Kagawa Prefectural Government Office East Building

Kagawa Prefectural Government Office Architecture Gallery
(East Building, 1st Floor)

The East Building of the Kagawa Prefectural Government Office was completed in 1958 (the original main building and east building, design by Kenzo Tange) and is seen as a representative piece of post-war Japanese architecture. Even now it receives a steady stream of visitors. With design plans, sketches, and photographs from the time of completion, this exhibition will look at the ideas behind its conception and design, how it was completed, and the contribution it has made to Japanese architectural history.

Modernist Architecture and the Kagawa Prefectural Government Office

In the early years of the 20th century a new form of architectural expression was born against the backdrop of modern lifestyles and industry. “Modernist Architecture” brought with it new technology and new materials, including iron, glass, and concrete, coming to replace the historicist architectural styles (classicist, gothic) that had been prevalent up to that point.

From the 1920s onwards, modernist architecture in Japan surpassed the historicist styles that had been studied since the Meiji period (1868-1912), and while developing traditional Japanese ideas and concepts of architectural space, undertook to utilize the results of modern technological innovation and develop a model and style that would speak to people’s hearts. Japan in the 20th century is shown in the design, the structure, and the use of space found here. Modernist architecture in this sense is a “cultural property” that reflects its period.

In 1999, “DOCOMOMO Japan” (an international organization for the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites, and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) selected twenty buildings for “Modernist Architecture as Cultural Properties”. The East Building of the Kagawa Prefectural Government Offices was selected and praised for its spacious composition, in particular the area dedicated for the use of residents in the city, its expression of tradition, cooperation with artists during construction, and its core system for protection against earthquakes. It was the only government building to be selected.
Open Space for the People of the Prefecture

The offices have a plaza where people can gather and relax. The widely spaced pillars, the lobby on the first floor, and the south garden with its small rolling hills offer an abundantly spacious, gently interwoven composition.

Creation from Tradition

Traditional Japanese architectural features, like the combination of pillars and beams creating the impression of a wooden structure, and the railing on the veranda, are all constructed using modern materials. Even after half a century has passed, the concrete remains strong. The south garden stretches out in front of the building and was made in a Japanese style incorporating a desire to improve the lives of the people of the area.

Kagawa Prefectural Government Office
Towards Open Government Offices and the Integration of Art

Those involved with the construction of the Government Offices (1955)

Masanori Kaneko, then the Governor of Kagawa Prefecture, stands in the center in a white suit. To the right are Kenzo Tange, and Yoshikatsu Tsutboi (who worked on structural design). Governor Kaneko asked Tange to create a design that was "fitting for government offices in the age of democracy", and "fitting for the main building of tourism in Kagawa".

Building the steel frame (1956)

The use of reinforcing steel was still extremely rare at the time, and it served to increase the strength of the concrete. The most advanced technology at the time was being put to use, and included gas pressure welding, another unusual technique, for the fittings of the steel bars.

Moving stones (1957)

Aji granite, chosen as a symbol of good harvest, was brought to the site over the period of a day, and laid at the pond.

Fifth proposal for the South Garden: model (1957)

The Kenzo Tange Laboratory was responsible for the design of the garden. Oil-based clay was used in many layers of the study, and the garden stones were laid in the pond as a "symbol of good harvest" and part of the wish for the rich lives of the local people, which was contrary to the typical ideas that go into Japanese gardens, like the wish for the long youth and longevity of the owner.
Four Highlights of the Kagawa Prefectural Government Offices

Integration of Art

In the first floor lobby, open planned with floor-to-ceiling glass windows, is “Wakeiseijaku – Harmony, Respect, Purity, Tranquility” by the artist Genichiro Inokuma, to welcome people into the building. Inokuma considered the ideas of post-war democracy to be in the spirit of the Japanese tea ceremony, and created this piece. The Kenzo Tange Laboratory produced the designs for wooden and ceramic chairs, wooden shelves, and stone tables. All serving to contribute to the “integration of art” into public spaces.

The Core System

At the center of the high rise building (the old main building), is the architectural “spinal cord” of the construction, the concrete anti-seismic wall, the first of its kind in Japan. The public facilities including the stairs, elevator, and toilet are centered on the core and office space is provided by partitions which run along the small beams.

The Governor’s Desk

This desk was made by the international designer Isamu Kenmochi. He aimed to produce a “Japanese Modern” style, which combined traditional Japanese designs with modern techniques and materials. It is currently on display in the Kagawa Prefectural Museum.

The hall of the Prefectural Office at the time of completion (1958)

The furniture was designed by Isamu Kenguchi, and is still in use today.

The production of the reception desk in the 1st floor lobby

At the time many desks were produced in a geometric style which utilized the shape of the materials. This photo shows Governor Kaneko inspecting the production of the Aji granite desk.

Open Space on the Roof

At the suggestion of Governor Kaneko, the roof was made an open space. Visitors could enjoy coffee and beer from the restaurant while enjoying the view out over the Setsu Inland Sea. It was popular among residents as a place to come and relax.

The entrance of the Prefectural Office Hall today

A red gotou painted door and shelves designed by Kenzo Tange.
The Architecture of Tange in the Setouchi

Many of the early works of Kenzo Tange are found in the Setouchi area, and are in tune with Japanese traditions, local characteristics, and the prevailing post-war democracy. For Kenzo Tange, the Setouchi was where he discovered his unique identity, gained a large number of supporters and collaborators, and where he first developed architecture that was connected to real society. The Kagawa Prefectural Government Office is the result of his time here.

The works of Kenzo Tange that remain in the various areas of the Setouchi serve to inspire architects working here, and have given rise to a number of new distinctive works. His buildings have become the influential foundation of the architectural culture of the Setouchi area.