

## **A Staging Post on the Way to Edo**

The origins of Eiunso go back to 1654, when it was known as the Mitajiri Teahouse (*Mitajiri Ochaya*) and had a very specific function. During the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868), Japan's feudal lords had to spend every second year in the shoguns' capital of Edo, so that the shoguns could keep a watchful eye on them. The local daimyos of the Mohri clan were no exception. From their base in Hagi Castle, some 50 kilometers from Hofu, they traveled by road to Mitajiri Port to go to Osaka by sea and thence by road to Edo. Since a daimyo could not very well stay alongside ordinary people in a normal inn, the Mitajiri Teahouse was built specifically to accommodate the daimyo and his retinue as they made their way to the capital.

The size of Mitajiri Teahouse fluctuated over the centuries. In the seventeenth century, it shared the site with the offices of the local administration. When, however, Mohri Shigetaka (1725–1789) decided to retire here, he moved the administrators out and greatly expanded the residential part of the building. The central, Edo-period (1603–1867) part of the building dates from 1783, the year Shigetaka moved here.

With the end of the shogunate in 1868, the feudal system was abolished and the daimyo were no longer obliged to spend every second year in the capital. Having outlived their purpose, most of the daimyo inns in Japan were sold off or demolished as a result. The Mitajiri Teahouse survived only thanks to the poor health of Duke Mohri Motoakira (1865–1938). Advised by his doctor that Hofu's warm climate would do him good, Motoakira lived here until 1916, when he moved into the Mohri Principal Residence. Subsequently, the Mitajiri Teahouse was used as a second home by the Mohri family, who would retreat here when important visitors came to stay at the main house.

The villa is a marvelous microcosm of three centuries of Japanese architecture: the part you enter dates from the Taisho period (1912–1926), the central part from the Edo period, and the furthest part from the Meiji period (1868–1912).

The Mohri family presented the house to the city of Hofu in 1939 for use as a community center, and it was renamed Eiunso in 1941. After World War II, it was briefly used as a dance hall by the New Zealand troops who occupied Hofu.

## **Highlights of the Interior**

## ***Goza no Ma***

This series of rooms is where Shigetaka used to receive visitors and hold audiences in the eighteenth century. He would sit in the furthestmost room, enjoying the view over the inner garden on one side and the outer garden on the other. (Special thin pillars are even used to minimize any obstruction to his view!) The details of the room also provide insights into the social hierarchy. In the room furthest away from the daimyo, for example, the tatami mats have a plain black border because the less important people sat there. Meanwhile, the corridors for important people have soft, warm tatami mats underfoot, while those used by servants have bare, cold wooden boards.

## **Design Notes from the Tea Ceremony**

The Mitajiri Teahouse is built in the *sukiya-zukuri* style, a style inspired by the aesthetics of the tea ceremony and involving the use of natural, rustic materials. Notice, for example, how the *ranma* transom screens between rooms are all of different patterns, and how the *nageshi* decorative tie beams along the walls are rounded (like tree trunks) rather than flat. The sliding doors in the garden corridor are carved with Chinese poems and made from single sheets of cedar.

## **The Second Floor**

The second floor has a delightful view over the garden. It also provides an opportunity to look down on the roof, which is made of delicate hinoki cypress bark. Hinoki-bark roofs must be replaced every thirty years or so, but do a good job communicating the feel and texture of nature.

## **Crests Abounding**

The crest of the Mohri clan—an *omodaka*, or three-leaf arrowhead—is in evidence throughout the house. Look for it on the sliding doors, door pulls, and decorative nailhead covers. The clan chose this crest because the shape of the flower suggests the sharp tip of a weapon—in fact, it is also known as *kachikusa*, or “victory flower.”