea bowls, tea caddies, tea scoops, kettles and lid-rests, fresh-water jars, waste-water jars, and incense containers all played a part in establishing the mood of the occasion. These utensils were treasured for their wabi characteristics, but also for the history of their previous owners. A simple wooden well-bucket used by Sen Rikyu, for example, was extremely treasured by later generations. Well-known utensils even came to have their own names. The culture of the tea ceremony continues in Japan to this day following the traditions developed by Sen Rikyu and his contemporary tea masters.

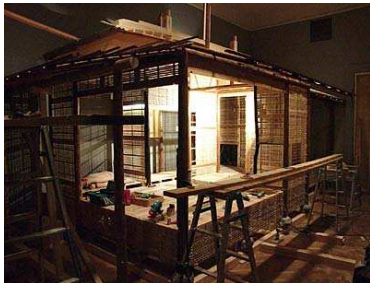


The museum's new teahouse is based on the Sa-an, an 18th century teahouse within the Zen monastery of Daitokuji in Kyoto. It was originally built by a wealthy merchant who may have been inspired to build the Sa-an in Rikyu's rustic style while attending a tea ceremony the previous year on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Rikyu's death.

An Introduction to the Vocabulary of Tea

Chanoyu	Term used for the tea ceremony in Japan (literally “hot water for tea”)
Chashitsu	Teahouse or tea room
Roji	Tea garden (literally “dewy path”)
Tobi ishi	Stepping stone path, usually irregularly placed
Tsukubai	Basin for ritual ablutions prior to entering the teahouse
Toro	Stone lantern, ideally modestly scaled and salvaged from a derelict temple
Chiriana	Dust pit, carefully shaped hole ostensibly used to hold garden waste, but more symbolic than useful
Katana-kake	Sword rack
Roji-zori	Straw sandals worn in the roji
Nijiriguchi	Small entrance to the teahouse
Tokonoma	Alcove for displaying art
Tokobashira	Post to the right of the tokonoma, often a specially chosen tree admired for its natural beauty
Nakabashira	Post in the center of the room that helps define the tea master’s area, also chosen for its natural beauty
Shitajimado	Window made by leaving underlying lathe exposed
Sadoguchi	Door through which the tea master enters
Kyujiguchi	Assistant’s entrance
Mizuya	Preparation area

Japanese Rooms In Minneapolis



The Yasuimoku Komuten Company Ltd., a construction firm doing business in Kyoto, Japan, since the mid-17th century, built the museum's replica audience hall and teahouse. The company's president, Hiroshi Yasui, is the 15th generation in a continuous familial line. Although the company builds everything from office buildings to swimming pools, it is renowned in Japan for its historic restorations and buildings in period style. The museum's audience hall was first constructed in Kyoto during the spring of 2001. It was then dismantled and shipped to Minneapolis. Materials for the teahouse were meticulously selected over the course of several years and stored in the company's warehouse, before being shipped to Minneapolis for the construction. A team of nine craftsmen spent the summer reconstructing and finishing the rooms in our Japanese galleries.

After constructing the audience hall and teahouse within the museum's galleries, the company's craftsmen conducted a traditional ceremony to ritualistically purify the rooms and to ask the gods to protect them from future damage. They inscribed two wooden tablets. One describes the project, mentioning the names of all individuals who participated. On the other tablet they wrote the names of three Shinto deities, each associated with water, in the hope that they would insure that the structures would never burn. Finally, they affixed a folk-style mask of the Okame, the Shinto goddess of fecundity who is especially associated with the earth and bountiful harvest. In Japan, these dedicatory items would be carefully placed in the ceiling rafters of a newly constructed building—and they will be so placed in the museum gallery as well.

See Quicktime Video footage of the construction process at www.artsmia.org/arts-of-asia/japan.

Interested in Reading More?

