

Architecture of the Chikatsu-Asuka Museum

The museum was built in 1994 within Fūdoki no Oka Park, where hundreds of the sixth-century burial mounds known as *kofun* are preserved. The architecture of the museum both incorporates the natural landscape and echoes the shape and structure of the nearby *kofun*.

The museum was designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect Tadao Andō (b. 1941). Its steel frame and reinforced concrete structure embody Andō's philosophy of the coexistence of nature and architecture. The building follows the sloping contours of the existing landscape. The roof is also an enormous stairway that is sometimes used as an outdoor auditorium or as an outlook on the surrounding groves of plum and cherry trees.

Andō's stark and unembellished concrete design is well suited to the funerary subject matter of the *kofun* museum and the surrounding park. The spacious exhibition hall echoes the distinctive keyhole shape common to many of the burial mounds on display in the museum. The slopping path that leads visitors to the lower level of the museum creates the illusion that they are traveling deeper into the earthen tombs and back in time. When they come to the end of the museum exhibition space, visitors enter an atrium filled with natural light, stepping out into the brightness of the living world.

Andō's mastery of light is an important part of the museum experience. Typical of many of his designs, the museum is a study in contrasts: light and shadow, open and closed, natural and artificial. It invites visitors to contemplate the intersection of life and death as they move through the space.