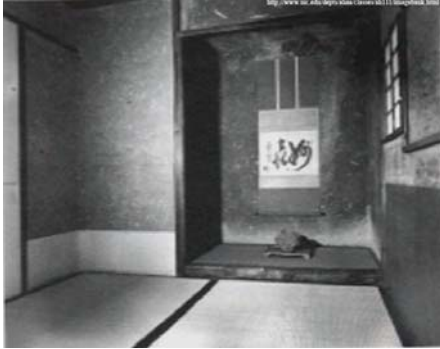


The Japanese Tea House: *Rustic Hut That Holds Infinite Space*

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With the opening of the Downtown Seattle Art Museum's Asian galleries last month, Seattle has a unique exhibit among American museums - a fully functional Japanese tea house. This three-mat tea room is on the third floor, in the middle of a Japan exhibit that highlights works of art that were created expressly for a tea house setting, such as the early seventeenth century Deer Scroll and 16th and 17th century ceramics.

The history of tea in Japan goes back to the twelfth century, when Japanese monks and scholars traveled to China to study Buddhism. In addition to religious and secular learning, they brought tea with them on their return to Japan. The medicinal and stimulant effects of tea caused it to be adopted throughout the country. The Japanese people of this time had a great deal of respect for the long history of culture in China. In addition to scholarly pursuits, the Japanese also imported a vast array of artistic and functional objects, many related to the serving of tea. Collecting of these objects grew so widespread among the ruling classes that the courts created the post of *doboshu* to catalogue and study the utensils.

These court advisors, in time, became the repositories of knowledge about the Chinese rituals relating to tea. Like every other cultural import, the Japanese put on their own indelible stamp. Murata Shuko (1423-1502), tea adviser to the Ashikaga *shogun*, or military ruler of Japan, was the first to create a room devoted to tea gatherings. Takeno Jo-o (1502-55), first organized the serving of tea into a formal ceremony. It was Jo-o who first described the style of rooms in which tea would be served.

A student of Jo-o's, Sen Rikyu (1522-91), became tea adviser to the shogun Oda Nobunaga (1534-83), and then his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98), ruler of Japan from 1582 to 1598. Rikyu grasped the full esthetic and spiritual possibilities of the

Japanese tea ceremony. He is recognized as a pivotal, almost mythic, figure in the history of art in Japan, and the founder of 'the way of tea' as it is practiced today. He swept away pretentiousness in the design of tea houses, searching for a space that would allow spiritual transcendence. Many of the features described by Rikyu are still found in modern tea rooms. Rikyu's students and children carried on the study of tea after his death, and three of the main schools of tea in Japan today trace their lineage back to that time.

The influence of the tea ceremony on Japanese culture is pervasive. Much of the understated nature and subtlety of Japanese art and design can be traced back to the *wabi*, or poverty, esthetic of Rikyu.

Many people assume that the rustic simplicity and quietness symbolized by Rikyu's ideal of poverty have been swept away by the technological marvel that is modern Japan; that the Japanese tea ceremony is a thing of the past. In fact the number of people who study tea is growing. In the Urasenke school alone, one of four main branches of tea, there are two million students within Japan, and another several thousand around the world. There are perhaps a hundred here in Seattle. It may be safe to say that among educated Japanese, virtually every adult has either studied tea or will profess a wish that he or she had.

Those who study tea feel that the quiet mind and spiritual discipline embodied in the simple act of giving and receiving a bowl of tea is the perfect antidote for a hectic world; and in cities in which every building tries to outshine its neighbors, so that the urban experience becomes one of chaos, the "rustic hut that contains infinite space" may be the only chance we have to experience the sublime in architecture.

This article joins one by Ann Cline published in the June/July 1991 issue of ARCADE, in which she imagined what might happen if the Japanese tea ceremony were adopted in the US and turned into a kind of "art experience." Two articles about Japanese tea house architecture promised in the introduction to that article have been combined into the following. This article is a discussion of tea house design, from the point of view of what architects call a "kit of parts." Each piece of the building - walls, floors, picture recess, sliding screens, etc. - is taken in turn, and we discuss historical, functional, and practical aspects of each. Interwoven with this is a narrative description of a typical Japanese tea ceremony, to give an introduction to the activity for which the architecture was created.