All of the titles listed here are available through the Minneapolis Public Library

Fujioka, Ryoichi. *Tea Ceremony Utensils*. Arts of Japan Series, vol. 3. (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill/Shibundo, 1973)

Explanations and examples of tea utensils, organized by type of utensil.

Hashimoto, Fumio (trans. And adapted by H. Mack Horton). *Architecture in the Shoin Style: Japanese Feudal Residences*. (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1981)

A scholarly review of existing examples of shoin structures.

Hayashita, T. et al. *Japanese Arts and the Tea Ceremony*. Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art, vol. 15. (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1974)

A detailed history of the tea ceremony and the contributions made by the great tea masters.

Kakuzo, Okakura. *The Book of Tea, the Illustrated Classic Edition*. (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000)

An elegant reissue of a 1906 classic, written to introduce the culture of tea and Japanese aesthetics to a Western audience at the salon of Isabella Stewart Gardner.

Nishi, Kazuo and Kazuo Hozumi. *What is Japanese Architecture? A Survey of Traditional Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985)

A scholarly explanation of different architectural styles throughout Japan's history. Of particular interest to the beginner is the inclusion of a multitude of line drawings of architectural details in prints and drawings of the era being described.

Sen, Soshitsu. *Chado: The Japanese Way of Tea*. (New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1979)

A 15th-generation tea master in the Urasenke tradition presents the tea ceremony as it is practiced today. Photographs and commentary provide a sense of the intricate details prescribed by tradition.

Tanaka, Sen'o and Sendo Tanaka. *The Tea Ceremony*. (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973, revised 1998)

A very readable history of tea in Japan and description of the tea ceremony, illustrated by many excellent photographs.

Varley, Paul and Kumakura Isao, eds. *Tea in Japan: Essays of the History of Chanoyu*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989)

An interesting compilation of essays for those who wish to explore the development of tea culture in Japan in greater depth.

Ideas for Exploration

How is creativity expressed within set rules?

How does the built environment influence impressions of power and status?

Why might one culture borrow from another culture? How does it happen? How are the borrowed elements changed in the process?

How do art forms interact in Japanese culture?

Exploration Activity: Audience Hall

Read the following English traveller's account of a visit to the shogun in the audience hall at Edo Castle in 1616:

The Emperours pallis is a huge thing, all the rums being gilded with gould, both over head and upon the walls, except som mixture of paynting amonst of Lyons, tigers, onces, panthers, eagles, and other beastes and fowles, very lyvely drawne and more esteemed then the gilding. ... [The Emperour] sat alone upon a place something rising with 1 step, and had a silk *katabira* of a bright blew on his backe. He set upon the mattes crossleged lyke a telier; and som 3 or 4 *bozu* or pagon priests on his right hand in a rowme something lower. None, no not *Kozuke Dono*, nor his secretary, might not enter into the rowme where he sat ... all the rowmes in his pallis under foote are covered with mattes edged with damask or cloth or gould, and lye so close joyned on to an other that yow canot put the point of a knife betwixt them.

Now look carefully at the audience hall in the galleries.
How is it similar to the description of the shogun's audience hall? How is it different?

Write a description of the room to help someone who isn't here imagine it.

Exploration Activity: Teahouse

Japanese tea masters of the 16th century found inspiration for the "grass-hut" style of teahouse in images of rustic huts they saw in Chinese paintings, like the one shown in this detail.



Look carefully at the teahouse in the gallery. How is it similar to the hut in the Chinese scroll? How is it different?

What different materials do you see used in the construction of the teahouse? What parts seem natural? What do not? Sketch some of the details you notice.

Exploration Activity: Teahouse

A tea ceremony follows a detailed routine specified by tradition. To someone unfamiliar with the tradition, it may seem like very little is happening, in almost complete silence. But the tea master's goal is to create a relaxing environment that stimulates all the senses.

Read the description of a simple tea ceremony on the back of this page while looking carefully at the teahouse. If you were a guest at a tea ceremony here, what small sounds, smells, or tastes would you notice? Make a list as you read.

