

Characteristics of *Machiya* in Takayama

Like the Takayama Festival floats, the design of *machiya* houses in Takayama was influenced by the cultures of Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo). During the Edo period (1603–1867), Kyoto was the location of the imperial palace and the center of high culture, and carpenters in Takayama emulated the architecture of Kyoto *machiya* when building Takayama's first neighborhoods. After the Tokugawa shogunate took direct control of Takayama in 1695, local architecture was more strongly influenced by trends in Edo, where the shogunate was located.

The architectural features of *machiya* in Takayama are an amalgam of these cultural influences and responses to the local climate. As winters in Takayama are snowy, the upper roofs of the residences extend beyond the lower roofs to prevent snow from piling up in front of the second-floor windows. The eaves of the upper roofs hang over a trench in front of the houses, which collects and drains water from the melting snow. Unlike the town houses of Kyoto and Edo, Takayama *machiya* rarely had tile roofs, and most were instead clad with wooden shingles. Many are now covered with steel roofing.

Edo-period towns, with their densely built wooden buildings, were often badly damaged by fire. The Meireki Fire of 1657 destroyed between 60 and 70 percent of the city of Edo and killed over 100,000 people. The Tokugawa shogunate looked to the forests of Hida domain as a source of timber for rebuilding the city. Thirty-eight years and another major fire later, the shogunate transferred the ruling Kanamori family to another domain and placed the Hida domain—and its forests—under its direct control. Under the Tokugawa, Hida merchants were forbidden from using certain high-quality woods, such as Japanese cedar and zelkova, and they were required to reuse as much wood as possible when making repairs or building new buildings.

On average, the rooflines of Takayama are about 4 meters tall, shorter than those of other *machiya* districts. Many of the *machiya* have dormers to let in more natural light and reduce the need for candles and other open flames. These also compensate for the lack of windows on the buildings' sides, which butt up against the neighboring houses.