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The

Power

of

Tradition

by Andy Smith

An Interview with
Yoshihiro Takishita,
Minka Restoration Professional

of our post-modern world and that lives in age-old truths handed down from generation to generation. Japan is full of traditional culture, but it is often hidden, even from those living in it. Where does traditional Japanese culture reside, and how does one find it?

Modern Japan is in a continual state of change. After World War two, Japan experienced mass movements away from local farming communities to larger cities. During the 1980's and 1990's Japan achieved economic success and became a leading world economic power, only suffer huge losses in the mid 90's due to overvalued assets and a faulty banking industry. Since then, Japan has been in a whirlwind; trying to find itself and pick up the pieces of a country divided between generations, tradition and pop culture, and what is local and what is foreign. Many Japanese youth struggle with deciding to live in opportunity filled large cities, such as Tokyo, or their local communities. Modern Japan is a perpetual teenager; seeking to find itself and its place in the world.

Farming communities of Japan's past were learning how to live in balance with nature before the industrial revolution and wars came. During the Edo Period (1603-1867), Japan finally found internal peace after centuries of civil war. A relative calm fell over the land, and much of what we call Japan's traditional culture flourished. Farming communities during the Edo Era lived in harmony both with nature and the village's inhabitants. Nature was a village's best friend and worst enemy. Depending on the weather any certain year, crops could fail or flourish, ruining or strengthening local communities. Because farming villages relied on nature that could change easily from year to year, a natural reliance upon neighbors developed and Japanese farming communities were closely knit. In this system of balance between both nature and community inhabitants, one of Japan's great treasures was created; the Japanese traditional farmhouse, called *minka*.

For farming villages of the Edo and early Meiji eras, materials for building were scarce, and carpenters had to rely on their environment. This resulted in two unique aspects of *minka* that are different from modern buildings.

The first is, because materials were in short supply, a carpenter had to utilize all materials to its fullest. For example, floor boards or other pre-cut parts of the house, instead of being made perfectly square and all the same length, were often irregular shapes; cut to use as much of the tree as possible. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)



City Page

May-June
2007



C-SHPAM a Success!

The Colorado Springs Homestay Program Alumni Meeting (C-SHPAM for short) held at Hotel Kaneyama-en in Fujiyoshida on March 24th, 2007 went off without a hitch. Over 130 Fujiyoshida local residents gathered for a meeting and reception about the program's almost 20 year history. Special guest from Colorado Springs, Robin Lawrentz participated and gave a memorable speech in Japanese. The Homestay Program promises to go strong for another 20 years. Thanks to all for your support in Fujiyoshida and Colorado Springs.

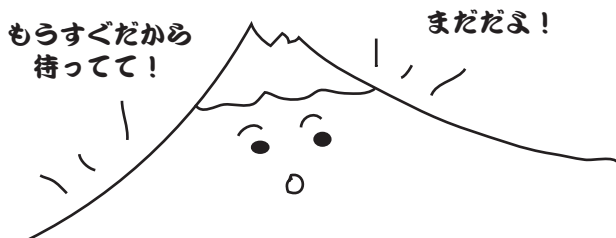


New Mayor of Fujiyoshida Elected!

As of city-wide elections April 22nd, 2007 the honorable Mayor Toshio Kayanuma will be replaced by Mr. Shigeru HORIUCHI, born October 3rd, 1948; 58 years old. He was previously a Yamanashi Prefecture Council member. Mayor Horiuchi will assume his post in Fujiyoshida City Hall as of Friday April 27th, 2007, after which a new Vice Mayor will be decided.



A Public Service Announcement: MT. FUJI IS STILL CLOSED!



We know it's tempting, but conditions at the summit can still be dangerous! Please wait until the start of climbing season! The 5th station will open once the weather permits!

For further inquiry, contact the International Affairs Desk.

iadfuji@city.fujiyoshida.lg.jp

Fujigoko International Club.