The invitation said to arrive fifteen minutes early. You arrive at the address on one of Kyoto's busiest streets twenty minutes before the appointed time. As you walk through the tile-roofed front gate, you notice the carefully landscaped garden, and glance up at the Japanese-style house, with its hipped, tiled roofs and sliding paper screens for walls. In the vestibule you leave your coat and shoes, and change into white socks. As you move into the waiting room, two of the other guests arrive. One of these is the main guest, a seventy year old man. It is in his honor that the host has invited you to a formal tea ceremony, called a chaji. As the elderly man and his helper, a young man in his twenties, are seating themselves in the waiting room, the final guest arrives. This is a middle-aged woman, and she will play the role of last guest, or tsume, the second most important role after the main guest. The host, realizing that the right atmosphere here will help put the guests in the proper mood for tea, has carefully prepared the waiting room. Its decoration is subdued, so as not to detract from that of the tearoom.

Shoin style v. soan style

Tea houses, or *chashitsu*, fall generally into two categories, *shoin*, or reception room style, and *soan*, or grass hut style. Shoin style dates from the thirteenth century in Japan. Shoin style tea houses and dwellings have the following characteristics: sliding paper screens used as room dividers and as the building enclosure; wood sliding shutters used at the exterior to secure the building; a flexible floor plan, with individual rooms serving a variety of functions, and with movable dividers allowing rooms to flow into one another as needs dictate; floors covered with 3'x6' rice straw mats in standard arrangements; an alcove with staggered shelves (*chigaedana*), a bay window with a low writing shelf at the bottom (*tsukeshoin*); and a ceiling of wood planks. Katsura Palace in Kyoto is a classic example. The tea house in Seattle's Japanese Garden is patterned after this style of architecture.

The soan style developed as a distinct style of architecture devoted specifically to the Japanese tea ceremony. Its roots can be traced back to the tea masters Takeno Jo-o, who created rooms devoted specifically to the giving and receiving of tea, and Sen Rikyu, who refined and, some say, perfected the style.

Soan style has its esthetic underpinnings in what the Japanese call *wabi*. The word means "poverty," but it has shadings of "humility," "honesty," and "simplicity." Perhaps it can be best described through a poem that was reportedly one of Rikyu's favorites. It describes the esthetic effect sought in a soan style tea house:

Casting wide my gaze,
Neither flowers
Nor scarlet leaves:
A bayside hovel of reeds
In the autumn dusk.

- Fujiwara Teika
(1162-1241)

Rikyu designed and redesigned tea houses, further refining this ideal of a lack of pretense in materials and design. Surfaces that had been lacquered in earlier styles became bare wood. He changed plaster walls from clean planes to rough mud walls. In some cases he even removed the frames from windows - imitating farmhouse walls in which light and ventilation is through a mere hole broken through the plaster, leaving the bamboo framework beneath exposed. And he relentlessly narrowed the size of the tea room, from four and a half mats (about 9 feet on a side, or 81 square feet) to three mats (54 square feet) to 1-3/4 mats (31-1/2 square feet). His goal was to perfect the tea house as a refuge. He knew that if wealth and power were allowed to cross the threshold, the search for a meaningful experience between people would be tainted. As discussed by Shosei Nakamura in an article called 'Aspects in the Development of Tearoom Design: Jo-o to Modern Times':

Rather than having a room full of famous masterpieces the Japanese prefer a space devoid of anything distracting with one work of art to concentrate attention. This is an aspect of wabi. Yet Rikyu's goal went even beyond this. For him, the universal standard was not having a single focal point but rather achieving wabi without any focus at all....

...The emphasis instead was placed on the world of relationship between the host and the guest. This emphasis on the "concord of hearts" is much more readily achieved in very small rooms of the size Rikyu had determined. In addition, by shrinking the room size he also achieved the concentration of wabi, creating an intensity of relationship by enforcing proximity....

...Rikyu achieved the absolute limits of smallness in which wabi could be successfully experienced.

Shoin style rooms often have one or more walls of paper shoji screens that can be opened, whereas soan style rooms are enclosed on all four sides. The only openings are the guest's entrance, host's entrance, and windows. Soan style tea rooms are generally smaller, and the surfaces and materials are more rustic.

Much of the following article applies to both styles, but the emphasis is on soan style. It is more distinct as a style from other traditional styles of Japanese architecture. I also find it more compelling, because of its refined "anti-esthetic esthetic."

After the last guest announces to the host that all have arrived, the host's assistant (hanto) brings in small cups of hot water on a tray and tells the guests that they may move from the waiting room to the outdoor waiting arbor as soon as they are ready. Proceeding in order from the main guest to the last, each of you steps outside into the straw sandals the host has provided. The last guest remains behind to tidy the cups before leaving the room.

