



Old World Charm and New Luxury in Kyoto

Takenaka Corporation delivers a new layer of history to Japan's cultural capital

In October 2019, Park Hyatt Kyoto opened its doors, bringing together one of the world's leading hotel brands with one of the city's most respected traditional kaiseki eateries, Kyoyamato. Tasked with bringing these elements into an elevated unity within the storied context of greater Kyoto was Takenaka Corporation, a leading design and construction company in Japan.

Surrounded by historical sites such as Kiyomizu-dera Temple and the Yasaka Pagoda, the all-new Park Hyatt Kyoto required the delicate preservation and restoration of Kyoyamato's traditional wooden buildings as well as the installation of Japanese gardens. Taken together with the hotel's refined interiors—designed by tonychi & associates and the Takenaka interior design team—the property affords guests a one-of-a-kind experience of Kyoto.

We spoke with Takenaka Corporation division head of investment and development Aki Tachibana and senior manager of the architectural design department Tetsuo Harada about the challenges faced and overcome to seamlessly blend Kyoto's distinctive local culture with an international luxury brand.



Left: Aki Tachibana
Division Head
Investment & Development
Department

Right: Tetsuo Harada
Architect
General manager
Design Department
Head Office



Guest rooms feature sweeping views out over Kyoto's historic cityscape.

Historical and cultural preservation for a new era

Aki Tachibana: Even amid Japan's efforts to promote tourism nationwide, the history and culture of Kyoto continue to draw global attention, and it was this that drew the interest of Hyatt Hotels Corporation to bring its top-tier brand, the Park Hyatt, to the city.

At the same time, the site's landlord and operator of the authentic Japanese restaurant Kyoyamato had a strong desire to preserve its historic buildings and gardens to the greatest extent possible.

Takenaka Corporation, Kyoyamato and Hyatt Hotels Corporation enjoy a long history together. Our relationship with Hyatt Hotels Corporation dates back to the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa project we worked on 30 years ago in Hawaii, and we have maintained close ties with Hyatt and its owner, the Pritzker family, ever since.

For this project, Hyatt's executive chairman Thomas J. Pritzker sent 31 rocks—said to be approximately 300 million years old—from his home in Aspen, Colorado as a show of our long friendship, and we've placed the rocks in the garden next to the hotel's entrance to be appreciated by guests from around

the world.

In addition, our company was entrusted with this project because the family predecessor of Kyoyamato, Mr. and Mrs. Sukeo Sakaguchi, who unfortunately passed away before the opening of the hotel, had been close acquaintances of our corporation's honorary chairman, Toichi Takenaka. It was thanks to this relationship that Takenaka Corporation was entrusted with the project. And because of our knowledge of both companies, we felt confident that we could bring them together in a way that mutually respects their unique histories, cultures and values.

As the hotel owner, Takenaka Corporation selected Hyatt as the operator and asked Kyoyamato to continue operating its authentic Japanese restaurant. From the beginning, the plan was not to have the restaurant inside the hotel but to achieve an elegant fusion of cultures between the two companies in which the hotel and restaurant coexist.

Many companies had expressed interest in the site, which is ideally situated for a hotel, but we were the only ones to propose that Kyoyamato and Hyatt coexist while retaining independence—an idea born from our ties to both companies, which have been fostered over the years.

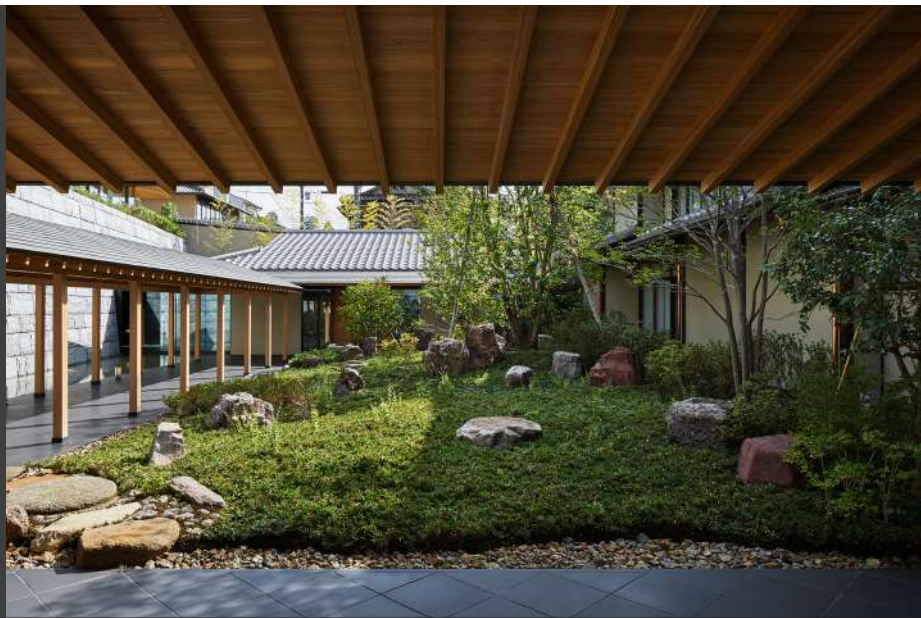
Another key element of our proposal was the decision to limit the number of rooms to 70 even though 150 to 200 rooms is a more suitable range for a profitable luxury hotel. But increasing the number of rooms would have disrupted the harmony of the gardens, buildings and surrounding scenery that are important for imbuing the hotel with a sense of Kyoto's traditions.

