

Kawagoe's Amazing Buildings

Kawagoe is famous for its Kurazukuri townscape

The storehouses of Ichibangai's Kurazukuri townscape are a color called "Edo black." The area was made a national preservation district for traditional buildings in 1999. Many tourists visit Ichibangai each day, and it is now one of Kawagoe's most famous sightseeing spots.

A huge fire in the Meiji period became the reason for building the storehouses in Ichibangai. The fire started on March 17, 1893 near the Yojuin Temple. The fire spread because of the wooden roofs used in the town. The fire destroyed around 40% of all homes in Kawagoe at the time.

Storehouse-style homes like the Osawa House, however, were not destroyed because they didn't burn easily.

What is "Kurazukuri?"

After the great fire, the merchants of Kawagoe saw that storehouses had not been destroyed. They then decided to



Kawagoe's Kurazukuri townscape

One of Kawagoe's biggest charms is its Kurazukuri townscape.

The Edo period scenery amazes tourists.

There are many other beautiful and historic buildings in Kawagoe that the people have protected.

build new storehouse-style homes and shops. In 1901, there were 51 of these storehouses, and 24 had extra measures to prevent fires.

Kurazukuri storehouses with shop areas facing Ichibangai were built. They were called "misegura." They were used as storehouses and shops, and were designed to prevent fires from spreading.

They were also decorated a lot. They had many unique features, such as their impressive tiled roofs, the high ridge on top of the roof called the "hakomune," and the hakomune's "onigawara" decorative tiles and "kagemori" joints. The doors and windows had a stepped design to create a tight seal when closed. Finally, if a fire happened in the area, the doors and windows were closed and people stood on the emergency "menuridai" stands to cover the door and window joints with mud to increase protection. Also, bricks, a new material at the time, were used to make walls between homes to prevent fires from spreading. Fires could happen at any time, and the Kurazukuri buildings used many different measures to protect the shops and goods inside them. Construction workers, carpenters, and plasters worked together to build the Kurazukuri buildings. The plaster and mud used to build them was very hard to use, and Kurazukuri needed a lot of skill to build. When a building was finished, a sign was added with the names of the people in charge of the construction, carpentry, and plastering.

Merchant house layout and site

Many different styles of buildings can be seen in Kawagoe other than Kurazukuri. Kawagoe City's national preservation district for traditional buildings has 136 traditional buildings in it. Many of them are Japanese-style merchant houses, and this includes Kurazukuri-style ones. Some are



Eave cornice (Fine china store YAMAWA)



Hakomune roof ridge (Harada House)



Onigawara decorative tile and kagemori joint (Flagship store of Machikan)

like the Former Tanaka Family Residence, which has a Kurazukuri design, but the shop front on the street has a Western-style design. There are also early Western-style buildings, shrines, temples, and more. They are important examples of different times in Japanese history, and are also still used for businesses and homes.

The traditional merchant house has a narrow front but is very long. On average, the front of merchant houses is 4.4 "ken" wide, or eight meters. Many are "L"-shaped, with an alley or garden on one side. Looking at one from the front, the layout starts with the shop area, then tatami mat rooms, then a detached room, and lastly a storehouse area.

Merchant house shop areas have several common features. They face the road, are right against the surrounding buildings, the second floor area is further back than the first floor