In the waiting arbor, you find a stack of round straw cushions—one for each person—with the top cushion turned upside down and a tobacco smoking set on top. The main guest arranges the cushions along the arbor bench for the four of you, then sits down. This is a pause in which to enjoy the beauty of the roji garden.

Roji - garden

The tea house has always been thought of as a retreat from the chaos of everyday life. All members at a tea gathering are seated on the floor, at the same level. None is higher, none lower. Within the tea room, rank and class are forgotten. In feudal times, guests were required to leave their rank at the door by hanging samurai swords outside the entrance.

This sense of removal is achieved by placing the hut in the midst of a *roji*, or "dewy garden." As guests enter the gate and walk through a small, carefully tended garden, their thoughts turn from life beyond the walls to small touches taken to make the garden pleasant. For a summer gathering, the host has rinsed the stepping stones that lead through the garden. As the guests prepare to enter the tea house, they pause to rinse their hands and mouth at a stone water basin, which the host has covered with a large leaf, to keep the water cool in the summer heat.

The garden is where a host of tricks come into play to make a small space seem large. Not in a physical sense, but an emotional one, where the psyche opens up, even as views of nature are narrowed. If the manipulation of space is deft, guests are prepared to enter the constricted space of the tea house and feel an unfolding of the spirit.

Some of these tricks include a gently curving pathway, so that vistas are limited and there is a process of discovery as one walks through the garden. The stepping stones and pathways are given great attention in garden design, so that the guest is given a series of small gifts. Perhaps the path turns, and as the guest slows, he or she notices a small stone lantern set among the shrubs. A bridge over a small stream has a right angle turn, so that a guest must stop, and in so doing pauses to enjoy a view down the streambed. The route to a waiting shelter might be via the least direct path, so that the guest is led to discover a cherry tree in full bloom.

As one author puts it:

The gently sloped flagstones represent a view of a deep mountain path. The green plants on either side are the forest. A bridge fords the rugged valley; represented by a thin brook. The path alongside the stepping stones is likened to an ageless rustic track.

The appeal of the garden to the guest is suggestive of having struggled over rough seas, steep mountains and deep valleys in order to obtain a bowl of tea.

- Haruzo Ohashi

Meanwhile, the host has been making final preparations for the ceremony. Having made sure that the tearoom is spotlessly clean and added incense to the hearth, he now prepares to present himself to the guests to signal that all is in readiness. The host exits through the room's crawl-in entrance (nijiriguchi), walks over to the stone water basin (tsukubai), and purifies himself by rinsing his hands and mouth. As you see the host at the basin, you know that he will soon call you into the tearoom. When the host steps up to the middle gate, the guests take a few steps forward, and all silently bow their heads in unison. The host then turns and walks back to the crawl-in entrance, and when he has disappeared from view, you return to your seats in the waiting arbor.

The host reenters the tearoom through the crawl-in entrance, neatly placing his straw sandals sole-to-sole beside the stepping stone below the entrance and leaving the door panel slightly open. While the host is working in the preparation room (mizuya), each guest in turn takes leave of the others to purify mouth and hands at the basin before going to the crawl-in entrance.

Nijiriguchi - crawl-in entrance

Guests enter a chashitsu through a small door called a *nijiriguchi*. The floor of a tea room is raised to accommodate the hearth in the floor, so the door sill is from eighteen to twenty-four inches off the ground. The door opening is about as tall as it is wide, about 26 inches square. Thus, a guest must both step up and kneel down to enter the room. There are a number of reasons that the entrance is so small. Passing through such a small opening reinforces the sense of refuge from the world outside. It also causes guests to bow as they enter, reminding them that they should have humility when entering. And a small door is in scale with rooms that are rarely larger than nine feet square, and in which all activity takes place while participants are seated on the floor.

The door slides in a wooden frame on the outside of the wall. There is a point during the ceremony at which the host is waiting “offstage” in the preparation room for all the guests to enter the tea room. After the last guest enters, he or she is expected to close the door firmly enough to make a sound as it strikes the frame, so that the host knows all the guests have entered. This signals the formal beginning of the tea ceremony.

This is one of many ways in which the architecture plays an active role in the tea procedure, and demonstrates the way in which the ceremony and the structure have evolved together.

