

Castle Craftsmanship: Tiles

Himeji Castle's highly durable roof tiles were fired in a kiln at 1,150 degrees Celsius for two to three hours. Firing at such intense heat makes these tiles more durable than tiles fired at lower temperatures. From the Ikeda clan to the Sakai clan, the succession of families that governed Himeji during the more than two and a half centuries of the Edo period (1603–1867) literally left their marks on the castle. The crests on the tiles of the keep—a swallowtail butterfly and a paulownia flower—belong to the Ikeda clan, the first lords of the castle under the Tokugawa shoguns. The round edges of the tiles are also stamped with the clan crests of the castle's lords.

Types of Tiles

1. *Shachi*

This imaginary animal has a tiger-like head and the body of a fish. Usually installed in pairs, *shachi* were believed to protect buildings against fire. Eleven *shachi* adorn the main keep of Himeji Castle, including the two large figures on the peak of the top roof.

2. Ridge tiles

The roof ridge is composed of tiles of four different shapes, stacked to form an aesthetically pleasing line as well as to divert rainwater away from the vulnerable roof juncture

3. Flat tile

4. Concave roof tile

5. Round-ended eaves tile

6. Drainage tile

7. Upward-slanting tile for the ends of roof ridges

8. “Demon tile” (*oni-gawara*)

9. Corner roof tile

Oni-gawara (“demon tiles”) are ornamental tiles that adorn the ends of roof ridges.

They usually feature images of mythical monsters, but Himeji's *oni-gawara* come in a variety of designs, including the clan crests of the castle's lords, peaches, mallets, waves, ginkgo leaves, and even a cross.

Look and Feel

Make a rubbing of a clan crest

To make a copy of the Sakai and Honda clan crests, place a sheet of paper over the tile and rub it with a pencil. Feel free to take your copy home as a souvenir.