

## **Tae no Yu**

### **For women by women**

Sato Koichiro's decision to abandon his job in Tokyo was supported by his mother, Kyoko, who was the inn's general manager. Right from the start, Kyoko had a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve. "Many of the hot-spring inns around here were quite basic. And when they were self-catering, the women were too busy caring for their families all day to relax. My mother had this idea of creating a *ryokan* where women from the big cities could come to unwind," says Koichiro. "She wanted to make a place that felt sophisticated in a quintessentially Japanese way, inspired by her love of Kyoto and Kyoto cuisine."

Kyoko's timing was spot-on. In the late 1980s, more women in Japan were in the labor force, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act had recently been passed, and a significant minority of people were actively looking for quieter hot springs that were not overrun by tour groups and company junkets.

"In families, it's often the woman who makes the decisions on where to go on holiday, so Kyoko's focus on women was a smart and timely concept," Koichiro says. Feminine refinement envelops you as soon as you step into Tae no Yu, whether it is the smell of incense wafting down the corridors or the gentle indirect lighting of the Tiffany-style Art Nouveau stained-glass lamps.

Tae no Yu believes in continuous improvement in tune with the times, and small changes made in response to customer feedback can be seen everywhere: rooms with beds rather than the traditional futons; family baths for people who prefer privacy; a window counter in the dining room for solitary travelers. One thing, however, that has not changed since the inn's founding is the indoor bath. It remains exactly the same as it was in Sadaji's day, a mark of respect for his decades-long work establishing and managing the inn.

Tae no Yu maintains the shared traditions of Nyuto Onsenkyo by having an outdoor mixed bath. "Some people are on the shy side, but we also get couples who are keen to bathe together. In that sense, the mixed bath is a marketing plus," Koichiro says. To avoid any issues with "crocodiles" (hot-spring ogglers), Tae no Yu encourages women to drape themselves with a towel in the mixed bath; there is also

a separate outdoor bath for women only.

Ironically for a *ryokan* that is so popular with women, the kanji character for Tae in Tae no Yu is made up of the ideograms for “few” and “women.” The character actually originates from the opening line of the *Lotus Sutra*. “My great-grandfather was very religious,” Koichiro explains. “He liked chanting while meditating under a waterfall. When he was still living here, he would chant and strike his bell very early in the morning. It was quite a surprise for the guests!”