



A Collection of Modern Japanese Architecture. Residences

Many of the businessmen of Otaru who made their fortune built extravagant mansions with no thought to cost. The businessmen chose locations typical of hilly Otaru such as Toun-cho, and Tomioka, where the view was breathtaking. The residences consisted of mainly Japanese style rooms for the main house, Western living rooms, and timber framed stone warehouses for fire prevention. The main building would be comprised of connecting Japanese rooms with a wrap around veranda, and a view of the ocean and gardens. Though the floors, shelves and added study room feature shoin-zukuri style (a type of architecture used to build military houses, Zen temples and such), the decorative transoms suggest the freedom, artistic design the cultivation of refined architecture. Timber gathered from all over the nation, and rare timber as well as massive timber is incorporated to all areas of the buildings. Master carpenters were also summoned from Honshu (the main land Japan) to help with construction. The clapboards of Western style living rooms were painted, and detail can be seen in the corbels. The walls and ceilings of the residences are often plastered, with central ornament and wainscoting which are elaborately finished with plaster. Sash windows, and other Western elements that are incorporated into the Japanese architecture, suggest modern Japanese architecture that was seen not only in Otaru, but throughout Japan. Further, the buildings feature lighting and other modern installations. All that has been mentioned so far is only an example of what was the norm, but does not mean that each and every aspect was incorporated into every mansion or estate that was built. Comparatively speaking, it may be difficult to call the residences of former days mansions or estates. However, if you understand or know the history behind the residences of Otaru, it will definitely make looking at the various residences more enjoyable.

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photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

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No. 4

Endo Matabei Residence



Location:9-4 Tomioka 1-chome, Otaru

Built:1906(Meiji 39)

Structure: One-story timber structure building

The residence was built for Endo Matabei, a merchant from Yamagata Prefecture who dealt in marine products. A plastered wall with notched bamboo stands in front, with a tall brick gated fence that wraps around the side facing the ocean, both of which have a tiled roof. Once inside the gate, the main entrance is on the righthand side with a side entrance on the left hand side of the building, both covered with an arched gambrel roof.

The main building has a pantiled gambrel roof, which at first glance gives the building the appearance of traditional Japanese architecture, but next to the entrance there is a Western sitting room with a hexagonal bay window which is painted white. The Western room is plastered and has an ornamental ceiling, accordion fold crown molding, and a marble mantelpiece that showcase Western design which entered Japan during the Meiji Period. Besides the currently remaining building on the south side, there originally were buildings on the west and north sides of the premises which were placed in a U-shape around an inner garden (the buildings were torn down in 1983). The building changed hands to Atsuzo Yamamoto (president of the Otaru Chamber of Commerce between 1917 - 1921) in 1913 (Taisho 2), and after its use by the Hokkaido Colliery Steamship Co., Ltd., was passed onto the Rissyo Koseikai(an offshoot of Nichiren-Buddhism) in 1964(Showa 39).

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No. 67

Shioda Villa



Location:8-1 2-chome, Otaru

Built:1912(Taisho 1)

Structure: Main building :partial 2 story timber structure building. Kura(storehouse):2 story timber framed stone building

This is the villa of Yasuzo Shioda who ran the Shioda Shipping Agency which was established in 1889 (Meiji 22). Yasuzo, the first president of the company had a store during the Meiji 20's in Sakaimachi and Minami Hama-cho (present Ironai), and second generation president Yasuzo owned luxurious passenger ships that went between Otaru and Karafuto (present day Sakhalin) during the early years of the Showa Period.

In 1952 (Showa 27), it became the Kazashita Residence, and in the 30's of the Showa Period, it was used as a pawn shop, and some rooms were rented. Although it is uncertain when exactly the building was built, the "Satsu" character on the lock of the kura places architectural style in the first year of the Taisho Period. The Japanese styled main building has a gable roof, and a partial gable and gambrel roof with a gargyle over the entrance. There were originally a Western sitting room and a tea room on the lefthand side of the entrance, and a large room beyond the veranda on the right side, but due to snow damage and aging that portion was torn down, leaving the main building and the timber framed stone kura (storehouse). In 1991 (Heisei 3), the Sukiya-style (traditional Japanese style architecture, mainly for tea houses) restroom with tiles and ceiling board, and other areas of the building which still possess their original beauty, underwent renovation and the building is now used as a restaurant.

Present Day Yumeji-Tei

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photo Makoto Iwanami, photographer

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No. 71

Itaya Residence



Built:1926-1927 (Taisho 15 - Showa 2)

Structure: Main building: one-story timber structure building Kura(storehouse)2 story stone structure

Itaya Miyakichi the first (1857-1918), born in Echigo, was a merchant in the shipping industry, who came to Otaru in 1875 (Meiji 8). This residence was built by Miyakichi the second (1885-1962), who while running the shipping industry, ran farms in Nagayama, Biei and Uryu, and who also was a politician selected as a member of the House of Lords* in 1927 (Showa 2). In 1875 (Meiji 8), he became the honorary unpaid Mayor of Otaru. Miyakichi was also a well known philanthropist who donated 250 thousand yen and land for a middle school in Otaru, and gave his alma mater Waseda University 100 thousand yen.

