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produced by The Japan Times Cube

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Imperial Hotel

Sustainable Japan Magazine

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The location is Hibiya, Tokyo, very close to the Imperial Palace. Here stands one of Japan's leading hotels, the Imperial Hotel. Its founding dates back to 1890, when political and business leaders set out to create a guest house fit for a proud modern nation.

The hotel's current building dates back to the early 1970s, but before then the hotel was housed in a palace-like structure, the design of which seemed neither Japanese nor Western. It was the handiwork of master architect Frank Lloyd Wright and was commonly known in Japanese as Raito Kan, the Wright Building.

So how did Wright, an American, come to design Japan's leading hotel? We'll start the story there.

Wright began his career working for architect Louis Sullivan, a leader of the Chicago School. Roughly six years later he established his own office and started

creating buildings, mostly houses, that emphasized horizontal lines and were closely integrated with the earth. The work became known as the Prairie School style. But, in addition to being an architect, Wright wore another hat, that of a buyer of Japanese ukiyo-e. And it was this that provided his connection with the Imperial Hotel. When Aisaku Hayashi, who had previously been an Oriental art dealer in New York, was appointed as the seventh manager of the Imperial Hotel, he tapped his old ukiyo-e dealer acquaintance Wright to design the new building.

At the time, Wright's jobs in the United States were drying up, after several high-profile scandals involving his personal relationships. For the architect, the Imperial Hotel job in Japan no doubt appeared like a chance at redemption. In it, he set about creating a new type of architecture fusing East and West, ancient and modern. The symmetrical appearance of the guest room wing was reminiscent of the first Japanese architecture that Wright had encountered: a re-creation at the 1893 Chicago Expo of the Phoenix Hall from Byodoin Temple in Uji, Kyoto. The low-lying building is firmly planted in the

ground, as in the Prairie School style, and the building is clad in Oya stone (a gray-green lava stone mined in Tochigi Prefecture near Tokyo) with a geometric pattern similar to a Maya ruin. This amalgam was born from Wright's insistence on not making copies of existing Western architecture. However, the strength of that passion was also his undoing. Due for completion in 1921, the building faced significant delays, and costs almost doubled from the original budget. Hayashi defended Wright, but in April 1922, when the original building burned to the ground in an accidental fire, he ended up resigning as manager. Having lost his major backer, Wright returned to the United States three months later and never returned to Japan again.

The hotel job was taken over by Wright's disciple Arata Endo and was successfully completed in 1923. On the day of the opening reception, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck, but Wright's unique construction method, which he called a "floating foundation," which shortened the foundation piles to absorb vibration, proved effective on Hibiya's soft ground. The building was unharmed, and Wright, who was by then back in the United States, proudly played up the seismic resistance of his architecture in his autobiography. The Imperial Hotel was known as the "Pearl of the East" and went on to entertain many guests as one of Japan's leading hotels. The building survived the Pacific War, and during the postwar Occupation was even requisitioned for use by the Allied Occupation forces.

We then jump forward to March 1967, when Japan was at the height of its rapid economic growth. With newspaper



Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel, as seen from the air on the Hibiya Park side in the 1960s. The two guest wings protrude on the left and right

reports suggesting the old hotel would be rebuilt as a high-rise, a movement to secure its preservation was born. At its center was the Imperial Hotel Preservation Association, comprising Japanese architects who also lobbied politicians such as Prime Minister Eisaku Sato for the hotel to be preserved. In October 1967, Wright's wife, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, visited Japan to lend her support to the movement, and what was rapidly becoming a bilateral U.S.-Japan issue was even debated in the Diet.

But although it was only 44 years old, the building was deteriorating badly. The floating foundation construction that had protected it from the earthquake was also a liability, causing the building's foundations to gradually subside. Just before the building was ultimately demolished, the first-floor office was already half under-

ground, and the corridor of the guest wing was so buckled that trolleys could not be used. The hotel management remained focused on economic considerations and firmly committed to rebuilding. After much back-and-forth, it was decided that the hotel's entrance would be relocated and restored at Museum Meiji Mura in Aichi Prefecture. Meiji Mura was reluctant to take on the responsibility because of the huge cost, but after discussions between its first director, architect Yoshio Taniguchi, and Prime Minister Sato, it was decided that the government would support the project.

