

Celluloid Architecture

Silence of the Tea Room Kochuu Film Review

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 IMAGES **Solaris Film Production**

Kochuu, by Jesper Wachtmeister. Solaris Film Production, 2003, 52 Minutes.

“Traditions for a new age must be created by people of a new age,” renowned Japanese architect Kazuo Shinohana, said.

Japan has long progressed and opened up to global influences since the sakoku of the Edo Period. With the exemption of a few, its contemporary architecture has traded shoji to glass, wood to concrete. But still it exudes a similar affinity with nature as that of the traditional chasitsu and the lightness of washitsu. Something about it is still starkly Japanese.

Kochuu is a film that serves as a primer on how and where such architecture grew resilient to influences of time and modernization. It attempts to trace back the fundamentals of Japanese architecture in order to make the viewer understand its contemporary version. The dissection particularly focused on the apparently inherent relationship of the Japanese with nature. As a tool, it constantly contrasts ideas and elements to its western counterparts.



Kapsule House K by Kisho Kurokawa

“We do not have the Zen, or the serenity, necessary to sit and peacefully watch an almond tree bloom. Our religion is way too nervous for that,” said Sverre Fhen as he explained why Europeans cannot retain the irregularity of nature in gardens - resulting to geometric forms such that of baroque gardens - in contrast to how the Japanese retain the fluidity of nature by cultivating this irregularity.

The oriental-occidental exchanges flow harmoniously throughout, although quite strange is the particular injection of Japanese

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influences in Scandinavian Architecture. That Pallasmaa claims, every Scandanavian architect has Japanese influences and that Japan shares a similar light with the Nordic sun are probable defenses.



Kapsule House K by Kisho Kurokawa



Centennial Hall by Kazuo Shinohara



Nakagin Capsule Tower by Kisho Kurokawa



Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum Annex by Tadao Ando



Water Temple by Tadao Ando

Visually, this film treats Kochuu as an experience, more than a room, suggesting that one can contemplate the universe in a small tea room. Building on the principles of a Japanese tea house, it invests on immersing the audience into the overwhelming role of nature in Japanese culture. On the expression “shichuu no sankyo” which suggests leaving everyday-life behind to enter a garden in the middle of the city, it takes the audience into his own little garden that mimics a bigger part of nature amid the complicated metropolis - a clever and successful attempt into subtly instigating that nature is the origin of everything in Japanese architecture.

The film is composed in a way that watching it is like scratching the surface of the origins of Japanese architecture over tea with Tadao Ando, Toyo Ito, Kisho Kurokawa, and Juhani Pallasmaa.

The film is also drizzled with anecdotes almost a tad too intimate to function as main instruments in discussing the topic. “I am not a Christian. Even though I have some Buddhist beliefs, I do not consider myself Buddhist either,” Ando said. “I think of light as an expression of nature,” he continued. ■

On this spread: Film stills from the movie.