



Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura and Junzo Yoshimura, International House, Tokyo, Japan, 1953-1955. Preservation and restoration by the Architectural Institute of Japan. Plan B with approach drive-way. © Masami Kobayashi, 2004.

Preservation and Restoration of the International House of Japan

BY MASAMI KOBAYASHI

The International House of Japan (I-House) in Tokyo is a non-governmental organization that has promoted rich international intellectual exchanges. Designed by three young, up-and-coming architects Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura, and Junzo Yoshimura, the building of I-House in an exquisite modern Japanese style was built in 1955, but due to financial difficulties, the building was threatened with demolition. The Architectural Institute of Japan scrambled to assemble a special panel to present a conservation plan in 2004. Ultimately, the Board of Trustees decided to follow the panel's proposal. This paper introduces the process of the restoration activities, discusses what were the driving forces of the preservation and restoration actions, and gives some lessons from the project.

History of the Site and Organization

The building of I-House cannot be thought of as being separate from the surrounding garden, but several historical transformations of the site of I-House experienced over the years since the Edo Period have contributed to its particular *genius loci* (power of place). In the 18th century, many Daimyo (Feudal Lord) estates were located in the Toriizaka area, with the I-House's site registered as the Edo residence of the Kyogoku Ikinokami family from the Tadotsu domain. The landowner changed several times from the Meiji Period (1867–1912) onward, with a new residence constructed by the politician Kaoru Inoue in the second Meiji decade, and a new estate added in the third decade. Records exist of imperial visitations during which performances of Kabuki were performed for the Emperor. Afterwards, the estate came into the ownership of Tetsuma Akaboshi, a businessman of the Mitsubishi group.

In 1924, the year after the large Kanto earthquake, the property was purchased by Koyata Iwasaki of the Mitsubishi family, who commissioned architect, Shintaro Oe, to design his residence, and a Kyoto landscape architect, Jihei (Ueji) Ogawa, to design the garden. The building, completed in 1929–30 was constructed in a design blending Western with Japanese elements.

During World War 2, this exquisite house was completely burned down, after which it became the property of the government in conjunction with the settlement of property taxes. Looking back on the history of the estate from the Edo to the Showa Periods, one can see how, despite transformation throughout the ages, this site in the Toriizaka area exudes a certain “power of place,” appealing to the hearts of many and building up a unique dignity and sense of place.

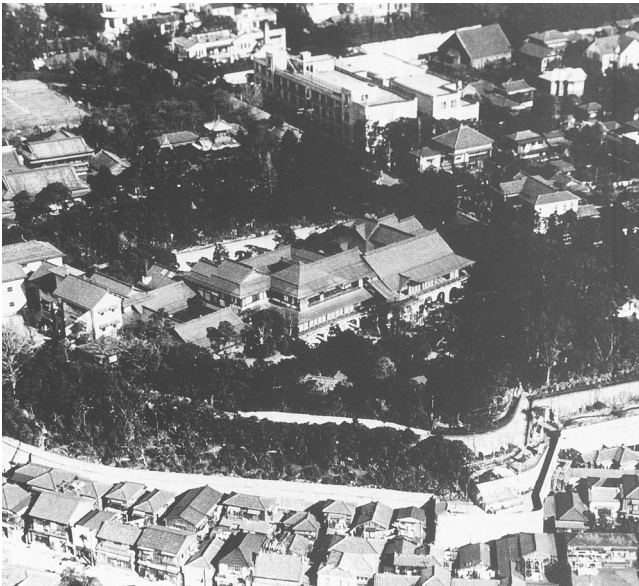
It is well known that the establishment of I-House is strongly linked to the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR),

a private organization founded in 1925 to foster peace in the Pacific area. Among its members, a young research assistant, Shigeharu Matsumoto met John D. Rockefeller III in 1929, which was the beginning of a long-lasting friendship between these two persons that proved to be a driving force in the establishment of the I-House. After Rockefeller's several visits to Japan, the idea of setting up some sort of Cultural Center for facilitating exchange and intellectual collaboration going beyond national and cultural differences with a House as the venue of for such interaction, was discussed eagerly.

The I-House was incorporated as a foundation in August, 1952, and the painful fundraising campaign was started in both Japan and the USA, being completed by August 31, 1953. In such way, the I-House was founded upon the passionate efforts of individuals, leaving just building the actual house itself as the final step in bringing the I-House to reality.

