

Shoraikaku (Former Hirasawa Family Residence)

The former residence of Hirasawa Yonosuke (b. 1885), the founder of Asahi-Shuzo Sake Brewing Company, was completed in 1934 and skillfully combines traditional Japanese architecture and art deco-inspired elements. Shoraikaku, the poetic name of the residence, can be translated as “pavilion of the sound of wind rustling in the pines.” The building was moved to its current location in 2002 to make space for the expanded Asahi-Shuzo headquarters. To preserve the valuable structure, it was transferred intact rather than through disassembling and subsequent reassembling. The house suffered extensive damage in an earthquake in 2004, but was restored to its original grandeur with the company’s financial support.

Shoraikaku is a nationally designated Important Cultural Property. Visitors can explore the many rooms of the residence and the surrounding garden from April to November on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The opening hours are 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Admission is free.

Tour of the House

Guests calling on the Hirasawa family at Shoraikaku came in through the main entrance, which has a gabled roof and a large carriage porch. The bell-shaped *katomado* window by the formal entryway is decorated with a pine-needle design in reference to the name of the residence. Today, visitors use the side entrance, passing through hallways where the floors are made from single long boards of polished zelkova wood. Knots or damaged spots in the flooring planks are fitted with pieces of wood skillfully shaped like gourds, mountains, and other motifs.

Past a small parlor or through the anteroom just inside the main entrance is the Shorai no Ma reception room. The large space has a high coffered ceiling, paintings of birds and flowers on the cabinet doors, a palm-tree pillar in the tokonoma alcove, and transoms carved with eagle and owl figures. In summer, the sliding doors are replaced with *sudare* reed blinds, evoking an image of luxurious palaces of old. Adjoining the Shorai no Ma is the altar room, which contains a large Buddhist altar and a household Shinto altar installed above it. The Buddhist altar is particularly impressive, with an elaborately engraved metal lock and intricate lacquered panels featuring depictions of seasonal birds and flowers created using gold and mother-of-pearl.

Behind the Shorai no Ma is a Western-style dining room with parquet flooring and large glass windows overlooking the side garden. Down the hallway is a Western-style bedroom that incorporates elements of art deco, which was the height of fashion at the time. The wall that the bedroom shares with the hallway has a round stained-glass window with a colorful geometric pattern, and the doors to the connected study are decorated with two long, thin bands of mosaic glass tiles. The study, called Asahi no Ma (“dawn chamber”), is a more traditional Japanese space that served as the private room of the head of the house. The pillar in the tokonoma is made of rare *Senna siamea* wood, the transom latticework forms a traditional auspicious pattern, the edges of the ceiling are adorned with delicate strips of woven wood, and many other design features are used to embellish the room.

A particularly notable section of Shoraikaku is a Western-style, brick-and-stucco drawing room that was added to the eastern part of the house. The ceiling is decorated with classic plaster reliefs around a four-light chandelier, the walls are covered with dark floral wallpaper, and the far side of the room has a fireplace flanked by stained-glass windows. Despite the mostly Western design, a Japanese-style painting hangs above the fireplace. The piece, titled *The Evening Lake*, was created by Fukuda Toyoshiro (1904–1970), a famous twentieth-century artist.

Other spaces in the house include a children’s room, a bedroom once used by the matriarch of the family, a Japanese-style dining room, and a large multipurpose room.

The Gardens

Shoraikaku is surrounded by greenery, with a garden containing approximately 100 pine trees and 100 maple trees. Parts of the garden have been added or modified in recent years, but the western side remains unchanged since the 1930s, when the residence was first built. The older section of the garden has a *karaike* (“dry pond”) feature, rimmed by pine trees on three sides. The *karaike* is decorated with large rocks, a stone lantern, and a mossy bridge, as if it were a normal pond, but it was never intended to hold water.

The inner courtyard garden contains a small pond, a decorative water basin, and a large stone lantern. The garden can be viewed from the three corridors that surround it, as well as from the Asahi no Ma, the Shorai no Ma, and the Western-style dining room.