FIC is going strong, and we are looking for new members to join us for fun activities designed to bring the local and foreign communities together. We will have several events in May and June, so please contact Andrew Smith at the Fujiyoshida International Affairs Desk iadfuji@city.fujiyoshida.lg.jp or at tel: 0555-24-1236 to be included on our mailing list.

Kawaguchiko-5th station bus schedules posted:

Information and Reservations: 0555-72-6877.

Departs Kawaguchiko Station at:	Departs 5th Station at:
#940	#1130
#1040	#1230
#1140	#1330
@1240	@1430

#-2007 4/28-11/4 everyday and weekends and holidays in November

@-2007 4/28-11/4 everyday

Adult One Way 1500yen, Round Trip 2000yen. Child One Way 750yen, Round Trip 1000yen.

From 7/1-9/2 There will be a separate Peak Season Bus Schedule with more buses everyday. Find that information online at: <http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/index.htm>

Fujiyoshida English Webpage Revised and Updated.

The Fujiyoshida English Webpage has been updated with a new look. Most information remains the same, but several new sections including back issues of the Reiho, and the Fujiyoshida accommodation packet have been added. Check back for continuing updates and fresh information. Go to: <http://www.city.fujiyoshida.yamanashi.jp/div/english/html/index.htm>

2007 Fuji Mountain Race

2007 Fuji Mountain Race Applications now available online at the above listed English website or from Fujiyoshida IAD. Application Due Date is May 25th. All able runners apply now!

From the Editor...

A wise man named Obi-Wan Kenobi once said, "The eyes deceive. Don't trust them." In that spirit, no matter where in the world this humble newsletter finds you, we at the Reiho Offices hope that this May and June you continue to sort past the surface of everyday life and embrace the world with a full heart and mind. Until next time, take care. --Andrew Smith, Editor in Chief, Reiho Fuji.

Reiho Fuji





Takishita-san's original minka from Fukui Prefecture

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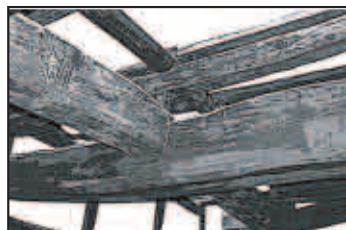
This efficient use of material, found not only in carpentry, but in all areas of village life was common sense, and is often referred to as "mottainai seikatsu," or waste-not lifestyle. The second unique aspect of the minka resulting from the communal village environment was that they were built for a single purpose; to house and support families who were the foundation of a strong village. In comparison to today's homes, minka were built with heart by many dedicated local carpenters in cooperation; not for profit or so that the carpenters might become famous, but instead for true utility; to protect and house village members. Traditional Japanese folk minka are therefore a treasure left behind by an almost forgotten lifestyle, and as one Japanese architect and minka restoration expert Yoshihiro Takishita will tell, stronger and better to live in than any modern home built today.

"The key is the wood." Says Takishita-san as he shows me the inside of his elegant house on top of Mt. Genji overlooking Kamakura City. "The carpenters cut and fit each hand-picked post and beam individually." The frame of minkas fit together "like leggos" with no nails or steel, so they can be easily taken apart and rebuilt with modern amenities. The main room of Takishita-san's rebuilt minka in Kamakura is impressive. The ceiling soars more than 3 meters high, and the spacious room radiates a sense of warmth and peace. In the far wall several sets of sliding doors open to a bright-green bamboo grove, and the interior is lined with "igusa" straw mats. "Originally, they used an irori fire pit in the middle of the main room." Says Takishita-san. "Smoke and soot