And now, 50 years later, one can stand in Hibiya Park, looking across at the current building, and imagine what it would be like if even just the entrance of the old Wright Building were still in place. Go inside to the second floor and squint hard

Frank Lloyd Wright



Along with Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright is considered one of the three masters of modern architecture.

Born in Wisconsin in 1867, he designed over 800 buildings during his lifetime. His best-known works include Fallingwater (1937) and the Guggenheim Museum (1959). In Japan, in addition to the Imperial Hotel entrance (1923), which has been relocated and restored in Aichi Prefecture, his extant buildings are Jiyugakuen (1922) in Tokyo and the Yodoko Guest House (1924), formerly the Yamamura residence, in Hyogo Prefecture.

enough at the mural from the old building that adorns the hotel's Old Imperial Bar, and you might just get the feeling that you are in the old building. Meanwhile, the main building of another grand hotel, the Hotel Okura Tokyo, which was completed in 1962 by Taniguchi, went through a similar process — closing in 2015, becoming the subject of international calls for its preservation and then eventually being demolished and rebuilt in 2019. In that case, only the former lobby area was retained and restored. While one hopes that Japan finds other ways to address architectural preservation beyond scrapping and rebuilding, the tale of the Imperial Hotel shows just how hard it can be to preserve a building while it remains in use.

This article was published in the Sustainable Japan Magazine, a monthly publication exploring sustainable lifestyle choices and the future of our planet from the perspective of our everyday lives. To subscribe to the magazine, scan the QR code.



The Peacock Room, the hotel's main banquet hall

Shintaku

Niigata restaurant makes brilliant comeback after fire



TAEKO TERAU
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Murakami, located in northern Niigata Prefecture on the Sea of Japan coast, is a small city with a historic atmosphere. Situated in a corner of the city is the gastronomic Japanese restaurant Shintaku. Its predecessor, the traditional restaurant Kinrinkaku, opened in 1867, and its name was subsequently changed. Today the restaurant is run by owner-chef Shinsuke Yamagai and his younger brother Ryota, who create the dishes, and their wives, who are in charge of service. The restaurant's creative and original cuisine has attracted attention, but there was hardship along the way.

"In 2005, the restaurant burned down," said Shinsuke, "not just the restaurant — everything, including tableware passed down through generations, became unusable." Before the fire, Shintaku was a traditional restaurant with a grand hall accommodating up to 100 people. It hosted splendid banquets that even featured geisha.

"With the opportunity of the renewal in 2006, we decided to transform it into a fine-dining restaurant." The brothers undertook the restaurant's reconstruction and gradually shifted the focus of the cuisine, and realized that everything they needed was actually



produced in Murakami. In addition, Ryota obtained a hunting license and set up a meat-processing facility on the property. In autumn and winter, the restaurant serves wild boar and other types of fresh game meat. Thus it came about that Murakami products now comprise 90% of Shintaku's ingredients.

HIDEYO HANAZUMI
NIIGATA PREFECTURE GOVERNOR



It is a great pleasure that Shintaku has been selected for Destination Restaurants 2024. Located in Murakami city, Shintaku is famous for its salmon dishes. The restaurant offers a wide variety of salmon dishes, in which you can enjoy every part of the fish from head to tail. Inspired by over 100 salmon recipes said to exist only in Murakami, Shintaku offers unique flavors that cannot be found anywhere else. The restaurant also won the Special Award at the 2023 Niigata Gastronomy Awards. I hope many people will visit Niigata and experience the appeal of its cuisine.



Address
Shintaku
3-38 Komachi, Murakami-shi, Niigata Prefecture
<https://murakami-shintaku.com/>



The dishes are created through an exchange of ideas between Shinsuke and Ryota. Even with traditional Japanese methods as a foundation, their cooking results in original dishes found nowhere else. It is this kind of cuisine that serves as a "tourism ambassador" conveying the attractions of Murakami to the world.

