

Gen-an

The tea house called Gen-an is a modern reconstruction. It is based on surviving plans for a tea house Uraku built at his earlier residence in Osaka—one which Horiguchi Sutemi believed may also have been called “Jo-an.” During the construction of Urakuen, an official name was needed for the tea house that would be built using these plans. Horiguchi suggested the name “Gen-an,” which means “original hermitage.”

To piece together the history of this earlier tea house, Horiguchi used a clue hidden on one of the artifacts now associated with Jo-an: the name plaque that hangs on its southern side. Although this plaque is inscribed with the name “Jo-an,” it is dated 1599—long before the Shōdenin and Jo-an were built in Kyoto. Horiguchi concluded that the plaque must have been created for an earlier tea house with the same name, and that Uraku took the plaque with him when he left Osaka. Presumably, Uraku then reused it and the name for the new tea house he built in Kyoto.

Uraku lived in the Tenma area of Osaka, just northwest of Osaka Castle, until the winter of 1614. Three years later, Uraku’s former residence was absorbed by the newly founded Kawasaki Tōshōgū Shrine. His tea house was preserved as part of the shrine until both were destroyed by fire in 1837. In 1871, the newly founded Japan Mint was built on the site. A single part of the original tea house survives in one corner of the mint grounds: the *kutsunugi-ishi* (“shoe-removal rock”), where guests would pause to remove their shoes before entering. During the reconstruction of Gen-an, Horiguchi negotiated to have this rock relocated to Urakuen, but he was unsuccessful.

When the reconstruction of Gen-an was complete, it needed a name plaque. Rather than use new materials, Horiguchi selected wood with a distinguished pedigree: a door panel that had once hung in Kikōji Temple in Nara and had been reused in the Mitsui family villa in Ōiso. Urakuen officials took the wood to Kyoto and presented it to Mujin Sōsa (1901–1979), the thirteenth head of the Omotesenke school of tea. Mujin inscribed the plaque with the chosen name and officially bestowed the name “Gen-an” on the newly finished tea house.

Gen-an is larger than Jo-an, and many of its interior features are equally unconventional. Several show Uraku’s clear departure from the preferences of his mentor, Sen no Rikyū. For example, Uraku used bamboo—a material Rikyū disdained—for many of the finishings in the room, such as the wooden frames of the *shōji* windows. There is also a bamboo pillar that separates the host’s seating area from the guests. Furthermore, Rikyū preferred to give the guests a direct view of the scroll and flower arrangements chosen for the gathering, but for Gen-an, Uraku positioned the

tokonoma alcove behind the host instead.