

***Machiya* Houses**

Homes built during the Edo period (1603–1867) for members of the non-samurai classes can be categorized as one of two types: *nōka*, which were freestanding houses used by farmers, and *machiya*, which were the homes and workshops of merchants and artisans. Relatively few *machiya* remain standing in most modern cities, but the streets of Takayama’s two Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings—the Sanmachi neighborhood and Shimo-Ninomachi and Ōjinmachi neighborhoods—are lined with uninterrupted rows of *machiya*. These districts are good examples of what most merchant neighborhoods looked like in the late Edo period.

Machiya are characterized by a few distinct features. Most are long and narrow, because property taxes were often determined by the width of the frontage. Each house’s foremost room opens onto the street and was the storefront from which the family conducted their daily business. A narrow, earthen-floored passage (*doji* or *doma*) connects the storefront to the living quarters at the back. Most *machiya* plots also included a storehouse and a small garden.

Machiya design was influenced by strict laws that prohibited the merchant class from using certain types of wood and other materials, and many of the houses look very similar. In Takayama, residents needed to get permission from both the governor and their own neighborhood before modifying or rebuilding their homes. The competitive merchant families generally did not allow each other to build anything more impressive than their own houses. This created a system of incentives that encouraged uniformity in the design and dimensions of the houses.