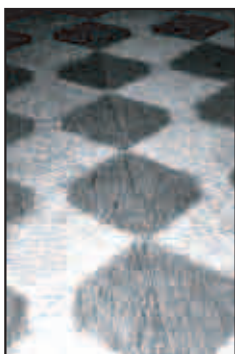


soaked into the wood and gave it its dark reddish-brown color." All of the gigantic jutting posts and beams that frame the main room have a fragrant but subtle smell, much like incense, and are the source of Takishita-san's minka's peaceful atmosphere. One beam in particular catches my eye; an elegant curving piece of 300 year old timber that looks like it probably weighs several tons. "I like that one too," says Takishita-san "...if protected from moisture this frame will last another 200 years at least," a claim not easily matched by modern homes. According to Takishita-san, an earthquake in Ishikawa-prefecture last March left many modern buildings in ruin, but all of the prefecture's minka were undamaged. From seeing the inside of Takishita-san's minka I have a new respect for wood, trees, and the craftsmanship that it took to build minka. "This is Japanese High Technology!" exclaims Takishita-san.

Yoshihiro Takishita-san is the author of several books published about restoring traditional minkas including "Japanese Country Style: Putting New Life into Old Houses" published by Kodansha with both English and Japanese translation included, and has overseen the completion of over 30 minka restoration projects in Japan and abroad. His house on top of Mt. Genji in Kamakura has been visited by George Bush senior, Hillary Clinton (probably at different times), and former queens of both Denmark and Greece. He is founder and head of The Association for Preserving Old Japanese Farmhouses (Nokoso-kai, www.nokosokai.org), and is committed to teaching Japan and the world about minka.

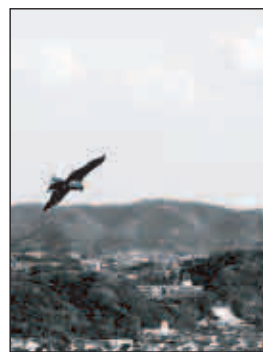


"The problem is many Japanese people don't know the value of their family home," says Takishita-san. "A couple will come to visit my home and tell me that they tore their family (minka) home down only several years ago. I get tired of hearing that they never knew how beautiful it could be. Japanese people are so concerned with foreign culture, for example brand name goods, that they forget their own culture. To know your own culture is to be international," which is good advice from a designer and architect at the top of his field.



"Igusa" straw mats; a stylish choice of flooring.

"Mottainai" (mot-tie-nye)
A Japanese adjective that means "wasteful." Also a catchphrase for the Japanese "Reduce, Recycle, Reuse" program. Because it is one of the few words in world languages synonymous with respect for the Earth, Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Wangari Maathai, proposed the word be incorporated into the international lexicon.



A hawk circling over Genji-Yama peers down on Kamakura City

Japanese minka are window on the past, and a mirror of an almost lost lifestyle; one that lived in balance with nature and between members of the community. Though Takishita-san's reformed minkas are all privately owned, many examples of traditional Japanese carpentry exist throughout the Fuji Five Lakes Area including local Shrines and Temples, various Pilgrim's Inns in the Kamiyoshida area, and several restored folk homes open to visitors at the Fujiyoshida Museum of Local History (tel: 0555-24-2411). Great works from Japan's past can be found all over Japan if one knows where to look. Perhaps one day we will take lessons from the traditions of the world's ancestors, and learn to live again in harmony with nature and each other.



五 Events 六 A May and June A

May

1st, Tuesday through **5th**, Sunday. **Fujizakura Festival** will continue daily at the area around Nakanochaya on the Yoshida Guchi climbing trail. Besides the beautiful Fuji Cherry Blossoms in bloom, expect vendors and a guided historic hiking tour (in Japanese) of the area. Info at: 0555-22-7133 "You Hike" Office.

3rd, Thursday is **Constitution Memorial Holiday**.

4th, Friday is **Green Day**. The 5th and 6th, Saturday and Sunday round out the 4 day weekend known as "**Golden Week**." Enjoy the time off, and expect heavy crowds at public transportation centers and airports.

