

Rhine House

Rhine House is a meticulously preserved two-story wooden home built in 1915 for J. R. Drewell. It consists of a main house and a service wing attached in an L configuration, and is considered an outstanding example of the Kobe *ijinkan* style of Western houses. Rhine House now serves as an information center for the Kitano Ijinkan-gai district and the preservation efforts underway on the district's historical buildings. Notable design features of the house include a south-facing porch with paired square columns and a glass-enclosed veranda above; bay windows with decorative details on the eastern and western sides; and wooden louvered door and window shutters. A roof of gray-glazed Japanese tile sits above a Western-style wooden dentiled cornice, and the external walls are sided with thick wooden clapboards highlighted by an ornamental engraved line. Most of these features had become characteristic of Western-style houses in Kobe as early as the 1880s, and they continued to be popular decades later.

The city of Kobe designated Rhine House a Traditional Historic Building in 1980 and an Important Building for the Formation of Landscapes in 2016. Beginning in 2017, the house was entirely dismantled and reassembled to perform earthquake-resistant structural upgrades, and all walls, floors, ceilings, fittings, and decorative moldings were restored to their original state. The house was reopened in 2019. The first floor of the main house originally included a drawing room, a living room, and a dining room, while the second floor contained bedrooms. The second floor is now devoted to informative exhibits about the history of the house and the foreign settlements in Kobe, including the Kitano-cho/Yamamoto-dori Preservation District. The displays also describe the repair of damage incurred in the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, as well as the more recent dismantling and rebuilding process.

The city of Kobe purchased the house in 1978, and the name “Rhine House” was chosen after receiving public input. The last non-Japanese resident of the house was a German named Oberlein, who lived there until

1968. The name “Rhine” was both an acknowledgement of his native

Germany and a pun derived from the strongly linear aspect of the exterior siding, as “Rhine” and “line” are pronounced identically in Japanese. Rhine House is the only *ijinkan* in Kobe where admission is free of charge.