

Momosuke Fukuzawa Memorial Museum

The Villa of a Man of Wealth and Taste

This is the villa of one of Japan's most famous entrepreneurs, Fukuzawa Momosuke. Thanks to the support of his influential father-in-law, Keio University founder Fukuzawa Yukichi, Momosuke was able to go to the United States after graduating from Japanese university. There he spent two and half years studying English and working as an intern at the Pennsylvania Railroad. Returning to Japan at the age of 21, he started working for the Hokkaido Coal Mining Railroad, and eventually became very rich by speculating in the company's shares. By 1909, he had left Hokkaido and become a major shareholder in the Nagoya Electric Light Co., where he became chief executive in 1914.

The gradient and vigorous current of the Kiso River inspired Momosuke to come up with the concept of "one river, one company." He believed the best way to exploit the hydroelectric generation capacity of any river was for one company to have all the rights.

Momosuke built this villa in 1919 while overseeing several local projects: the Yomikaki Power Station (completed in 1922), the Kakizore Aqueduct (completed in 1923), and the Oi Dam and Power Station (completed in 1924). He had stakes in multiple companies and was responsible for building six power stations along the Kiso River. He and his mistress used the villa to host lavish parties, wining and dining politicians, businessmen, and foreign technical consultants.

Here are some notable things to see inside the house.

Downstairs

Photographs of Kawakami Sadayakko. Sadayakko, a geisha, actress, and entrepreneur, was Momosuke's mistress and business associate. They lived here together while Momosuke's wife languished in Tokyo.

Drawing-room fireplace made of river stones. Local Japanese builders were familiar with *irori* open hearths, but not with Western-style fireplaces. This may be one reason why the mantelpiece is so badly warped from the heat.

Upstairs

The second floor of the house was rebuilt after being destroyed in a fire in 1959. It is designed in the Japanese style, with smaller rooms, lower ceilings, and sliding doors. It was not uncommon for buildings in the Taisho era (1912–1926) to have public rooms in the grand Western style, while the parts of the house reserved for the family were in the cozier, more intimate Japanese style.

Documents related to Momosuke's negotiations with local people for rights to the river water are on display. Notice the charming color map depicting all his operations along the Kiso River. It may look like an old *ukiyo-e* print, but it actually dates from 1937.

In the upstairs corridor are original plans for the nearby Momosuke Bridge, as well as some photographs of construction in progress. The bridge itself is visible from the back of the house. Housing for the workers at Momosuke's company once stood in front of the house, where the school now stands.