

Visiting Seihu-so Villa

★Nov.11 (Sun.)

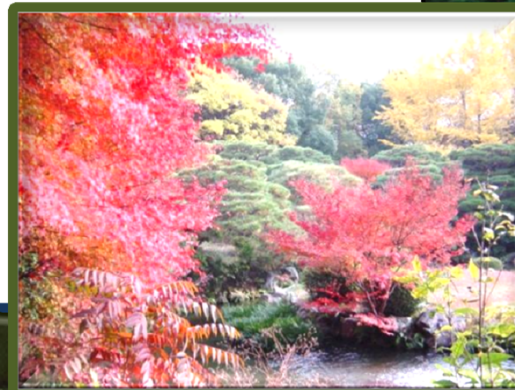
① 10:00-11:00

② 13:30-14:30

★Nov.12 (Mon.)

③ 10:00-11:00

Free to stroll



Introduction to the Buildings and Garden

The Seifu-so was originally a villa of the noble Tokudaiji family, and during the reign of the Koumei Emperor, the grounds were surrounded by farmland and bamboo groves, and covered over 10,000 square meters. In the main building was a separate tea room and waiting room, and there were tea houses located in scattered areas in the central part of the garden.

The present buildings were built over a five-year period beginning in 1910, and it is believed that this long construction period was due to the time spent on careful selection and drying of the building materials.

The master builder was the famous Osaka carpenter of the time, Yagi Jinbei. Upon receiving the commission to rebuild the villa from

Sumitomo Kichizaemon, Yagi carefully laid out a construction plan and employed carpenters of good judgment to travel to the east and west of Japan, to as far as Hokkaido and Kyushu, to gather building materials of the finest quality. The fact that the Duke himself is said to have given directions concerning the choice of materials and design speaks to the exceptional quality of the construction in all its aspects.

The main building complex consists of three structures: the east, central, and west buildings. The pillars are mainly squared cryptomeria wood with corners left rounded, but in some places, Japanese cypress is used. All three structures are built in the Sukiya style (kitchen and detached smaller buildings built in regular style) in a complex, organic layout. The designs of the three buildings are as follows.

[East Building]

The East Building is a wooden structure of two stories. The 1st floor hallway is laid in boards of fir that run the full seven-meter length of the hallway uncut. The main pillars of the tokonoma alcove are cryptomeria with natural surface contours (not artificially shaped) and the floorboard is single-board lengths of reddish pine. The decorative ranma panels above the fusuma panels adopts the pattern of opened fans, all of which are rare and famous (production area unknown). At the time of the original construction, this building was about four meters to the north of its present position and it was moved to accommodate the construction of an earth wall to shut out the noise of the old Imadegawa Avenue. The soil used for this wall came from the construction site of the Minami-za Theater (Shijo, Kyoto) and most of it was transported here by horse-drawn wagons.

[Central Building]

This building is a wooden structure of two stories made of basically the same construction materials as the East Building, although each room is comparatively smaller in size than the East building.

[West Building]

This is a single story wooden structure and the ceiling wood is said to be of the famous Sano-sasame cryptomeria from an old tree of the San-no Shrine of Kyushu. This building was mainly used as a meeting room.

In all, this main complex consists of 20 rooms, one bath, two inner courts, three gates, four toilet rooms, one main entrance, one family entrance and one service entrance, as well as a steward building, two



servant/attendant residence buildings, two small storage buildings and one earthen kura (safe storehouse mainly used for the keeping of books that were later donated to Kyoto University and Ritsumeikan University after the Duke's death).

The Seifu-so is a cultural asset that is highly valued as a representative example of Meiji Period garden design.

Originally, the size of the garden's pond was over twice what it is now.

Old trees grew at several points around the garden in a way that was aesthetically lacking, especially in the southern area where a single old maple stood out very noticeably.

The garden as we see it today was improved upon as the villa grounds

were remodeled so as to create greater overall harmony with the buildings, beginning with the tearing down of the old main building, followed by the moving of the tea house to a new location, the reduction of the amount of spring water area by half, and the placement of rocks around the garden.

In the original garden, there were very densely wooded areas, including a natural grove on the south side and a pine grove on the east side. On a number of unfortunate occasions, several trees withered away, and as a result, the layout of the trees was adjusted and improved upon each time.

The pond's water is drawn from the Ohtagawa river (now a covered conduit) that flows through Imadegawa. The water is first drawn into two large water tanks inside the eastern part of the grounds, where it is settled before being fed to two small waterfalls that flow into the pond from a rise called Higashi Takami (East Rise). A portion of the water is also drawn into

a rivulet that has been created in front of the tea house and flows to the southwest corner of the garden to add to the landscape. The two waterfalls have been given names, with the southern one called "Otaki" (Male Waterfall) and the northern one "Metaki" (Female Waterfall).

Originally, the road on the west side of the villa (the present small road running beside the official residence) was especially narrow with bamboo and sasa grass pressing in close along it, so horse carriages and other traffic had to make a detour around to the north (present Imadegawa avenue) and around to Hyakumanben on the east side in order to enter the villa. As time passed, the farm land and groves around the villa gradually became residential areas.

When the Ohtagawa river was converted to an underground conduit, the road on the north side of the villa was widened. As for the south side, when

a request arose from the city of Kyoto for a portion of the grounds to accommodate the building of a trolley road, it was decided to be for the good of the city's citizens and the land was given over on the one condition that the old maple mentioned earlier be preserved because it was too old to be moved.

(Note) This maple later died and was removed, but you can still see a southward jog in the road where it once stood.

While in this way a trolley road came to be built along the south side of the villa, a portion of land belonging to the villa remained on the south side of the road, until this land was also granted to the city of Kyoto by the Sumitomo family.