

Former Ryotei Hotoro: Second-Floor Parlor

The lavish parlor on this floor was the heart of the luxury restaurant (*ryotei*) Hotoro and was dedicated to entertaining guests. The two large rooms were used as a single space, and the side room was available for private engagements. The parlor was designed with a particular focus on high-quality materials and eye-catching features, such as intricately carved transoms, red walls, and windows and sliding doors with translucent *washi* paper. The fine-grain wood ceiling on this floor is higher than on the first floor, which is typical for a building in an entertainment district where customers were hosted upstairs.

A Space Designed for Entertaining Guests

Hotoro did not have a kitchen and dishes were specially ordered from outside caterers, which was considered the mark of a truly elegant establishment. Guests gathered at the large table in the far room to eat, drink, and enjoy each other's company. The room near the parlor's entrance served as a stage for music and dance performances by geisha (called *geiko* in Obama, as is the custom in Kyoto). Examples of musical instruments used by *geiko*, such as shamisen and a small drum, are displayed in a dedicated recess along the wall. To the left of the instruments is a large "full moon" design element that serves as a frame for a tokonoma alcove with a hanging scroll. A similar "crescent moon" in the opposite corner of the parlor frames a flower arrangement and creates an artistic balance between the two rooms.

Works of Art Enhancing the Impression of Luxury

The art on display in the parlor includes a variety of paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, and woodcarvings. Some remain from the time when Hotoro operated as a *ryotei*, while others were added in later years. In the far room, a painting of a flock of sparrows in flight was the subject of a game enjoyed by patrons. The goal was to count the birds, a task that likely became more and more challenging after a few drinks. Near the "crescent moon" motif hang two calligraphy pieces by Iwaya Ichiroku (1834–1905), an influential artist who contributed to the development of modern calligraphy. Another prominent work of art is a pair of six-paneled folding screens that span the length of both rooms. The gilded panels display calligraphy by Tatsu Soro (1714–1792), a Confucian scholar and poet known for his works in classical Chinese.

Preserving the Historic Atmosphere

The second-floor parlor provided fine dining and entertainment for countless patrons, including merchants, ship owners, and wealthy travelers, for about a hundred years until the *ryotei* closed in 1989. The distinctive architecture, opulent interior design, and numerous works of art on display preserve both the look and the atmosphere of Hotoiro from that prosperous era.