

AGENCY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS (BUNKA-CHO)

3-2-2, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, Japan

Cable Address: MONBUNKA TOKYO

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Mrs. Karen Zien, Curator,  
The children's Museum  
The Jamaica way, Boston 02130,  
Massachusetts, U.S.A.

Dear Mrs. Karen Zien

It is my pleasure to send you the introduction about  
KYŌMACHIYA, town house in Kyōto, which you asked me the other  
day. Excuse me for being late.

Yours faithfully,



Kakichi Suzuki  
Director  
Architecture Division.

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## KYŌMACHIYA-Town House in Kyōto

Kyōto used to be the capital of Japan for about one thousand years, from the 8th through the 19th century. KYŌMACHIYA, the dwelling house of its citizen, has the oldest history of town houses in Japan, and is the most elegant example.

Its floor planning, exterior design and so on have had no little effect on town houses elsewhere in Japan, and it has become a model of town house architecture.

Each town house was built making the most of its long and slender lot allotted to it, the shorter side facing the street, and on both sides of it similar type houses stood in a row closely adjoining each other.

The fundamental ground floor planning of KYŌMACHIYA was that <sup>broader</sup> <sup>lower</sup> MISENOMA (a sales room), <sup>MIDDLE room</sup> IMA (a living room) and <sup>\* ZASHIKI: - fancy sitting room</sup> KYAKUMA (a guest room) were arranged in order from the front to the back along TŌRINIWA (a corridor with an earth floor). TŌRINIWA was not only a path to the back yard, but also a kitchen with a well and a cooking stove.

The partitions between MISENOMA, IMA, which was also used as a dining room, and TŌRINIWA were shōji (paper sliding doors); so, if necessary, they could use these rooms and the earth floor en bloc removing the shōji.

The partition between KYAKUMA and TŌRINIWA was a mud wall, because KYAKUMA was also used as a bed room, but the room was used to be coupled with IMA to make a larger space. Sometimes the three rooms, MISENOMA, IMA and KYAKUMA were used as a wide space removing the partitions. Fusuma

Here we can observe the clever and skillful floor planning to secure the most effective use of the limited lot.

In about the 16th century, a garret came to be built above the MISENOMA to be used as a store or a dwelling room for employees, which was by and by developed to involve three rooms same as the ground floor.

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The inner room, facing the back yard, was the guest room which had TOKONOMA (an alcove to place flowers and hanging pictures) and CHIGAIIDANA (a ornamental shelf), and was the most beautiful room,

The front two rooms were kept as garrets with lower ceilings. In Japan, as marchants and <sup>(definition)</sup>craftmen living in a city were given a lower status than samurai under the feudal system, they were obliged to make a plain living. It is why they never decorated the exterior of their houses, but made the interior of each room, especially ZASHIKI (a main room), comparable to that of samurai's houses.

This house, built in the middle of the 19th century, is a typical example of such KYŌMACHIYA.

Kekichi SUZUKI

Director, Architecture Division.  
Cultural Properties Protection Department,  
Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Born in 1928  
Architect, Doctor of Engineering

main books

"HŌRYŌJI temple"  
"Structure and Technique of ancient  
architectural monuments in Japan"  
"History of medieval architecture in  
Japan"

samurai ——— Japanese equivalence to  
European knights — who  
owe his allegiance to  
Feudal Lord.