

JAPANESE TEA HOUSE



Accession Number 2001.204.1 G225

“SAMURAI BAN SWORDS & OTHER WEAPONS ON THESE PREMISES”

BY AMALGAMATED LEAGUE OF SAMURAI & TEA MASTERS

MIA teahouse & audience hall are both replicas constructed by Yasuimoku Komuten Company Ltd., a construction company in Kyoto Japan. The name of the Tea House is ‘Hermitage of the Meditative Heart’ translated from the Japanese.

Artisans at the Kyoto company selected the teahouse components over the course of several years. They were then shipped to MIA. A team of 9 craftsmen constructed the tea house over the summer of 2001 for MIA Japanese galleries.

It is a unique design based on the Sa-an an 18th Century tea house within the Zen monastery of Daitokuji in Kyoto. The monastery is designated as one of Japan’s ‘Important Cultural Properties’ The original ideal of size for a tea house was a hermit’s hut—plain and small. This became the structure to hold only 4 or 5 persons during the Tea Ceremony itself.

Elements for Tour: East Asian Art; Japanese Art; South East Asian Art; Making Peace Art in the Spirit of Renewal ie MIA Public Tour September 2011.

Questions for use w/Tour Groups:

1. What is your overall feeling when you look closely at the Japanese Tea House & its garden/Entry area?
Response: Serenity, calmness, sense of invitation to a special place, a place for a special event.
2. What elements of the Tea House gives you that feeling?
Response: proportion, size of rooms for few people, quiet elegance-rustic, worn, unfinished, not rococo or busy, unpretentious.
3. The Tea Ceremony developed to encourage a tea master and guests to have a once in a life time moment together. How do you & family & friends celebrate a once in a life time moment?
Response: Family: mother and baby coming home from a birthing at a hospital; Birthday; Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner; Passover or Easter dinner w/family & friends.

Theme Making Peace: Art in the Spirit of Renewal: The physical structure and proportion of the MIA Tea House reflect the cultural values of meditation and group communal sharing which developed through the history & religious intellectual life of Japan in the 14-18th Centuries. The pattern of approved behavior during the ritual of the Tea Ceremony is to trigger a shared relaxation, both physical & mental, among guests and the tea master. The purpose is to assist the guests in withdrawing from the dailyness of their tasks and then to consider nature, a closeness to its rewards & benefits. All this to include the group enjoying time together as friends drinking tea.

The Tea House is included in the tour 'Making Peace: Art in the Spirit of Renewal' because of its democratic & peaceful purpose. This is symbolized by an ancient & iron clad rule: samurai might participate as equals with other lords & commoners but each was required to remove any sword or weapon before entering the Tea House. Thus I give you my proposed motto below the picture of the Japanese Tea House. This edits the current proscription at our front entrance: "MIA bans guns & other weapons on these premises."

This weaponry rule is both product & result of the role of samurai in Japanese society in the 14-18th Centuries. Not just thugs on horses, samurai were a cultural elite-educated gentlemen, active military men-but also knowledgeable in art, literature & philosophy. With this ideal of an educated elite samurai thus participated in the Tea ceremony; the peace of the ceremony, however, mandated removal of the swords on entry.

The MIA Tea House has a rack for swords just to the left of the entry port on the Tea House. If you decide to use this object on a tour, be sure to point out the rack & its purpose.

MIA's banning is to the same effect as the requirement that samurai must leave their weapons behind on entering the Tea House. The building was & is to be a safe place for all, samurai, commoners and any participant in the tea ceremony. MIA is also to be a safe place for all, people on the tour and the docent, too.

CHANOYU OR 'HOT WATER FOR TEA' is the Japanese word for the Tea Ceremony. As stated earlier, its purpose is to supply the tea master and guests a temporary withdrawal from the mundane world of tasks and making a living, to remove the group of 4 or 5 to a one time moment together appreciating the space & the structure as well as the skill of the tea master and his tea.

This ritual began to develop in the Momomaya period during the 16th Century. While one element of Japanese culture moved to an elaborate & richly decorated architecture, another and somewhat contradictory cultural value grew up. This is a counter-aesthetic of rustic simplicity influenced by Zen Buddhism. Samurai, as a military caste, the bourgeoisie and lords in their castles favored the weathered, the unfinished, the unpretentious. All this is encompassed in the size of the rooms of the Tea House itself originally modeled on a hermit's hut. Further the architecture & its setting in a garden being the entryway all were designed to prompt a guest to participate quietly and mentally in the moment with the tea master.