We felt that we had a responsibility to the history and culture of Kyoto and Kyoyamato, so we chose to respect both tangible and intangible aspects—what Kyoyamato and the city have passed down over generations—by bringing in a world-class luxury brand that would allow for profitability at the same time.

Overcoming difficulties to preserve the elegance of Kyoto

Tetsuo Harada: The Higashiyama area that is home to Kyoyamato and Park Hyatt Kyoto is a special place with sweeping views of Kyoto and a history

A view of the Pritzker Garden, a traditional Japanese garden in the Park Hyatt Kyoto's inner courtyard.



The Park Hyatt Kyoto features refined interiors designed in partnership with tonychi & associates and the Takenaka interior design team.



dating back to the Heian era.

I can still clearly remember the deep sense of history that I felt when I first visited.

The challenge for us then was to create a property that would exist in harmony with historic Kyoto while also evolving the city's appeal into the future.

The interior design was a joint effort between tonychi & associates and Takenaka Corporation while renowned landscape architect Yasuo Kitayama was responsible for the gardens.

The three teams went through a long series of discussions covering every detail, yet a shared vision of wanting to give the property contemporary and timeless appeal was a constant throughout.

In the same way that Kyoto has been formed and refined over many centuries, so has the Park Hyatt brand been refined to represent a culture of its own. At the Park Hyatt Kyoto, the historic gardens and contemporary architecture link these two cultures, and form a new chapter in Kyoto. It's our hope that this relationship will only grow deeper as time passes, allowing guests to experience the changing surroundings and scenery as time passes and the seasons change.

Tachibana: When building in Kyoto, the emphasis is on preserving the look of the city with regulations covering everything from building heights to design elements that blend with the traditional townscape.

As a result, the experience and technical skills of our design and construction teams were indispensable to the success of the project.

Harada: Following the many regulations is of course required, but it's even more important to understand the values of the local community.

As architects involved in community planning, I believe it's our role to understand culture and to create buildings that contribute to community values.

With heavy tourist traffic nearby and a height variation of approximately 30 meters within the site, these conditions made construction difficult.

In response, and in order to maintain the area's iconic scenery, we came up with a plan to place about 60% of the hotel's floor area underground.

Our design and construction teams worked together to consider the best approach from the beginning, allowing us to come up with various proposals to preserve and use existing historic buildings and gardens.

The tea pavilion structure, for example, is made up of three separate tea ceremony rooms that we moved here without disassembly, and we raised the original Kyoyamato restaurant structure, in order to locate the kitchen and service paths underground. Steps such as these, have allowed us to improve earthquake resistance and overall functionality while also highlighting the property's traditional beauty, resulting in the creation of a new experience that can't be found anywhere else.



Views of Kyoto's historic cityscape were meticulously preserved from the 300-year-old teahouse.



A stunning view of the traditional Japanese garden that harmonizes the old Kyoyamato structures with the new Park Hyatt Kyoto.

Creating new value for historically significant buildings

Harada: Historic buildings serve an important role in a community's identity. With growing competition between cities and regions around the world, preserving these buildings through adaptive re-use projects, such as this, not only serves to preserve a region's distinct culture and spirit but can also serve to create new value. Understanding this, restrictions surrounding the preservation and use of historic buildings are being eased.

In addition to designing hotels and commercial facilities that make use of historic buildings, Takenaka is also engaged in a broad range of efforts to preserve communities' legacies such as supporting the registration of important cultural properties and participating in regional community development efforts.

Tachibana: Currently, the Tourism industry around the world has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but in the long run, the high-end market will definitely return. Some say Japan lacks in the five-star luxury hotels category even now, so this project to build Japan's second Park Hyatt property drew significant attention both domestically and internationally.

And there has been a large number of inquiries from overseas developers now looking to develop luxury hotels in Japan.

As Japan aspires to become a tourism-oriented country, there's likely be more and more development of luxury hotels.

I hope that our experience from this project will help us to grow our presence going forward. And in terms of adaptive re-use projects of traditional architecture, we are also currently working on a project to create new value from a designated historical landmark building in San Francisco.

So both within and outside Japan, we are working on projects to create new value for historically important buildings and their communities.



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