At the crawl-in entrance, the main guest crouches on the stepping stone and, placing his folding fan on the threshold as a sign of respect, briefly views the interior. Then, ducking through the entrance, he takes off his straw sandals and places them next to those of the host, out of the way of the next guest. Once in the tearoom, he proceeds first to the tokonoma to admire the scroll, then to the hearth, each time sitting with his fan placed in front of him. Each guest follows in turn, and takes a temporary seat until all have finished, at which point bows are exchanged with the next in line, and all assume their places, the main guest taking the place of honor nearest the tokonoma.

Meanwhile, knowing by the sound of the last guest closing the door to the crawl-in entrance that all have entered the tearoom, the host steps outside through another door and replenishes the water in the stone basin. Returning to the preparation room, he ascertains when the guests have settled themselves in their places, then slides open the door between the tearoom and the preparation room to offer his guests the first spoken greeting of the day. Each of you in turn voices a brief greeting, then the main guest, as spokesman for the group, compliments the host on the thoughtful preparation of the waiting room and roji garden and inquires about the scroll in the tokonoma. These preliminaries over, the host goes back to the preparation room to get the charcoal basket. Sitting at the threshold, basket to one side, he bows and announces that he will now lay the charcoal in the hearth. The host takes up the charcoal basket and places it by the hearth, then brings in the ash dish from the preparation room and, before bringing it up to the hearth, shuts the door.

Tatami - straw mats

The entire floor of a tea room is covered with rice straw mats, called *tatami*. They have been common in Japanese buildings since the sixteenth century. Floors before that time were either dirt or occasionally wood plank. Often the floors were spread with rush mats laid edge to edge, the precursor to *tatami*. Most of Japanese domestic life over the years has been played out on these mats on the floor. People relaxed on *tatami*, they ate their meals on low tables placed on *tatami*, they slept on futons placed on *tatami* - often all in the same room; the room changing from living to dining to bedroom as table or bed or, more recently, television is taken out or put away in cupboards.

The multi-purpose nature of rooms may help explain the fastidiousness of the Japanese. It clearly is a reason they take their shoes off as they enter a dwelling. Walking upon the same surface on which you are sitting tends to make you want to stop dirt at the front door.

The construction of tatami mats has changed somewhat over time. The aim has always been to achieve a blend of firmness and cushion that allows one to walk or slide easily, yet sit for extended periods of time on the bony parts of the knees. The mats are about two inches thick, and commonly were made of a thick straw cushion inner part, with a plaited reed cover. The cover is then bound at the edges with cloth tape, which is often black and sometimes decorated. In modern times, the core is often made of a composite material not unlike styrofoam.

The tatami may have been the beginning of the modularity found in Japanese architecture. The mats are, with few variations, 3 feet by 6 feet. This standardization of size occurred after the end of the eighteenth century, when the use of tatami mats spread from the upper to the middle and lower classes. This caused them to become commercial articles, which required an exact size. It was customary after this time for tenants to carry their mats with them when they moved to a new residence, so the size of mats had to be standardized to fit both old and new.

The number of tatami in a room became the standard designation for the size of a room, and also dictated room arrangement. Thus after the end of the eighteenth century, rooms became denoted as 3-jo, 4-1/2-jo, 6-jo, etc. (*Jo* is an alternate reading of the written character for *tatami*.)

Tea rooms are normally quite small. Although there are large-scale tea rooms for demonstrations and for teaching, in general they will be of a scale that seats only the host and one to eight guests. Four-and-a-half mats (81 square feet) is common, although there are many as small as one-and-three-quarter mats (31-1/2 square feet).

In the tea room, tradition dictates where activities take place and where different participants sit. There is the 'mat of tea preparation,' the 'entrance mat,' where the host steps as he enters; the 'guest mat,' where the guests sit; and the 'nobleman's mat,' which is the honored seat before the picture alcove. The half mat at the center of the room which contains the hearth where the water is heated is called, naturally, the 'hearth mat.'

Walls

The solid walls of traditional Japanese buildings are normally plaster. In soan style tea houses, designers tried to simulate the plaster found in old farmhouses, or at least impart the rustic atmosphere of a farmhouse. The plasterers mixed straw with the plaster and left the straw exposed on the interior of the hut.

There were other techniques used to get a rustic feeling. One was to leave a portion of a post at the corner of a room unplastered. Another was to display the reed wattle framework beneath the plaster.

The plaster walls sometimes have a rice paper wainscoting on the interior that is ten to 20 inches high. This helps protect the lower part of the wall from bumps by elbows and feet, and helps lighten up the interior of what is sometimes a very dark space.