Architectural Design of I-House

After the World War 2, the I-House foundation managed to purchase the land of the ex-Iwasaki residence from the government, and it started selecting a suitable design. Matsumoto, then director of the foundation, called upon three young, up-and-coming architects Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura, and Junzo Yoshimura to each submit a plan for consideration in a closed design competition, in which the best proposal would be selected. As it turns out, excellent proposals from each of the three defied attempts to select a winner, so it was decided to build the I-House based on a collaborative design of these three architects, a rare occurrence in the history of modern Japanese architecture. Following roughly one year of design work from 1953, the construction work was commenced



01 Aerial View of Iwasaki's House. © International House of Japan, 1930.

by the Shimizu Corporation, and it was safely completed in 1955. In the years that followed, several additions and repairs were made to the building: a dining room was added in 1958 designed by Junzo Yoshimura; a coffee shop was built above the banquet rooms in 1959; the central inner court was covered; and additional flooring was installed in the basement in 1969.

In the 1970s, the building was significantly remodeled and expanded by Maekawa Associates to add more functionality, in what is now the “annex”. In essence, these are the events that contributed to the main building’s construction seen today.

Preservation Process

After the remodeling in the 1970s, there was a rise in membership and a revitalization of I-House activities, but from the 1990s I-House was struggling with severe budgetary difficulties as well as aging facilities. After considering a joint-project in the area, in 2003, a general consensus was reached to sell the property and airspace rights to a developer, and to demolish the building for reconstruction. This triggered the organization of the “Committee for the International House of Japan, 21st Century” in May of 2004, comprising concerned I-House members and neighboring residents, and a symposium was held on the matter. Personally, my family and I had a deep connection with I-House, and as an architect I was asked to prepare an alternative plan for the building’s preservation for the committee. Unfortunately, the plan I drafted at the time did not win the favor of the persons concerned.

The Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ) had already requested in 2003 that I-House consider conservation, but the heads of both AIJ and I-House had changed, the new Director of AIJ, Hiroshi Akiyama, resubmitted a written request for the preservation of I-House to the new House Chairman, Tasuku Takagaki. The decision to dispose of a



02 Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura and Junzo Yoshimura, International House, Tokyo, Japan, 1953-1955. © Shin Kenchiku, 1955

portion of the I-House assets was made soon afterwards, at the Board of Trustees meeting on June 22. Chairman Takagaki sent a response to the AIJ on July 9, which contained the following phrase:

“With regards to rebuilding the International House of Japan, our first priority is to maintain a harmonious relationship between the new I-House and the surrounding garden to preserve the garden as is; we would like to preserve the current atmosphere of the property as much as possible.... it would be greatly appreciated if the Architectural Institute of Japan could furnish any advice or suggestions by the end of August.”

Hence, in facing the prospect of the building’s complete demolition and reconstruction, the AIJ was given the tight schedule of no more than 2 months to produce its own position paper.

Preservation and Restoration Strategy

AIJ scrambled to assemble a special panel under the chair of Hiroyuki Suzuki of Tokyo University to look into alternative proposals. Given the previous submission of my own alternative proposal, I was placed in charge of the planning. With several experts asked to join the panel to look into the history, structure and facilities of I-House, we made an all-out effort to come up with a workable alternative.

The first task that lay before us was to provide an objective assessment of the current building. All blueprints of the I-House were obtained and professional assessments conducted with regard to the building’s structural integrity and degree of aging. These assessments concluded that the building did not satisfy earthquake resistance standards, and that regrettably most of the facility would have to be renovated.

Secondly, intense debate was given to whether the AIJ should even consider restoring the I-House. Within the panel, the opinion was overwhelming that the AIJ could not consid-



03 Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura and Junzo Yoshimura, International House, Tokyo, Japan, 1953-1955. Exterior view of the original house. © Shin Kenchiku, 1955.

er demolishing a building that it had once presented with an architectural award, and that the first and foremost obligation of the panel should be to preserve the current building.

Thirdly, serious thought was given to a proposal to renovate the annex portion added by Maekawa Associates into office space. Since the building itself is rather recessed from the road nearby, we looked into whether demolishing and rebuilding this part was even physically possible, and determined it was at least technically feasible.

Our fourth task was to determine what method to use to increase the earthquake resistance of I-House, and structurally reinforcing the skeleton was rejected since it was decided to that it would alter the appearance of the building too drastically. Upon hearing that earthquake-proofing retrofits performed at the Mie Prefectural Office Building succeeded while it was largely still in use, a group visited the site for further study, and we came up with a proposal minimizing the amount of downtime for I-House.

Lastly, we had to estimate the final construction costs and draft a plan of action. Ultimately, the panel came up with two proposals: Plan A that followed the original plan to sell the property, and Plan B, which minimized the amount of property for sale, and kept the approaching drive-way.

Without a moment to spare during the summer vacation, the panel engaged in a colossal undertaking in July and August of 2004. Looking back on panel records, opinions were exchanged at a flurried pace over several meetings of panel members with I-House Chairman Takagaki and other executives. In retrospect, going through this process allowed us to build up a mutual trust, which had a significant impact on overall decision making. We managed to finalize the details by the end of August and submit a hundred-page report to the I-House by September 3.

