

Antique Japanese Houses Traditional Minka Farmhouse Frames from Japan, c. 1880

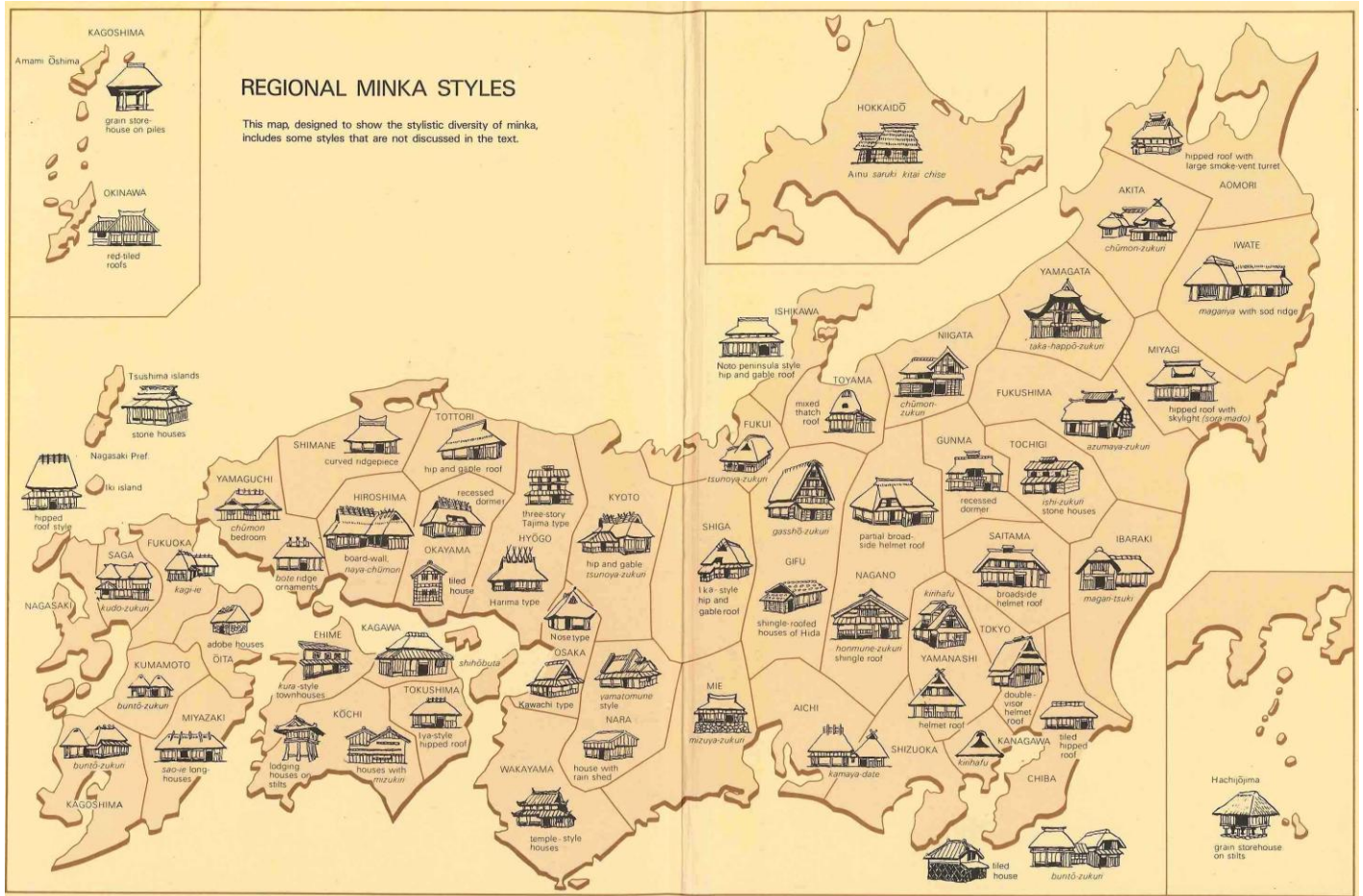
Despite the recent catastrophic troubles in Japan, we will be proceeding with these imports in 2011. Age becomes a minka: its beauty is only enhanced by the patina of time and continuous habitation. No matter how crude or humble a minka may be when it is built, as the years go by, it acquires a unique flavor and character.

From Japan's Folk Architecture by Chuji Kawashima

With your help, we will save every house we can.



**ERWIN & JONA AT
JAPANESE HOUSE AND GARDEN MUSEUM
SHOFUSU, PHILADELPHIA, PA**



Original Antique Japanese Minka Frames for Reconstruction

The following three original Japanese Timber Frame houses are available to be reconstructed.
 Scroll down for some additional photographs of typical construction details which distinguish Japanese craftsmanship.