KUNIYOSHI TAKAHASHI
MAYOR OF MURAKAMI CITY



I would like to sincerely congratulate Shintaku on its award. Murakami city is a region rich in wonderful ingredients nurtured by its abundant nature, such as salmon, rice and Murakami beef. The fact that these ingredients have been utilized to showcase Murakami's charm through cuisine, and have been internationally recognized, is truly a testament to the recognition of Murakami's food culture, and we take great pride in it. I hope this will be passed on to future generations, and I wish Mr. Yamagai continued success in his endeavors.

Fixing modern misinformation with 'self-correcting mechanisms'

ESG/SDGs

SHIGEYA SUZUKI
PROJECT PROFESSOR, KEIO UNIVERSITY

After the internet became widely available, people began to get information from an increasing number of sources on a daily basis. Many came to be overwhelmed and are now inundated with misinformation and disinformation.

Historically, the means of information transmission developed step by step from clay tablets to papyrus scrolls and, in modern times, mass media such as newspapers and television, which deliver information from a handful of sources to a vast number of receivers. In the last half-century, the internet has made direct person-to-person communication easy. On the internet, anyone can be a source of information.

On the other hand, this has resulted in information of mixed quality, including misinformation and disinformation. In other words, in a society where information is freely exchanged, the quality of information depends on the soundness of the sender.

Historian and science writer Yuval Noah Harari's latest work, "Nexus," discusses disinformation and misinformation through the lens of "information networks," his model of the mechanisms of information transmission from a historian's point of view. The concept refers to the ways in which people create, share and store information and is distinct from the conventional understanding of "networks" in communication technol-

ogy. The book provides examples of how information is created, how it connects people and societies, and how it can lead to fragmentation.

In our society, the sound dissemination of information by the mass media is an essential element. In this respect, the "self-correcting mechanisms" discussed in "Nexus" have many implications. These mechanisms are the ways in which errors and distortions in information networks are removed or fixed. Information should be reliably communicated so that recipients can confirm the sender and ensure that it was delivered as intended.

Since the mass media exist in order to disseminate information widely, the identity of such senders can be confirmed. In addition, it is essential for the sender to be clear about the norms it follows. Mass media are expected to transmit information with a certain degree of self-discipline, so their commitment to this generally leads to self-correcting mechanisms to ensure soundness.

Originator Profile digital technology, which is being developed by media-related companies and researchers at Keio University, can implement certain self-correcting mechanisms. In addition to technology that can verify a sender's identity and technology that ensures information is delivered as intended, a mechanism that encourages self-discipline in the transmission of information is implemented through a combination of technology and governance.

It is possible to confirm that the text and images on a web page have not been tampered with, along with the identity of the sender. In addition, it is possible to confirm the sender's position and background through multiple third-party checks, such as confirmation of membership in an organization and certification by an accreditation organization. In particular, governance is carefully



Shigeya Suzuki

designed to prevent the centralized control of the distribution of information. At the same time, the reliability of the sender is indicated to the receiver, promoting awareness. With the cooperation of several media companies and the support of the Japanese government, we have implemented a proof-of-concept system and an almost production-ready system. We have been experimenting with the systems since 2023.

The need for sound information distribution is not limited to the media. At the time of the 2024 Noto earthquake, various disinformation and misinformation was circulated and local authorities had trouble getting information out, leading to confusion among many people in the area. With support from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and in cooperation with Tottori Prefecture, we will experimentally apply Originator Profile to local governments' dissemination of information.

Furthermore, beyond the media category, we are also working on digital advertising, which has similar issues with disinformation and misinformation. The key to the establishment of a democratic society is the free distribution of information, and in order to sustain this, it is necessary to have a healthy distribution of information based on a certain level of self-discipline. We aim to promote the distribution of healthy information through activities surrounding Originator Profile.



Originator Profile is explained at the meeting of G7 digital and technology ministers in Takasaki, Gunma Prefecture.

Destination Restaurants 2024 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