Prior to the report's actual submission, I myself made a solo presentation of the contents of the report to the I-House executives on August 27. Chairman Takagaki

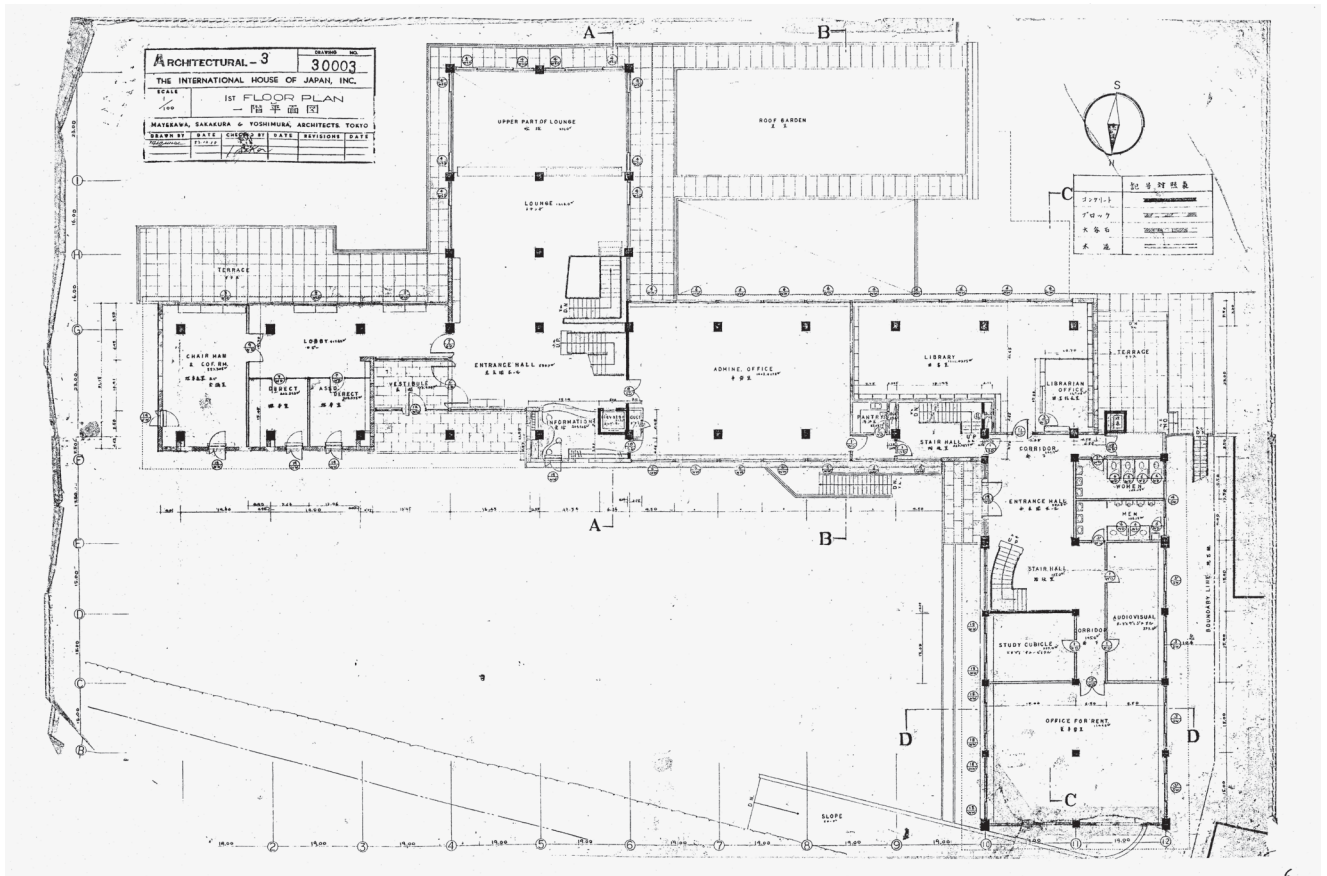
was furious that our final plan completely preserving the I-House main building was a far cry from the request of the Board of Trustees for a plan to rebuild the House preserving the garden. However, a careful explanation of the proposal including the financial merits seemed to at least partially win over the House Chairman. In the end, the I-House Committee gave a good look at the proposal, and approved it on the following grounds: (1) downtime during construction would be short; (2) there would be no relocating or removal costs; and (3) construction costs would be low. Consequently, Plan B was approved during an I-House Construction Committee held on September 6.