East Coast Minka Frame

1860s
 Oak, Pine, Cypress, Bamboo
 28' x 42' x 23'
 1 Floor

This traditional Japanese home is located on the East Coast of Japan.
 All wood work included such as doors, rice paper windows, flooring, mouldings, and interior walls. Very fine detailed woodwork.
 Silkworms were once raised and harvested in the attic.
 Blackened timbers are from generations of smoke from the doma (cooking pit)
 Comes documented, dismantled, tagged, shipped, delivered and can be reconstructed by a crew experienced in Minka Framing
 anywhere worldwide.



Japanese Minka Frame of Yamanashi Prefecture

Yamanashi Prefecture area
 Pine, Chestnut, Oak
 28' x 41' x 21'
 1 Floor

Nice traditional Japanese home. Everything is hand made.
 Includes the frame, doors, roof system, flooring, doors...

Comes documented, dismantled, tagged, shipped, delivered and can be reconstructed by a crew experienced in Minka Framing anywhere worldwide.



Ituka-ichi Minka Frame
this building was demolished; we need to save these buildings!

1880

Cedar, Pine, Cypress & Oak

30' x 30' x 22' high

Also, 12' x 16' addition

1 Floor

Fine traditional Japanese home available for reconstruction.

Sills, roof system, posts, beams, doors, flooring, mouldings, windows...

From the town of Ituka-ichi

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What is a Minka Frame?

Minka is a "farmhouse" using traditional Asian style timber framing methods. The joineries are often "hidden" like those of temples rather than shown off. The layout method is done off the center line of round beams. Minka posts are always carved onto large rocks, a very good practice to use in seismic areas, as it prevents buildings from collapsing.



Minkas have rice paper walls that are used to create privacy within the homes. Some of these "walls" are often move-able and fold-able. During pre-1600's Minka living quarters were often built on the second level and above while livestock used the ground level. Silkworms were often raised in the attic space. Silkworm farming, called sericulture, often involved a repeated smoking process which blackened the beams over time.

Traditional Minkas often have a "doma", an earth-floored cooking area found in the center of the home. Smoke from the doma blackens the round beams, which creates a beautiful patina. The fires in many domas have never gone out, some for centuries! There is a traditional seating arrangement around the doma, with the heads of household (husband and wife) sitting at the top. It is forbidden to wear shoes inside.



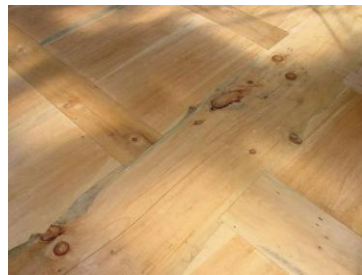
Blackened Patina



Craftsmanship



Wattle before Daub



Floor

The artistry is outstanding. The subtle intricacy of Craftsmanship is so well understood in Japanese Culture that 1,000-year-old temples are periodically deconstructed, restored and reconstructed not for the preservation of the building, but for the preservation of the trades used in their construction. The master builder in Japan is himself often understood to be a national treasure as well, instead of the building he constructs.

Like American and European barns, Minkas are fast disappearing from the landscape to make way for more modern homes. They are found mostly in Japan, China, and the Koreans.

A Traditional Minka Frame in Progress in the United States



The deep integrity of the joinery is based upon sophisticated principles of the balance of weight, counter balance and gravity force, similar to Japanese Martial Arts principles. In this design philosophy, the timbers befriend, strengthen and lend themselves to each other, creating a dynamic which creates the essential flexibility of the total building, so important to the continual shifting impact of earthquakes.



Minka, the traditional houses of rural Japan, are as diverse as the climate and landscapes of the archipelago.

In Central and Northern Japan, Minka are spacious enough to accommodate large families and their activities through the long winter months. These multifunction structures shelter under one expansive roof not only the family's living quarters but a large earth-worked floored work area known most commonly as a doma (literally, "earth room"), where farm work and handicrafts can be carried on during the winter, as well as the stable for livestock.

In the south of Japan, where the warmer climate permits outdoor work year round, there is no need for a large indoor work area. Dwellings are typically made up on several separate buildings, an arrangement that confines the presence of smoke and fire to a separate structure or outdoor area used for cooking. The stable is also separate, as is the storehouse.

The large Minka of the North are built to bear the weight of several feet of snow; they are constructed of thick durable timbers and furnished with high windows in the gable or roof for better lighting in winter. In the south, since typhoons are common in the summer, it is an advantage for a dwelling to be split into several relatively small structures. Even if one portion of the complex is damaged, the whole will not be seriously affected.

