

The Main Tea House

Shointei was designed by Taniguchi Yoshio, an architect best known in the West for his 2004 redesign of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. In addition to two large straw tatami mat rooms available by reservation, the main tea house also contains an open area with tables and chairs and floor seating for walk-in guests as well as for teaching.

The main entrance is through a roofed, wooden gate and along a wide path extending past a pond to a stone staircase. Beyond the staircase is a stone walkway leading to the main building. Another entrance, from the carpark, is through a small gate in the outer wall; its low height forces those who pass through to lower their heads as they enter. This echoes the low entrances of traditional tea houses and is an indication that all participants in a tea gathering are considered equal. The path to the entrance meanders before reaching the gate, allowing time for reflection and releasing stress back to the outside world.

Inside the main building, the garden is directly visible through the large glass sliding doors. Guests who reserve one of the private spaces are allowed access to the wooden veranda that traverses the two tatami mat rooms. The walls and ceilings are made from fine pieces of Japanese cedar and chestnut, providing natural light that blends the interior with the gardens. Taniguchi's minimalist concept for Shointei complements the simple aesthetic of the tea ceremony.