Ceiling

The ceiling inside contributes to the image of the peasant's hut by being surfaced with rustic material, such as rafters made of reed bundles or woven strips of cedar. The ceiling is modulated in some way, to keep the dark, rough-textured surface from being too oppressive. One area of the ceiling is raised or slanted. This is often the area under the eaves, which allows a skylight to be cut into the ceiling.

The ceiling above the picture alcove is often a different height than the rest of the room, in order for it to be in better proportion for the display of scrolls. There are even stories of tea masters rebuilding the entire alcove for a single tea gathering, for the express purpose of showing off a particular piece of calligraphy.

The host removes the water kettle from above the fire and arranges the ash firebed and the burning charcoal. As the host dusts the ash off the hearth frame, each guest exchanges bows with the next in line and moves up to watch him prepare the hearth. The host then sets pieces of fresh charcoal around the burning ones to keep the water hot through the ceremony. When the last piece of charcoal has been placed, the guests return to their places.

The host then dusts the hearth with a feather brush, places a ball of slow-burning incense in the coals, and sets the incense container out for the guests to inspect. The host returns the kettle to the fire and carries the charcoal utensils back to the preparation room. In small tearooms like this one, the host will now also sweep the tatami mats in front of the hearth with a bird's-wing duster before exiting and sliding the door shut behind him.

Hearth - furo and ro

From November to April, an iron kettle for heating water is heated in a hearth, called a *ro*, that is set into the floor at the center of the room. The placement of this hearth is carefully prescribed by tradition. It is a square frame 16.7 inches on a side and about seven inches deep that takes up about a third of the half-mat in the center of the room. It is located between the host's mat and the guest's mat. The kettle either hangs from a chain attached to the ceiling, or rests upon a trivet that holds it above the coals. In the warmer months of the

year, from May to October, the kettle is supported in a portable brazier, or *furo*, which rests on the mat of tea preparation. In the *furo*, the fire can be kept small, so it does not overheat the room. It can also be kept farther away from the guests.

The changeover in the Autumn, when the brazier is stored and the *ro* in the floor is uncovered, and in the Spring, with the reverse, are accompanied by special ceremonies. The Autumn changeover is especially anticipated, because it is also the time when tea harvested the previous Spring is first tasted.

The incense container, a lacquer box with a gold-leaf design, is passed down the line for all the guests to inspect. It is then returned to the host's place by the head guest. Soon after, the host returns to the room. He sits at the hearth, folds his silk wiping cloth (fukusa), and uses it to lift the kettle lid slightly askew. The main guest inquires about the history and design of the incense container. The host then picks up the incense container and bows at the preparation room door, saying that he will now serve the kaiseki meal, and shuts the door. The name kaiseki literally means "bosom stone," and comes from Zen Buddhism. Zen priests kept warmed stones wrapped with cloth next to their stomachs to fend off hunger and cold as they meditated. Thus a kaiseki meal is not meant to be a feast. It is, however, a carefully-prepared meal of many small courses, meant to please the eye as much as the palate.

The host soon enters and begins serving a meal of eight courses of small servings, including rice, miso soup, and such things as nimono, or morsels in seasoned broth, yakimono, or broiled meat, small cups of kasuimono, or light broth, and hassun, or trays bearing delicacies from the mountains and the sea. These are served with sake - rice wine. After eating, the guests wipe their bowls clean with paper and drop their chopsticks on their trays in unison as a signal that they have finished. When the host hears this, he opens the door and removes the individual trays, bowing to each guest. This concludes the kaiseki meal.

Mizuya - preparation room

Much of the preparation for a tea ceremony takes place in the *mizuya*, or preparation room. This is a room or alcove next door to the *chashitsu* that functions as a kitchen, but is specialized for tea. As in the tea room, all activities take place while kneeling on the floor. Set into the floor is a sink with bamboo grate and water supply. Above the sink are shelves with tea utensils. There is often a papered window behind the shelves, which silhouettes the bowls, tea whisks, tea scoops, tea caddy and other utensils with a soft light. At the top is a cabinet with sliding doors.

Shelves

Shelves are sometimes built into the design of tea rooms. Often in the shoin style of tea room the wall adjacent to the tokonoma alcove contains another alcove with shelves. In fact, the shoin style gets its name from the *tsukeshoin*, or writing shelf, found in rooms of this style. Shelves mounted in this alcove, called *chigaedana*, are frequently offset vertically, which creates the asymmetry of which Japanese designers are so fond. At the bottom of this alcove is a cabinet.

