

Samurai Residence (*Buke-Yashiki*)

Matsue was an important castle town during the Edo period (1603–1867), and required a large garrison of samurai warriors for its defense. The areas surrounding Matsue Castle were designated as residential areas for the samurai retainers and their families. Although several samurai residences (*buke-yashiki*) in Matsue have survived in altered form, this home built for a mid-ranking samurai has been carefully restored to its original configuration.

This home was one of many samurai residences built along the Shiomi Nawate road that winds alongside the moat on the castle's northern side. It was rebuilt after being destroyed by a large fire in 1733, and has since undergone several expansions and modifications. Occupied until quite recently, it was carefully restored in 2016 based on plans that date from the Meiji era (1868–1912) and information discovered while dismantling the former structure. The restoration work took three years.

A Showcase of Modesty and Taste

Like typical residences of samurai above the lowest rank, this *buke-yashiki* is a walled compound containing a house, a garden, a gate, and associated outbuildings. At its peak, 10 family members and staff lived within the compound. The size, materials, and design features of samurai residences were carefully regulated based on the family's rank, with special attention given to the needs of formal protocol. Samurai families were expected to avoid ostentation. The house is spacious, but sober and modest in appearance, with about 67 *tsubo* (220 square meters) in floor area. The restoration includes a large number of furnishings and household items that make it easy for visitors to envision the frugal samurai family lifestyle.

The Entrance Hierarchy

A large roofed gate called a *nagayamon* (long-house gate) is the main entrance to the compound. The gate structure is fairly large, containing living space for three low-ranking samurai retainers (*chugen*) as well as storage space for the master's palanquin. It is low in height and undecorated, befitting the household's modest rank, and opens onto a small courtyard that leads to the house. One of the more notable features of any samurai dwelling is the hierarchy of entrances. To the left is the ceremonial entrance used only by the master and his important visitors. It has a pair of broad wood-slatted sliding doors, as well as a wide wooden porch and step that allowed guests to alight

from a palanquin without stepping on the ground.

This ceremonial entrance leads to a tatami-matted formal vestibule and the master's formal reception room (*zashiki*) on the left. Immediately to the right of the ceremonial entrance is the side entrance intended for everyday use by the women of the family, as well as by servants, close friends, and relatives. This entrance leads to an earthen-floored vestibule, and from there one can either step up to the tatami-matted private living rooms straight ahead or on the same level to the earth-floored kitchen workspace to the right. A third entrance to the rear of the house opens directly to the kitchen and serves as a utilitarian back door. The entire house is similarly zoned into formal spaces at the front of the house opening onto the carefully designed main garden, and family living spaces to the rear opening to the more casual rear garden.

The Room for Receiving Visitors

The *zashiki* formal reception room is considered the best room of the house, appropriate for receiving and entertaining visitors of a higher rank. Rooms such as these are required to have a decorative tokonoma niche, used to display hanging scrolls, flower arrangements, or other prized decorative objects, as well as the master's sword on certain occasions. To the right of the tokonoma is a low, built-in writing desk illuminated by the gentle, diffuse light of the sliding paper shoji screens. To the left of the tokonoma is a modest decorative cabinet set at eye level, whose doors feature a subdued ink painting of a plum tree about to blossom.

The wooden details of this room are of high quality, made of carefully selected parallel-grained Japanese cedar (*sugi*); the post framing the tokonoma is a smooth log of *sugi* left partly in a natural state. Several metal nail covers in the form of the family's crest on the wooden framing are the only other decoration. The *zashiki* and the formal garden outside are designed to complement each other, with great attention given to the vantage point of seated visitors. A wide wooden veranda (*engawa*) acts as an exterior passage to the garden or a place to sit under the broad eaves and enjoy the view.

The Functional Living Quarters

The private zones of the house can be divided into family living spaces and functional spaces such as the kitchen and storage. The former are arrayed in a line across the rear of the house, sharing a long veranda and opening to the rear garden. These include a family room, likely used for sleeping as well as daytime activities; the master's private

room; and a room for the master's wife. The contrast in design with the formal rooms is subtle but noticeable, and includes the use of pine wood with a lively grain, along with rounded corners and playful sparrow-shaped decorative hardware in white metal.

The functional spaces include tatami-floored rooms for daily work as well as a wooden-floored kitchen area with clay cookstoves (*kamado*) and a low stone sink. A roofed well stands a few steps outside the kitchen door, and a large pottery water jar is ingeniously set into the kitchen wall—half inside, half out—in a way that allows it to be easily filled from the well outside. A simple bath is located nearby to take advantage of the water and fuel supplies for heating. A small space is provided for keeping large jars of fermenting miso paste. At the very rear of the house is a small separate wing containing a Buddhist altar room where the spirits of the family's ancestors are enshrined, along with a simple two-mat tearoom.

To meet the needs of modern visitors, a stable near the *nagayamon* entrance has been reconfigured with modern restrooms, and a nearby outbuilding has been converted into a tea and gift shop.