

Ben's House

The name of this house derives from a legend that it was once the residence of English aristocrat and adventurer Ben Allison. The two-story wooden structure dates from the late Meiji era (1868–1912). The exterior is almost completely preserved in its original style, with walls of textured plaster and dark brown wooden trim, including a fine dentiled cornice. The windows have strikingly patterned painted shutters and window boxes, with geometrically patterned window panes. The roof is a gray-glazed Japanese type, as was typical at the time, and the entrance portico has a unique pointed roof. The building itself is designated a Cultural Property of Kobe City, as is the street-side boundary wall, which still retains its original red bricks, imported from Germany at the time the house was built.

In 2019, the interior was completely transformed into an idiosyncratic and imaginative natural-history display inspired by Ben Allison's collection, in the manner of a European "cabinet of curiosities." Ben's House is not a

conventional museum, but rather an artistic adventure. Original interior details like arched inner doorways and fine paneling were retained, and artful installations of natural specimens of many types were arranged in rooms painted in striking colors. Although the contents of the exhibition are subject to change, the red-walled ground floor currently houses an impressive taxidermy collection, including a polar bear, an American bison, and a snow wolf. A large array of antlered skulls occupies one wall, while wooden shelves lining another wall display dozens of books, specimens, and other curiosities.

A blue-walled butterfly room is the focal point of the second floor.

Individually framed butterfly specimens cover the walls, while others are mounted in small glass cases displayed on built-in shelves. An adjoining gray-walled room features a collection of wall-mounted African masks, as well as dozens of tall glass jars containing an imaginative selection of shells and other natural specimens along with pencils, papers, rulers, silverware, playing cards, and other sundry items. Ben's House is operated by the Uroko Group.