

The Glow of Old Rooms

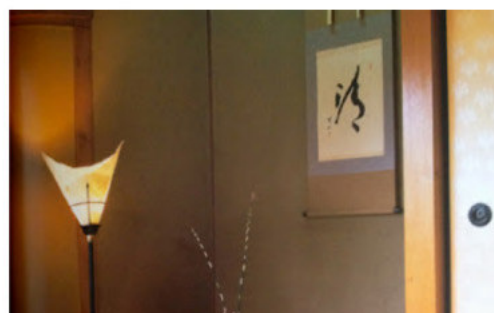
On those occasions when in Maitland, a suburb of Orlando fifty miles west of my location on Florida's east coast, I make it a point to visit (usually more than once) Bright Light Books, a treasure trove of new and used books, movies and music. In the ten or more times I've been there, not once have I left without at least one surprise find, more often than not a hard-to-find first edition, sometimes signed. My last visit was over the 4th of July holidays and as usual, I left the store with a big bag of books. Among them, an out of print 2006 title from Taschen GmbH, one in the Lifestyle Series titled *Living in Japan*. An especially handsome book filled with sumptuous photographs by Swiss photographer Reto Guntli.



The problem with sharing the photographer's fine work in this case is the size of the book. Weighing four pounds and measuring 12x10.6 inches, scanning becomes a difficult problem, and in most cases I was forced to take a photo of a photo. Certainly not the best of conditions or results, but something still worth sharing.



Yoshida Sanso is one of the few remaining princely estates left in Kyoto. The house was built in 1932 and since 1948 has served as a *ryōkan*, a traditional inn and restaurant. The house was built using *hinoki* cedar. Reflecting the modish style of the 30s, it incorporates art deco touches in its chandelier and stained-glass windows. The photograph above shows low-trimmed azalea bushes leading through the garden to the main hall. In the traditional style, windows are hung with reed blinds called *sudare*.





Above is a room in the Yoshida Sanso showing one of the rooms arranged for sleeping. We see the bedding, a tray with water and to the left of the *tokonoma* alcove a lamp with a flaring rice paper shade.



The Japanese inn Tawaraya in Kyoto has a history dating back 300 years, and counts among its guests James Michener, Rudolf Nureyev, Pierre Trudeau, Marlon Brando, Betty Ford, Jean-Paul Sartre, Leonard Bernstein, Simone de Beauvoir, Alfred Hitchcock and John D Rockefeller IV. The inn's street entrance is so small one can walk past it without noticing. There is no lobby, just a small reading room, some nooks to sit and relax in, corridors with flowers, and then the rooms, all looking out on a private corner of a perfectly tended garden. It represents classic hospitality compressed into eighteen rooms situated in the heart of busy modern Kyoto. The photograph shows a stone lantern (*ishi-doro*) and a *tamba* ware pot in a corner of the garden. In back is the *engawa* or veranda outside one of the rooms.

Off Kyoto's central Karasuyama Avenue is a townhouse (*machiya*) called Nishirokkaku-cho and built in the latter half of the twentieth century. The house is now another of the city's traditional guesthouses. In every room flower arrangements bring the cycle of seasons indoors, a hallmark of traditional life in the old city. Above, guest bedding lies in front of the *tokonoma* alcove, with grasses and wildflowers in a bamboo vase. Light from the garden flows in through the low *shoin* window.



Onsens, or hot spring resorts have been popular for centuries in Japan, and continue to attract modern Japanese, as well as visitors from abroad. The above photo, Hoshi Onsen in Niihara, Gunma Prefecture shows the view from a guest room looking through trees to the Hoshi-no-yu bathhouse. The *onsen* was built in 1875 and stands alone in a national park among the mountains of Gunma, northwest of Tokyo.

Chiiori ("Cottage of the Flute") is a thatched farmhouse on the island of Shikoku, located in the Iya Valley, a remote spot among deep mountain gorges. Built in the eighteenth century, the interior of the cottage is one vast cathedral-like space. From hundreds of years of smoke

rising from the three open hearth fires, the interior has darkened, with floors, beams and pillars now a shiny black, called "black glistening" in old Japanese.



In 1976, architect and antique dealer Yoshiro Takeshita moved an eighteenth century *minka* (farmhouse) from the Gifu area of Japan to Kamakura. The photo above shows the west gallery with a Qing Dynasty Chinese chair and *dantsu* carpets placed in front of sliding *shoji* doors going out to the garden.