Preservation Debate on "Authenticity"

Following approval by the I-House Board of Trustees, an I-House Construction Advisory Committee was newly established and a Working Group was set up. In particular, this Group intensely debated several times about what exactly the authenticity of the building meant. The debate essentially centered on bridging the gap between a group of historians espousing a strict conservatism returning the building to its original state in 1950s and another group stressing the wishes of the current occupants for a more flexible restoration and renovation. Personally, I emphasized there should be no problem with additions or renovations to the extent they did not deviate from the overall design of the building and the era clearly expressed, similar to the gradual evolution of a gothic cathedral. In due course, a policy course of renewing functionality, and renovating the I-House was decided upon: a new hall with two-story high ceiling would be added in what used to be the Kabayama room, and the lobby would be expanded to prevent crowding in the entrance area.

Construction with Tight Budget and Time

Following the preliminary studies described above, in



04 Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura and Junzo Yoshimura, International House, Tokyo, Japan, 1953-1955. Original Plan © Mitsubishi Jisho Sekkei, Inc., 1955.



03 Kunio Maekawa, Junzo Sakakura and Junzo Yoshimura, International House, Tokyo, Japan, 1953-1955. Preservation and restoration by the Architectural Institute of Japan. © Masami Kobayashi, 2006.

December 2004 the Board of Trustees of I-House approved final plans for the first phase of construction. Next, the staff from Mitsubishi Jisho Sekkei, Inc, that was in charge of the working drawings, took on the difficult tasks of fine-tuning quotes based on a more detailed design; negotiating with public authorities; looking into recycling existing building materials; and verifying the newly discovered architectural artifacts of Koyata Iwasaki's house, all within a limited time frame. However, we managed to break ground in April 2005, with the original construction company that built the I-House, the Shimizu Corporation. The addition of the new hall involved several complex construction tasks, such as excavating into the ground while suspending the existing building on posts, but construction of the non-hall areas finished successfully without incident in March 2006, when part of the I-House was opened once again to the public.

That following July 1, a grand opening was held on schedule unveiling the new hall and holding a symposium. Several days later on July 7, the Emperor and Empress of Japan were invited to a formal reception commemorating the I-House's 50th anniversary. Regardless of how well the new I-House was received, the truth of the matter is that those involved in the construction were treading on thin ice in order to meet the demands of a rigorous schedule. In retrospect, it is obvious that throughout this preservation and restoration project of I-House, the I-House staff and the design and construction personnel, went above and beyond the call of duty. One must give special appreciation to the hard work and workmanship that went into renovating the I-House: without everyone's meticulous teamwork, this complicated Preservation and Restoration Project could not have been successfully completed.

Conclusion as Lessons Learned

As described above, opinions were exchanged several times between panel members and I-House management while alternative proposals were being explored. Those involved were thus able to develop a certain level of trust by looking at the situation from each other's viewpoint, which no doubt helped in gaining final approval from the Board of Trustees. Such a dramatic policy reversal in which a building slated for the wrecking ball was instead preserved and restored is unparalleled in Japan.

The lessons learned here were:

- The whole orientation largely depended on a property owner that was open-minded towards both the voices of its own members and of AIJ.
- Moreover, rational understanding that choosing to preserve and restore the property, not simply for the cultural or nostalgic value but also made economic sense, played a significant role in the property's fate.
- Lastly, the most crucial seemed AIJ's decision to go beyond simply requesting the I-House's preservation and to play a more active role by coming up with an actual preservation and restoration strategy taking into account the owner's point of view.

The debate about a building's *authenticity* has just begun to get underway in Japan. As an architect, I believe we should attempt to clarify the architectural aspects that retain our historical DNA and the new aspects that express the modernity of a new era, and use that contrast as an opportunity to emphasize time, memory and authenticity. I also feel that when preserving modern architecture in pursuit of the functional beauty, restoring architecture so that it complies with the needs of the age is a more realistic approach.

Finding ways to preserve modern architecture, our social heritage which is now a half-century old, is set to be a major challenge facing us in the years to come, as can be seen in the worldwide *docomomo* movement. In order to prepare for that time, it is up to us today to develop and promote widely strategic arguments that outline how architectural preservation and restoration initiatives can result in living buildings that simultaneously uphold the history and memory of the past.

Needless to say, educating and training those with the occupational skills necessary for preserving and restoring our architectural and cultural heritage is also important. Actually, general preservation and restoration strategy requires a high level of comprehensive understanding of architectural engineering and artistic aesthetics. Thus, we need to provide for a well-balanced educational program for the coming era of a preservation and restoration oriented society. Within such programs, the case of the "Preservation and Restoration of the International House of Japan" might stand as a useful precedent. ■

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06 Symposium hosted by International House members. © Masami Kobayashi, 2004.