In a thumbnail sketch, the Zen Buddhist influence is described by two terms: **wabi** a mind stimulated to a contemplation of the essence of reality by encountering and accepting the rustic; **sabi** the aesthetic pleasure of the senses contemplating the rustic, the worn or 'found' objects, not completely finished; unsophisticated; the appreciation of natural items. These elements of Zen Buddhism were to encourage a person to be honest, prudent & self-restrained. From this viewpoint the four main aspects of the tea ceremony are serenity (within ones self), harmony (w/surroundings and in life & living), respect (for all things and people), & finally purity (of motive)

STRUCTURE OF THE MIA TEA HOUSE: As you present the Tea House, let's look at it from left to right, starting with the garden. The garden is well shown in the photo at the beginning of this essay.

GARDEN OR 'ROJI' Translated this means 'Dewy path' It began as a place of quiet removed from the city's hustle & bustle and has taken on a spiritual value in the years since the time the name was first used.

An assistant will slightly water the rocks to give the guests the sense of entering a new, different and clean place. As you can understand removing the guest from the day's cares and woes begins at the garden; it is the entrance to the Tea House and the tea ceremony,. The guest must navigate the stepping stones, paying close attention to placing his feet while walking to the entrance. He comes to a stone washbasin near a lantern (both of which are present in the MIA tea house) The hands are wetted, cleaned and dried as the guest approaches the entrance.

It is at this point on entering the tea house the samurai must remove his weapon and place it on the rack outside the tea house entrance.

The largest stone at the entry is to supply a footing for the guest. It is raised above the level of the other stones and can hold both feet.

Note the sliding door to the left of the entrance: this is a classic refinement of Zen rusticity: a piece of older wood with finely finished new woods. This combination of old and new shows the aesthetic of **sabi** mentioned above.

The guests, including samurai without his sword, must bend low to enter the tea house itself. This symbolizes the removal of self from the world of trade & war to enter into a different world-a joint experience with other guests, to appreciate the tea ceremony and the structure of the rooms.

TEA ROOM OR SOAN: Again looking at the MIA entry room, you see an alcove for a vase and a scroll containing a poem. This is to the guest's immediate left. The scroll is the Eight Line Poem: The Bodhisattva Jizo's Seal and Staff Reveal Shining Words." Accession Number 99.117. MIA has a statue of Jizo (ie Gizo) 86.7a-c G226. The combination of the vase and the calligraphy of the poem, as well as the poem itself contribute to the atmosphere in the tea house, enhancing the meditative quality of the tea ceremony moment.

The other doors are for the tea master himself and his assistant. MIA's tea house is a classic structure with shelving for the tea master and his work. Note the fire pit and container for heated water.

One element present but not explicit is the democratic nature of the tea ceremony. No matter who is attending, a lord, samurai, tradesmen, people of varying backgrounds, all are invited by the tea master to celebrate the moment with him. Most importantly all are treated equally in terms of the tea, the utensils, the cups & the seating in the soan.

PERSONAL NOTE: SOURCE FOR THE SECOND TOUR QUESTION: Debbi Hegstrom had an inspired insight when she monitored my tour "Reflective Waters" at the end of our first year. I had included the Japanese Tea House & the Italian Renaissance Fountain in that tour. The fountain in full spray really worked well and I then moved on to the tea house.

On the tour I emphasized water, the marble chips in the garden symbolizing water, the hand washing before entry, the water used in the tea ceremony itself.

Debbi suggestion was to focus on the feelings of serenity found at the fountain & at the tea house. The very sound of the water at the fountain gives that comfortable feeling, that serenity. The architecture of the tea house itself plus a narrative of the tea ceremony also give the observer a sense of serenity. This is a nice contrast of the effort of an artist to create the serenity for the observer, a contrast between hearing and seeing.

I think I will get to that on some other tour.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION: The essay that takes you quickly and deeply into the Japanese Tea Ceremony is Metmuseum.org: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art "The Japanese Tea Ceremony" This is really a gem for grasping what's at play in the structure and how the ritual works.

Other worthy Heilbrunn Timeline of Art essay are: Shoin Room; Samurai; Momoyama Period (1573-1615); Art of the Edo Period (1615-1868), Zen Buddhism.

Asian Art Museum asianart.org Japanese Tea Ceremony. This has a photo of AAM's Tea House.

MIA Library for Docents: photocopy of article: Tanaka Sen'ō & Sendo The Tea Ceremony Introduction, Tea Garden & Tea Ceremony (1973 revised 1998) Quite detailed and parts quite interesting NB no one ever asked them to write a longer article about the Tea Ceremony & the architecture after this one.

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