

***Uchigura*, Then and Now**

As many as 30 of the residences within Masuda's Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings still contain interior storehouses (*uchigura*), some of which are over a century old. Such storehouses were constructed in response to a burst of economic prosperity that began in the mid-nineteenth century. The precursors of *uchigura* were fire-resistant exterior storehouses that served as places to store food, tools, and other products related to a merchant's trade. After the merchants of Masuda began to connect their storehouses to their main residences using an exterior roof, the utilitarian structures were eventually incorporated into the living space.

Each *uchigura* in Masuda is the heart of a home, both in placement and function. Long beams that hold the outer roof in place rest on the sturdy *uchigura*, creating a solid structure that can withstand the region's heavy snowfall. In the late 1800s, many merchants built *uchigura* that included a second floor. This divided the storehouse to create a living space on the first floor, where the family would gather or entertain guests, and a second-floor space for storing valuables, utensils, furniture, and clothes.

A residence's kitchen and other additional living spaces were typically located between the *uchigura* and the storefront. The kitchen often included a well or water pump so that residents had access to water without leaving the house, which was especially valuable in winter. According to older residents of the town, these large merchant homes regularly housed as many as 20 people, including the family members, servants, and employees of the shop. Accordingly, the *uchigura* would often be the one area of the house reserved exclusively for use by the family or head of the household.

Today, many of the families that own Masuda's *uchigura* have opened them to the public. Other *uchigura* have been repurposed as businesses, and one now serves as the local tourism information center. One residence is now a restaurant where customers can learn about the importance of fermentation in the local food culture of Masuda. In total, as many as 50 *uchigura* are known to still exist, and many are open to visitors. Among these is an *uchigura* that has been in the Satō family for 13 generations. Constructed in the mid-1800s, the residence contains a unique *misegura*, a style in which the storefront is located inside the *uchigura*. The Satō residence is registered as an Important Cultural Property of Japan.