

Greetings from Kyoto-U

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楽友
Raku-Yu

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Newsletter





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P R O M E N A D E

京都逍遙

Sumiya — a place where the entertainment and banqueting culture of the Edo Period emerged

Follow the elevated tracks 300 meters south from Tanbaguchi station on the JR Sagano Line. When you get to a residential district, you will notice 'The Sumiya museum of hospitality culture' etched into the lattice and the red wall (which was regarded as a high class wall in the Edo period) and its designation as an important National Cultural Treasure. Sumiya is the only surviving masterpiece of the architectural style of *ageya** in Japan. It is a two story *ageya* made of wood, featuring a tea house in a spacious garden facing the main Japanese style sitting room, and a huge open kitchen.

An *ageya* is something like what we would nowadays call a *ryotei* (high class Japanese-style restaurant), a place where banquets with music and dancing were held, accompanied by *geisha* and *taiyu* (premiere *geisha*) being summoned from the nearby *okiya**. It was also at the same time a cultural space where important guests were entertained with tea ceremonies and haiku poetry readings. On the *fusuma*, the sliding doors of the guest sitting room there are hand-drawn paintings by some of the greatest artists of the Mid-Edo Period, such as Buson Yosa and Okyo Maruyama. We can still feel the atmosphere of that place even today.

In the autumn of the year before last, Prof. Kazuo Oike, then President of Kyoto University, was invited to a haiku reading held at Sumiya. He noticed that the trains ran very close by the building, and the vibrations caused by the trains led him to consider the possible effect that an earthquake might have on the building. This led to the university setting up a survey group, out of their own funds, with Prof. Kohei Komatsu of the Research Institute for Sustainable Humanosphere as its leader. They installed micro-vibration recorders at nine locations in total to gauge the vibrational characteristics of the building, and investigated the effect on the building that an earthquake in the same class as the Southern Hyogo Earthquake (1995) would have. They collected data for calculating the stress bearing capability of the building by carrying out detailed checks of the relational positions of the pillars and beams and the number of walls.

The survey group held a symposium this spring based around these findings. One can see from this how Kyoto University is actively contributing to the preservation of important cultural treasures in the city.

*an *ageya* (Ageru=inviting in, Ya=building) is a two story building where guests were escorted to the main sitting room on the second floor.

*an *okiya* is a business which dispatches *geisha* and *taiyu*.



Prof. Kohei Komatsu, who headed the survey (right), and Munekazu Minami, a doctoral student of Kyoto University, and first-class architect and building engineer (left).



The kitchen, which is almost the size of a temple kitchen. At the back, one can see Sumiya's *noren* curtains. They depict the family crest.



In the Fan Room at the south corner of the second floor, the 59 fans pasted up on the ceiling depict Chinese and Japanese paintings and calligraphic works, and on the *fusuma* doors there is a picture of scenes from *The Tale of Genji*, the oldest novel in Japan.



Looking at the main garden, called the Pine Garden, from the Pine Room, the large sitting room on the first story. There is a crisp contrast between the green of the pine and the white of the sand.



Going up to the second floor, one can see right through to the Fan Room at the other end of the house.