

Kannonnden

The Kannonnden (literally “Kannon Hall”) is the structure many think of as Ginkaku, the Silver Pavilion. It was commissioned by Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436–1490) as part of his Higashiyama-sansō estate, and completed after he died, in 1490. The Kannonnden is one of two buildings at Ginkakuji that remain from the original estate, and is a National Treasure.

The Silver Pavilion is not actually silver in color. One theory is that this nickname was bestowed only during the early Edo period (1603–1867) to contrast it with the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku), built by Yoshimasa’s grandfather, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408). Another theory is that the second level of the structure, originally covered in black lacquer, gradually assumed a whitish hue as the lacquer weathered over the years. Near the souvenir shop there is a model of the lacquered exterior as it probably looked over 500 years ago.

The Kannonnden takes its name from a large wooden statue of Kannon, a Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, enshrined on the second floor. The statue faces east towards the pond and the Tōgudō. The hall is not open to the public, but photographs of the statue are on display at the temple stamp (*goshuin*) office. The second floor is built in the Zenshuyo architectural style common at Zen temples, typified by bell-shaped *katomado* windows.

The architectural style of the first floor is different from the second floor. It is built in a simple residential style (*shoin-zukuri*), and the panels of the outer wall on the east side can be pulled to the side, completely opening the room to overlook the pond. A bronze figure of the phoenix (*hōō*) of East Asian myth stands atop the roof facing east.