Some rustic soan style tea houses also have built-in shelves. There are occasionally utensil shelves adjacent to the mat of tea preparation. One of Rikyu's innovations was a set of shelves that penetrated the wall between the *mizuya*, or preparation room, and the mat of tea preparation in the tea room. This allowed him to prepare his utensils out of sight of guests, yet still have them readily available from the tea-making mat. It was said that this tea hut was suitable for Rikyu's retirement, because the pass-through shelves allowed the elderly man to move with dignity, as he did not have to carry utensils back and forth from the kitchen.

The host then tells you that he would like to rearrange the other room for the tea service and suggests that you might like to stretch your legs before beginning the second sitting. The main guest replies that you will wait in the garden and listen for the sound of a gong as a signal to return to the tearoom. After the host closes the preparation-room door, you again stop to admire the tokonoma and the hearth, and follow the main guest to the roji garden for a brief interlude.

After awhile the host sounds the gong five times — loud, soft, medium, medium, loud — as a signal for the guests to return to the tearoom. Having purified yourselves again at the stone water basin, you enter the tearoom and admire the flowers in the tokonoma, the preparation area, and the hearth before taking your places.

Tokonoma - picture recess

A feature of tea house design that maintains its early link with Buddhism is the picture alcove called the *tokonoma*. It is a special recess created originally for the display of objects from China. Here the host places a flower arrangement and hangs a scroll that relates to the theme of the gathering. The scroll is a picture or calligraphy executed by a Chinese or Japanese Zen Buddhist master. The flower arrangements found here are different than Japanese flower arrangements called *ikebana* with which many people in the West are familiar. Design in *ikebana* is very concerned with picturesqueness, which involves a major reshaping of the plant material. Flower arranging for

tea, or *chabana*, involves shaping the flowers and other materials to bring forth their inherent beauty, or spirit, so to speak, while respecting their natural qualities. Intervention is kept to a minimum. The arrangement is either placed on the floor of the tokonoma alcove or is hung from a hook on the central post.

As an example of how the flower arrangement and scroll might reflect the theme, imagine a Spring tea gathering called by the host to celebrate the plum blossoms in his garden. After the guests have walked through the garden and admired the plum trees in full bloom, they enter the tea hut. The host has chosen to display a scroll with a *haiku* by Kito Takai:

“Marvelous” I say
With each single thing I see
Springtime fades away.

Alongside the poem on the scroll there is a drawing of a plum branch, bare except for a single blossom. Down below, on the floor of the alcove, is a shallow lacquer tray with perhaps a half inch of water. The only flower “arrangement” is a loose collection of plum petals sprinkled over the water, with a few scattered on the floor of the alcove: it is as if the petals had fallen from the branch displayed in the calligraphy of the scroll. The melancholy air about this - as if saying about Spring: “You can enjoy the garden with its color and rebirth, but all beauty and joy is transitory . . .” - is an emotion the Japanese like very much.

The picture alcove is generally wider than it is deep. The rustic central post is along one side, with a sleeve wall plastered into the post. The scroll is displayed on the back wall of the alcove. The floor is raised slightly. The honored guest at a tea gathering sits just in front of the tokonoma, although paradoxically with his or her back to it.

Tokobashira - central post

Adjacent to the picture recess is the *tokobashira*, or central post. This post, also called a *nakabashira*, is finished roughly, sometimes with the bark left on. This roughness symbolizes the *wabi* esthetic - it suggests the rustic huts of the past. Often the designer of the tea room has used wood from a tree that has special significance. Rikyu once created the *tokobashira* out of a tree that had stood in the spot where he wished to build his tea hut.

There is a hook mounted on the post that allows the host to hang a vase with flowers on one side of the tokonoma.

The preparation and sharing of a single bowl of thick green tea which begins the second half is the high point of a chaji. Since everyone present knows the ritual from memory, most of this part of the ceremony is spent in silence.

The host goes through a sequence of symbolically purifying the tea container by wiping it with his silk cloth, then purifying the tea bowl with hot water from the kettle. After drying the bowl, he pours a fixed amount of powdered green tea into the bowl, adds hot water, and mixes it with a whisk. He then offers the tea bowl to the first guest, who sips three times and passes it to the next guest. Each of you in turn drinks and passes it on, until the last guest finishes the tea and returns the bowl to the host. This communal drinking unites the guests in friendship. After this, the utensils, which may be antique or have special stories attached to them, are viewed.