Japan's terrain is largely mountainous, so most farms are very small. In many areas winter brings heavy snows that halt all agricultural activity until the spring thaw. Comparatively few households engage solely in farming, most combining agriculture with silkworm cultivation, horse breeding, forestry, or paper making and other cottage industries. The refinements in structure and style that we see in minka today are the result of the accumulated efforts and innovations of rural people to make their homes as convenient and comfortable as possible, not only for living but also for working in some craft or industry in addition to farming.

In regions with a great deal of snow, the placid, gracious beauty of steeply pitched minka roofs covered with a thick layer of thatch is still a fairly common sight. In mountain areas, where forestry is an important industry, the more gently pitched minka roofs covered with shingles made of cast-off timber or refuse bark have a lighter, more urbane air, yet one attuned to their mountain environment. This rich diversity, growing out of local peculiarities of topography and climate within the context of traditional industries and customs, is one of the most striking features of minka.

Another characteristic of minka is that they were built by the people who actually lived in them, with a minimum of aid from professional carpenters. Posts and beams were hewn with the adze called a chona, the farmer's all-purpose tool, from timber hauled from nearby forests. Roofs were thatched with reeds or tall grass cut from communal meadows, and walls were plastered with earth from nearby hills. These natural materials give minka a natural unpretentious beauty. Their charm is robust, unprepossessing and above all, functional.

Age becomes a minka: its beauty is only enhanced by the patina of time and continuous habitation. No matter how crude or humble a minka may be when it is built, as the years go by, it acquires a unique flavor and character. Smoke from the hearth permeates its timbers, and as the soot that collects on the woodwork is rubbed in by daily cleaning and polishing, the posts take on a warm, satiny sheen, almost as if they had been lacquered. This glow is one of the hallmarks of minka. The aging of a minka is not a pathetic spectacle of decay; it is a process of ripening, maturing beauty augmented by the years, just as the dignity and grace of a tree that has withstood the winds and snow of decades is continually enhanced.

Minka are built entirely of natural materials available locally. Often timbers are only roughly finished, the bark trimmed off but the natural curves retained. The wood of posts and beams is left more or less in its natural state, the idiosyncrasies of the timber giving each dwelling its own special flavor. For centuries sumptuary laws prohibited commoners from using good-quality, straight-grained timber, such as cypress and cedar. The main woods used were varieties of pine and chestnut. Zelkova and oak were common woods for such members as the central post, or dailoku-bashira, and door and window frames. Bamboo, which is not used as a structural material in Western architecture although it is a basic building material throughout Southeast Asia, is used for a variety of purposes. In certain styles of minka, most of the roof truss, including braces, purlins and rafters, is of bamboo. Bamboo is also used for the weblike framework (shitajii, or "base frame") that forms the core of hanging walls and in some cases for the corner post of the decorative alcove known as the tokonoma, as well as for fences and roofing in some parts of the country.

The use of beam timbers with pronounced curves became a local minka tradition. While partly due to the difficulty of obtaining good-quality pine timbers of sufficient length, the use of odd-shaped timbers was turned into a challenge, and they became part of the house where the carpenter could best show his prowess



Minka have been bypassed by time: the age of self-sufficiency when all articles of daily life were made by hand from locally available natural materials, has given way to the age of industrialization.

From Japan's Folk Architecture by Chuji Kawashima



“PARE DOWN TO THE ESSENCE, BUT DON'T REMOVE THE POETRY”

Our Artists

Our Artists are able to fashion a new structure using traditional techniques or can deconstruct and reconstruct an antique building, including Tea Houses, Shrines, Hermitages and Dwellings. They can restore or duplicate virtually any form of indigenous architecture that has evolved, from the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe to the Japanese Archipelago and even the traditional Timber Frames houses and barns of Europe and the Americas.

Our artisans specialize in the folk architecture of Asia and have been working in indigenous traditional custom and building methodologies for over thirty years. The focus is mainly on the links between the First Nations People of the Americas and their Asian complement. From the Chise-Minka of the Ainu to the Timber Plank structures of the Pacific Northwest, there is a commonality of elements among the indigenous people who aspired to create architecture in harmony with their spiritual connection to the environment. Originating in the Middle East, radiating outward to Eastern Europe and Asia, Timber, Stone and Earth dwellings have been sheltering us for millennia.



American Grain Etched Beams

These are “American” but look very Oriental in Character



Grain Etched Beams

These are “Grain Etched” eastern white pine walls and Beams that have been salvaged from an Old Grain Elevator, c. 1887
Check the Catalog Icon for this limited supply of beams with the patina that nature created.



Click Icon on the Catalog Page for Grain Etched Panels

Architectural Global Network

The National “Go To Source”

Jona Harvey

www.GoToAGN.com

610-565-4594 – Office, Yes, we’re national!

610-247-1253 - Cell

888-807-1842 - Toll Free

FindIt@GoToAGN.com

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