4th, Friday and **5th**, Saturday. Solar Café presents **Eden Children's Music Festival**; Sustainable Lifestyle Day. Including a variety of activities, games, and performances aimed at promoting earth-friendly lifestyles. Contact Solar Café, owner Jake Reiner, for more information: 090-9346-3774. Website at www.earthembassy.org.

5th, Saturday is the **Spring Festival at Fuji Sengen Shrine** in Fujiyoshida. They will have festival vendors, stage performances, and plans for a karaoke tournament are to be announced. Starting at 10am. Info at: 0555-22-0221

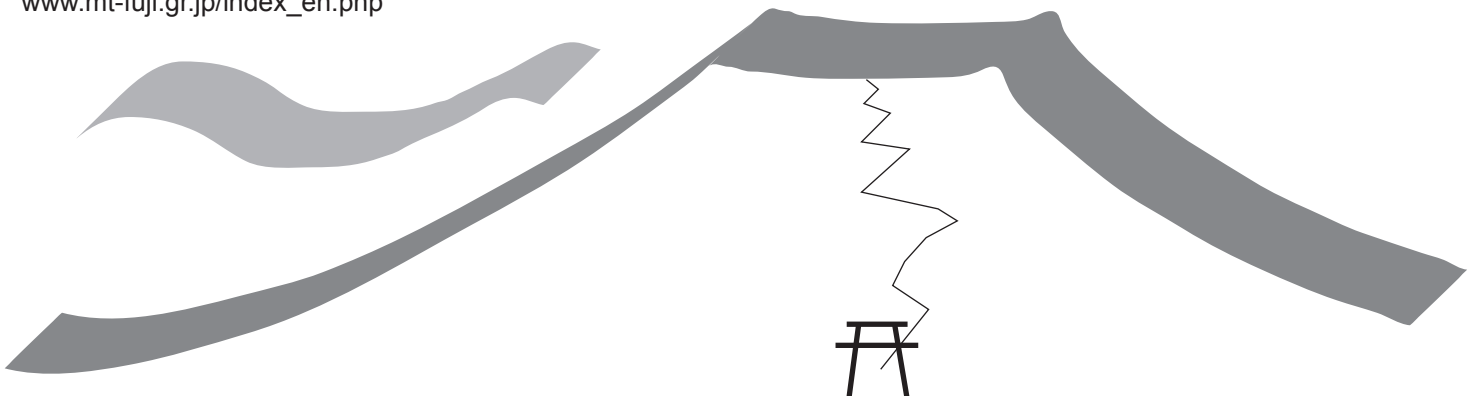
13th, Sunday is the **Spring Festival at Refre Fujiyoshida Street Station (Fujisan Arena)**. Planned events include a performance by the Fujigakuen Jazz Band and the Yosakoi Dance Troupe. Starts at 10am. Info at: Fujiyoshida Tourist Information Service. 0555-21-1000

27th, Sunday. **Yamanakako Road Race**. Choose between 1 lap around the lake; 13.6km or full half marathon; 21km. Info at 0555-62-9105 or road@vill-yamanakako.com. Subonichi Road Race Office Yamanakako.

June

10th, Sunday there is a **guided tour of the Shimoyoshida Station Area** from the station to Asama Park (Chureito Pagoda), the three temples of the Arakura area, and Kotoku park, a famous view point of Mt. Fuji. 2 tours starting at 10am and 11am. Call 0555-22-7133 to reserve a space "You Hike" office. Guide in Japanese only.

Yamanakako Tennis Open Cup. Dates to be announced (June). Doubles Teams entrance fee 29,000yen up to 300 teams competing for all the glory. Info from Mt. Fuji Cup Office: 401-0502 Hirano 74 Hirano Ryokan Minshuku Kumiai or www.mt-fuji.gr.jp/index_en.php



The force flows freely through the Reiho Fuji; a bimonthly publication of Fujiyoshida City Hall. Please send your comments, contributions, and suggestions by email or regular mail, but beware the dark side.

Email: iadfujii@city.fujiyoshida.lg.jp

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