Then the host carries the utensils out, and returns with the charcoal basket. He then rearranges the ashes and replenishes the charcoal in preparation for the thin tea part of the ceremony. He carries the charcoal basket to the mizuya, and returns with utensils for thin tea. After going through a purification procedure with the tea bowl, the host scoops a measured amount of tea into the bowl, adds water, and whisks up a bowl of tea for the first guest, then for each of you in turn. After everyone has been served, these utensils are passed around, and the host tells the you the poetic names and histories of the utensils .

Mado - windows

Tea room windows are kept small, so that the host can more easily control the light within. There are three types of windows, called *shitaji*, *renji* and *tsukiage*. The *shitaji* window is simply an opening left in the plaster of the wall that exposes the bamboo lattice beneath. The inspiration for this type of window came from those found in rustic farmhouses, in which the wall was constructed of a mixture of mud and straw over a bamboo framework. In places the plaster was broken out and the lattice left uncovered in a rectangular shape.

Since the *shitaji* window cannot be made large, it is often used in combination with another type, called a *renji* window. This type has a framed opening, with vertical slats of bamboo on the outside. There are paper screens on the inside, which can be hung from pegs in the wall or mounted in frames so they slide open. These allow the inside light to be modulated by the host.

The *tsukiage* window is a skylight in the sloped part of the ceiling. To keep out the rain, on the outside is a cover made of wood slats which is propped open with a stick. On the inside is a translucent paper panel. This skylight, with its paper screen, allows the host to

accentuate the changing light of the day or to introduce a square of moonlight at night, and make it part of the ceremony. As Heino Engel says, in his book Measure and Construction of the Japanese House:

Such a control of room illumination, together with the single flower and the picture scroll in the alcove, provides infinite possibilities to adapt the emotional quality of the tearoom either to the weather or to the disposition of the house master, making the architecture of the tearoom not only physically but also psychologically a true image of the man himself. To exploit these possibilities, of course, presupposes an awareness of the potential of light in architecture, and in the tearoom it appears as if the Japanese understood very well the importance of light in the art of living.

Amado - shutters

Traditional Japanese houses often have a wooden-floored veranda between the living spaces and the garden. The living spaces are enclosed by sliding paper screens called *shoji*, and the veranda is enclosed by wooden shutters called *amado* that offer protection from weather and intruders. In shoin style tea houses, in which one or more walls are enclosed by sliding *shoji* screens, the veranda is often dispensed with and the wood shutters slide in a track that is just outside the *shoji* screens. This is the style found in the Shoseian Tea House in Seattle's Japanese garden. The wooden shutters can be latched together, or locked with pins that drop into holes in the tracks on the inside. When the room is in use, the shutters are stored in a boxlike shutter compartment at one end of the track.

Shoji - sliding paper screens

The sliding paper screens called *shoji* demonstrate the level of technical proficiency achieved in Japanese architecture of the feudal period, from the thirteenth century onward. They are concrete examples of the tradeoffs between architectural planning and functional, esthetic and economic considerations. The screens are constructed of a wood frame with the horizontal members only 1.4 by 1.2 inches and vertical members 1.0 by 1.2 inches. There is a lattice within this frame made up of wood strips 1/4 by 1/2 inch. There is often a wood panel at the foot that is just 3/16 of an inch thick.

This framework is covered with rectangles of rice paper pasted horizontally on the outside. The maximum dimension of these rectangles was limited by technical ability in papermaking until recent years to about eleven inches. The sheets were cut to the module of the lattice framework, and pasted to the frame in a pattern offset from the lattice, setting up a secondary pattern of paper joints against that

of the lattice when seen with light coming through. Even now, when paper can be produced in sheets many times the width of the screen, fabricators of shoji still cut the sheets to an eleven inch module, because this overlaid pattern of frame and paper is so desirable.

The top and bottom of the shoji slide in tracks, and the screens can easily be lifted out for relocation or repair. About the “technology” of shoji, Heino Engel says:

The single sliding unit weighs but ounces and is so light that rollers to reduce friction in the lower track would be superfluous. All members have rectangular sections, and, as a rule, the edges are not even beveled; no decorative effect is striven for, and expediency and restraint are the only prevailing factors.

And yet, an intimate aesthetic sensation is effected. It is true that the proportions of the *shoji* pattern and the harmony of expression between wood and the translucent paper are partly responsible for this effect, but they only emphasize the actual source of this aesthetic quality: display of the fabric’s structural potentialities through the utmost restraint in dimensioning....

