

Former Mikami Residence

The Former Mikami Residence is a large mercantile home that was built in 1783 in Miyazu when it was still a castle town. Here the Mikami family ran a business selling the conventional paper bands (*mottoi*) for tying topknots. Eventually they expanded into sake production, thread wholesaling, and the *kitamaebune* coastal shipping industry. Their wealth and elevated status is evident in the spacious living quarters and various architectural features of the house. Also of note are the well-preserved sake brewing facilities.

The previous Mikami residence, built in 1776, was destroyed by fire after just seven years. When the house was rebuilt, it was extensively fireproofed with thick walls and layers of white plaster applied to the exterior. Nineteenth-century additions to the original structure include a sake storeroom, and because the Mikami family entertained a number of upper-class visitors, guest quarters and a special entrance reserved for elite guests.

Guest rooms open onto a *zashikansho* garden—a type of garden designed to be viewed from a seated vantage point—despite restrictions on commoners building gardens during this time period. The garden was designated a Kyoto Prefecture Place of Scenic Beauty in 2000. Examples of the subtle elegance found throughout the house include decorative nailhead covers, reversible ornamental sliding doors, a transom with engraved carp set with jeweled eyes, and luxurious black persimmon woodwork.

The Mikami family lived in the residence until 1975, when it was purchased by the city and opened to the public as a museum. The entire property was designated an Important Cultural Property of Japan in 2003.