

## Villa Ushiroyama

Villa Ushiroyama is a house with an eventful history. Tucked away on a mountainside overlooking the picturesque port town of Tomonoura in Fukuyama, the building was originally designed by Japanese architect Fujii Koji (1888–1938). Fujii was born in Fukuyama and became famous for designing environmentally-friendly Japanese-style homes using a fusion of Japanese and Western techniques.

Fujii designed the villa as a mountain retreat for his older brother in the late 1920s. The house was thoroughly modern for its time, and showcased many of the same distinctive features Fujii developed building his own home, Chochikukyo, in Kyoto.

Unfortunately, the villa was abandoned after the war and by 2009 the house and surrounding garden were in a state of serious disrepair. The owner had planned to replace the house, but instead commissioned architect Maeda Keisuke, another Fukuyama native, to restore it. Although much of the house had to be replaced, the Villa Ushiroyama's sunroom and distinctive double roof remained intact. Maeda completed the full restoration in 2013, combining contemporary architecture with traditional, while also remaining true to Fujii's original design. The result is a harmonious fusion of styles which shows the craftsmanship of both men.

Maeda's style, which aims to create buildings that have a reciprocal relationship with the environment around them, has a lot in common with Fujii's. For example, the sunroom at the Villa Ushiroyama features a unique natural ventilation system, designed by Fujii and restored by Maeda. Sliding panels in the base of the walls allow cool air to filter in, while similar panels in the ceiling allow hot air to escape into an attic space, cooling the house further.

Large glass windows in the living room face east down the mountain, letting in plenty of sunlight as well as an expansive vista of Tomonoura. The glass is old and its wavy pattern lends an almost impressionistic edge to the view of the town. Between the living room and the windows is one of several ground-level corridors paved with stone, another way the Villa Ushiroyama brings the outdoors inside.

Although the Villa Ushiroyama is a private residence, it is open for visits on the second

Sunday of the month by reservation.