The main building of the Japanese residence was made up of two buildings, one with the entrance on the east, and a wing that stretched toward the south from it, both one-story with copper hipped roof. The east wing had a gambrel roof over the entrance with two connecting rooms to the left, and veranda that wraps around the building. The exterior of the one-story Western wing built north of the Japanese wing is covered with mortar, and had a copper Mansard roof. A 2 story timber framed stone Kura was built to the north, and a brick air raid shelter was built to the south of the backside of the Japanese wing.

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No. 74

Sakaushi Residence



Location:8-15 Irifune 5-chome, Otaru

Built:1927(Showa 2)

Structure: 2 story timber structure building

The building, which served both as the residence and office of lawyer Naotaro Sakaushi represents 1920s architecture designed by architect Yoshinari Tanoue (1899 - 1991). Influence from famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who designed the Tokyo Imperial Hotel (1923), and who was the mentor for Tanoue, is evident in the architecture of the building. The clean horizontal lines of the exterior and interior and cruciform layout are perfect examples of this. On the other hand, the beams on the norther side of the second floor, diverges from Frank Lloyd Wright' s influence, and shows Tanoue' s personal style and design of snow country architecture. The Ueda residence was built on the southern side the following year, placing both residences designed by the same architect on the same property (Ueda residence was torn down in 2009). Besides the Sakaushi and Ueda residences, Tanoue designed the former Takada(1925), Saka(1927), and Segawa(1930)residences, showing his deep affiliation with Otaru. The former Oguma Residence (1928) which is presently located in Sapporo and used as a cafe, was also designed by Tanoue, and is one of the few remaining residences that are open to the public.

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No. 26

Inomata Residence



Location:4-9 Sumiyoshi-cho, Otaru

Built:1906(Meiji 39)

Structure: 2 story timber structure building

Magohachi Inomata the second, built the residence in Ironai 1-chome, but the building burnt down in the Ironai Fire of 1904 (Meiji 37). The residence was rebuilt in its current location on a hill south of the Irifune Nanasaro Intersection. The first thing that catches the eye is the gated stone fence and kura, made from stones cut out of Mt. Tengu, which were built for fire prevention. It is said that the design of the gate came from a sketch the owner did while visiting China. Overall the residence is built in authentic Japanese style and architecture, with the exception of the Western styled living room built on the left side of the entrance. Shirokiya Department Store in Tokyo was commissioned to design the interior and carpenters were hired from Niigata to do the construction.

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No. 27

Suhara Residence



Location: Toun 8-1, Otaru

Built: Taisho 1, 1912

Structure: 2 story timber structure

This residence belonged to Naoji Takahashi and Sotoyoshi Suhara, who were active in the business and political world beyond Otaru. The land borders the northern side of the grounds of Suitengu Shrine, and due to the slope the three wings are enclosed with a veranda (hall). The lowest portion of the main building is the living quarters with a foyer connecting to a timber-framed stone warehouse of two stories. A Western reception room occupies the middle wing, while the highest wing has a Japanese-style connecting room for receiving visitors.

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No. 55

Shimatani Steam Ship Co. President' s Residence



Location: Tomioka 2 chome 25-32, Otaru
Built: Showa 2 (1927)
Structure: 2 story timber-frame

Starting in the Meiji period and continuing into the Taisho period, numerous residences were built in the Tomioka area on account of the excellent view. From here, the city streets of Otaru form the foreground, Otaru Harbor and Ishikari Bay the middle ground, and the Hamanasu Mountains in the background. One of the first great residences to be built during the 30s of the Meiji Period (early 1900s by Western calendar) was that of Matabei Endo, consisting of a main building in the Japanese style on the center of the wide estate, with an adjoining Western building and rooms. This building in particular reflects the elegance of the early Showa Japanese residences in the tiled roofing on the main hall and foyer and stucco-covered batten siding for the exterior walls.

Present: Sangate

No. 57

Japan Mail Steamer Company Branch Manager Residence



Location: Suehiro 3-7, Otaru
Built: End of the Meiji Period
Structure: One-story timber

The branch manager' s residence was built alongside the employee residences (one two-story wing), a dormitory for singles, and bathhouse surrounded by a retaining wall with a gate. As modern architecture in Hokkaido actively incorporated Western elements into Japanese style, so too this residence has a tiled roof, clapboard exterior walls, and Western rooms with sash windows. The logo of Japan Mail Steamer Co. is engraved onto the gargoyles.

Present: Shimomuratei