...Simplicity of response to the constructional problem is demonstrated in each detail. Friction from sliding is reduced by having only the sides of the struts in contact with the upper track, and by having the grooves in the lower track just deep enough to keep the panel in position.

Put another way, the construction of these screens is so delicate that sheets of rice paper serve to resist shear, and the doors can be slid open with the pressure from a single finger.

Opaque screens called *fusuma* are similar in construction to shoji, and are used when a more substantial room divider is needed. The framework structure of fusuma screens is slightly heavier than that of shoji, and both sides are covered with paper. The paper is thicker, so fusuma have provided a place for wall decoration, such as printed patterns, painted murals, or calligraphy.

After the host has carried the utensils back to the mizuya, he returns to sit across from the guests. The main guest, and each of you, give thanks for all the host has done on your part, and the host in turn thanks you for coming. Then you make your way back through the garden as the host sees you off.

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Authentic Tea House Is Installed At The Downtown Seattle Art Museum

A Japanese tea house has come to roost in downtown Seattle. The Seattle Art Museum downtown, designed by Robert Venturi, has a full-sized working Japanese tea house within the third floor galleries. The tea house was designed, built and donated to the museum by the Urasenke Foundation, one of the three major schools of Tea, based in Kyoto, Japan.

As planning for the new museum building was getting under way in 1989, William J. Rathbun, Curator of Asian Art at the museum, approached local representatives of Urasenke with the idea of installing a working tea house within the new galleries. Design of the tea house began in Kyoto in Spring of 1991. There was careful coordination between Urasenke's architectural office, Mr. Venturi's office, and Olson-Sundberg Architects, the associated Seattle firm. After a rough floor plan had been resolved and the Museum decided where it wanted to put the tea house, architects in Kyoto modified their design to fit the allocated space.

Soon after that, in August of 1991, carpenters employed by Urasenke began fabricating the tea house in a Kyoto warehouse. When they finished, all parts were labeled, and the entire structure was dismantled. In October it was put in crates and shipped to the Port of Seattle. In early November 1991, three Urasenke carpenters and one plasterer, who has been designated as a 'Living National Treasure', arrived in Seattle and set to work erecting the tea house in the nearly completed museum.

In three weeks, they unpacked the material from Japan and erected the tea house, even accommodating a discrepancy between the plans and the way the museum was actually built. The tea house is a three-mat room, with a behind-the-scenes preparation area. The museum has stated its intention to present the collection at the downtown museum in the context of "the individual in society." Considering the impact that the Japanese tea ceremony has had on the arts of Japan, Seattle is fortunate to have the first and only functioning tea house within an American museum. Demonstrations of 'the way of tea' began February eighth with the opening of the third floor Asian galleries. The tea house will be officially dedicated in April by family members of the hereditary grand master of the Urasenke School, Dr. Soshitsu Sen XV. The Urasenke representatives will christen the tea house with its poetic name, much as the Arboretum tea house was given the name Shoseian - *Arbor of the Murmuring Pines* - after it was rebuilt in 1981. Demonstration ceremonies will be presented on a continuing basis, for groups of up to twelve people. Reservations are required. For further information, please call the Seattle Art Museum at 654-3100. Reservations will be taken in March for summer gatherings.

Seattle Has A Tradition In The Art Of Tea

A new tea house in the Seattle Art Museum and the one in the Japanese Garden at the Washington Park Arboretum were both donated to Seattle by the Urasenke tea school of Kyoto. This family traces its lineage back to Japan's most famous tea master, Sen Rikyu. The present head of the school, Soshitsu Sen, is the fifteenth generation grand master of Urasenke.

Urasenke's Seattle branch, headed by Bonnie Mitchell, has been offering classes and demonstrations at the Japanese Garden for eleven years. The Urasenke office has also been coordinating with the other schools of tea in Seattle to arrange a schedule of events and demonstrations for the new tea house.

Tea classes are offered through Urasenke Tuesday through Saturday at the tea house in the Arboretum and at the branch office in Madison Park. A course is also offered through the Art History Department at the University of Washington. Students take one or two classes a week, and certificates are awarded from the Kyoto office as they master the basic *temaes*, or procedures for serving tea. Students also learn about related arts, such as flower arranging and ceramics.

For further information about classes or membership, call the Urasenke branch office at (206)324-1483. The office is located at 1910-37th Place East, Seattle, 98112.