Tea ceremony action	Sensation

How might the environment of the teahouse intensify the sensory experience?

A simple Japanese tea ceremony

Before guests arrive for a tea ceremony, the host thoroughly cleans both the tearoom and the surrounding garden. Then he lays a fire in the sunken hearth or brazier and puts a kettle on to boil. In the tokonoma, an alcove at one side of the small room, he hangs a scroll and arranges flowers. When the guests arrive, they move silently, in single file, through the garden, rinse their hands and mouths at a stone basin filled with clean water, and crouch to enter the low doorway of the tearoom. Each guest gazes quietly at the tokonoma for a moment before taking his place in a row facing the hearth where the tea will be prepared.

The host opens the door from the adjoining pantry and greets his guests. He then carries in, group by group, the jar of fresh water; the tea bowl, tea scoop, and tea caddy; and finally the waste-water jar and bamboo ladle. These, together with the kettle, utensils for tending the fire, incense case and burner, and utensils for eating the simple delicacies that are served with the tea or for the meal that sometimes precedes it, are objects of connoisseurship.

After placing all the objects in their proper locations, within easy reach, the host takes his place by the hearth, facing his guests. Using a silk napkin, he wipes the tea scoop and the ladle. After placing the kettle lid on its special stand, he pours a ladleful of water from the kettle into the bowl, washes the bamboo whisk, empties the water into the waste-water jar, and wipes the tea bowl with a clean cotton cloth. Taking up the tea scoop and tea caddy, he puts two scoopfuls of tea in the bowl and replaces the caddy in front of the fresh-water jar. He pours a ladleful of hot water into the bowl and whisks the tea into a pale green foam. He presents the bowl to the first guest and bows. Before returning his emptied bowl to the host, the guest is expected to spend a few moments examining the bowl closely, remarking upon its fine points, and even passing it to other guests for inspection. While each guest is partaking of his bowl of tea, the host cleans the bowl used by the preceding guest and replenishes the kettle from the fresh-water jar. When he has served all the guests, the host withdraws, carrying the ladle, lid rest, and waste-water jar; he returns for the tea caddy and tea bowl, and finally for the fresh-water jar. His bow to the guests from the threshold of the pantry signifies the completion of the ceremony.

From Ryoichi Fujioka, Tea Ceremony Utensils, p. 11

Exploration Activity: Audience Hall

An audience hall in the shoin (sho-EEN) style always includes most of the features on the list below. Look carefully at the room and see if you can identify them based on the descriptions below. (Hint: One wall is missing from our room so you can see inside— which feature is not included in the museum's room because it would have been on that wall?)

tokonoma

a raised alcove for the display of hanging scrolls and other works of art

chigaidana

built-in staggered shelves for displaying art objects

tsukueshoin

low built-in desk, usually incorporating a window to take advantage of outside light

fusuma

plain or decoratively painted sliding doors that divide rooms

tatami mats

floor covering made of straw covered with rush matting

How else might the room be arranged and still include all these elements? Sketch a few possibilities in the space below.

Exploration Activity: Tea ceremony utensils

The great tea masters of the 16th century wanted the tea ceremony to express the idea of *wabi*. *Wabi* is a very difficult word to define. Translators have used the ideas of "poverty," "rusticity," and "imperfection." The great 16th century tea master Shuko described it with an example: "Even the moon is displeasing without clouds."

Look carefully at the tea utensils displayed in the teahouse and in the wall cases. What do you see that might help explain the idea of *wabi*? How would you describe it?

Tea masters sometimes use commonplace objects as tea utensils in the *wabi* spirit. In the 16th century Sen Rikyu used an old well-water bucket, for example, and made a flower container out of a hollowed-out piece of bamboo. What commonplace objects around your house might a creative tea master use in the *wabi* spirit in place of the ones you see in the galleries?