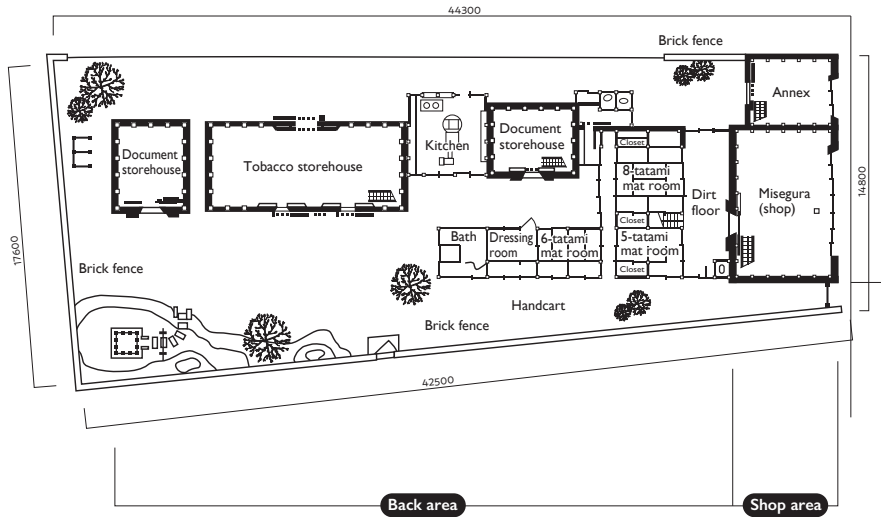
area, the slope of the roof is uniform, and the front is symmetrical except for corner houses. The home areas in the back are different. They are not right against the surrounding buildings. Instead, they have gardens with lots of sunlight and good airflow. This made these merchant houses comfortable places to live in even though they were very close together.



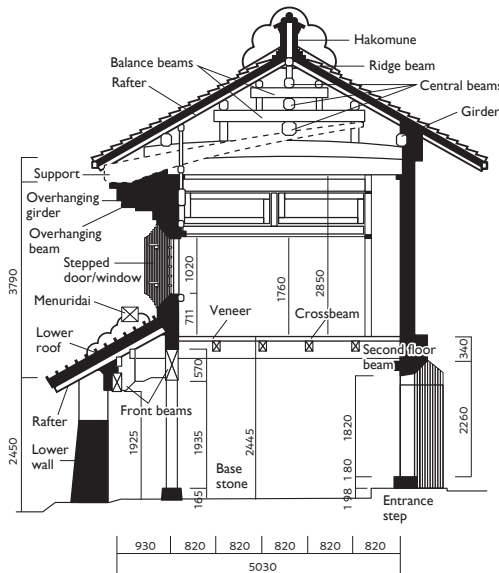
The Osawa House



The Former Tanaka Family Residence



The Former Koyama Family Residence (Kawagoe Kurazukuri Museum)
From a report on Kawagoe City's Kurazukuri by the Kawagoe City Board of Education



Yamazaki House blueprint
From a report on Kawagoe City's Kurazukuri by the Kawagoe City Board of Education

Kawagoe's early Western-style buildings

Many early Western-style buildings still stand in Kawagoe. The 85th National Bank building is still a landmark in Kawagoe. It was designed by the architect Yasuoka Katsuya and was completed in 1918. The design includes Renaissance-style decorations and a tower, and Persian-style stripes. It is also known for being an early use of reinforced concrete. Yasuoka Katsuya also designed the Former Yamakichi Department Store (1936; now the Yamakichi Building), the Yamazaki House (1925), and the Kawagoe Savings Bank (1915; no longer exists). Other buildings built after the great Meiji fire are still used today. These include Kawagoe Christian Church, designed by William Wilson in 1921. It has beautiful French bond bricks and a hammerbeam roof. Another example is the Kawagoe Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Designed by Maeda Kenjiro in 1927, it has Doric columns and medallion decorations. There are also many large signs on buildings in Kawagoe which were made between the Taisho and early Showa peri-

ods. Some good examples of early Western-style buildings in Kawagoe are the Handmade Soba Hyakujo building (1930; originally a fishing gear store) and the Manita House (1933). These buildings are still used as shops and restaurants. They are important parts of history, but are also part of people's lives today.



Kawagoe Christian Church



Yamazaki House



Handmade Soba Hyakujo (originally a fishing gear store)



There are many old signs on the buildings on Taisho-Roman Street. The building in front is the Manita House.

Protecting the townscape and growing

After World War II, people did not protect Kawagoe's Kurazukuri townscape. Around the 1970s, however, more people became interested in protecting old buildings in Japan. Kawagoe City began making some buildings cultural properties. At the same time, shopping streets and neighborhood councils also started working to protect these buildings. Because of this, eventually Kawagoe's Kurazukuri townscape was chosen to be a national preservation district for traditional buildings. With the help of building owners and preservation groups such as Kawagoe Townscape Committee and Kawagoe Kurano Kai, Kawagoe will continue to grow while using and protecting its historic townscape.