

The Former Kaichi School Building, a National Treasure

The Former Kaichi School Building is known for its architecture, which features Western design elements recreated with traditional Japanese materials and construction techniques. This hybrid of styles is called “pseudo-Westernism” (*giyōfū*).

The two-story structure was designed by a carpenter from Matsumoto named Tateishi Seijū (1829–1894). Tateishi was tasked with creating a Western-style building, but like most Japanese architects of the time, he had no experience building with stone or brick. Faced with this challenge, Tateishi took creative steps to make the wooden school appear more like a Western building. For example, he used stucco to create the “stonework” on the lower part of the building’s exterior. Pseudo-Western design became popular following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when Japan abandoned its closed-border policy and began to adopt technology and culture from the West.

The school building was originally located in central Matsumoto on the bank of the Metoba River, where it was used as an elementary school from 1876 to 1963. It was moved to its current location in 1964 and has since become a museum of modern-era architecture and the history of education in Japan. In 2019, the Former Kaichi School Building was the first school building from its era to be designated a National Treasure.