

# Kyo-machiya (Kyoto Traditional Townhouses)

Kyoto hosts a wide variety of traditional machiya buildings, which has a spiritual connotation and influences the daily lives of Kyoto people in both their homes and work places.

## Exterior Characteristics of Kyo-machiya

### Straight-line Roof Tile (Ichimonjigawara)

One of the major characteristics of Kyo-machiya townhouses is that each eave is parallel to the street. This gives the whole streetscape a sense of unity. In order to emphasize this horizontal line, the lower eave edge of roof tile is cut in a straight line. This is why the name ichimonji—the Chinese letter for one, “一” has been given to this type of roof tile.

### Zhong Kui Dolls (Shouki-san)

Many Kyo-machiya can be found with a small statue of “Shouki-san (a ZhongKui doll made from roof clay) on the eave above the main entrance. Zhong Kui was originally a Chinese legendary figure. According to the legend, Emperor Xuanzong of Tang China had a dream in which Zhong Kui appeared and later he recovered from a serious illness. Kyotoite people decorated the house with these dolls in the hope of expelling epidemics such as malaria.



### Insect-cage Window (Mushiko-mado)

The majority of townhouses, made before the Meiji period (until 1868) have mezzanines with low ceilings. A window with vertical lattices covered with clay or plaster is set onto the mezzanine façade for ventilation. The name mushiko (insect cage) is given to this type of window as they resemble an insect cage.

### Protruding Lattices (De-goshi)

In Kyoto, wooden lattices (koshi) are installed for two purposes: to allow light and air to pass through and at the same time to protect the privacy of the inhabitants. The forms of koshi lattices differ according to the profession of the house owner. For example, a fuya (wheat gluten shop) or a someya (dyer) have their own pattern of lattices. They are called de-goshi when they protrude into the street below the eave.

### Large Door (Oh-do) and Small Door (Kuguri-do)

A small sliding door (kuguri-do) is set on a large sliding door (oh-do) in Kyo-machiya. For everyday use a small door is used and the large door is used whenever it is necessary for large items to be moved in and out.

### Retractable Bench (Battari-shogi)

A retractable bench is installed in the front to be folded it away when not in use. The original purpose was for displaying commodities in the daytime. At night it is put away. Sometimes it is used by the people to cool down in summer.

## Types of Kyo-machiya

The “Kyo-machiya Community Development Survey” which was carried out in 2008-2010 stated that approximately 48,000 machiya in the categories shown below are found within Kyoto City.



“So-nikai” or “Hon-nikai”  
(Proper Two-story Houses)

This style of house, perfected from the late Meiji period to the Taisho period (around 1900-1926), has equal heights on the ground floor and the first floor. The first floor usually features wooden frame glass windows. has equal heights on the ground floor and the first floor.



“Chu-nikai” or “Tsushi-nikai”  
(Houses With Mezzanine)

This style, perfected around the middle of the modern era and built until the late Meiji period (late 19c), has a lower ceiling on the first floor which forms a mezzanine. “Insect cage windows” (mushikomado) are usually obvious on the first floor which forms a mezzanine.



Three Storied Houses

Three storied houses with the characteristics of Kyo-machiya.



Single Storied houses  
Single-storied houses with the characteristics of Kyo-machiya.



“Shimotaya” (Closed Stores or Houses Used Solely for Dwelling)

Shimotaya is a house built solely for dwelling, not for business, so it does not have a shop space in front. One notable characteristic is that the front window opening with lattices (de-goshi) is relatively small.



“Shimotaya” with Attached Fences

Some shimotaya houses built by prosperous merchants, have attached fences. There is a high wall in front of the house so that the building does not face directly onto the street.



“Kanban-Kenchiku”  
(Signboard Building)

A signboard building is a machiya which has been renovated in order to give it a modern appearance. The façade can be refurbished in traditional fashion again with relative ease.

# Characteristics of Kyo-machiya Layout

The layout of typical Kyo-machiya is more or less similar, although they can vary according to the size of the building. The following are: the "misenoma (workplaces or shop spaces), the "daidoko (in standard Japanese it means a kitchen, but in Kyoto it means living and dining spaces)", the "toriniwa (earthen passage), and the "zashiki (a reception room or a guest room)". The same layout applies to smaller houses mainly for the craftsmen "nagaya" for communal living. The illustration below is called "omoteya-zukuri" (shopfront layout), a relatively large machiya, which has two roofs, one for the shop area in front and one for the main house for the inhabitants.

## Smoke Shaft (Hi-bukuro)

A stairwell located above the earthen passage is referred to as the "smoke shaft (hi-bukuro)", as it is used for smoke and ash from the cooking area. Usually the beams of the stairwell are beautifully crafted and arranged to show the grandeur of the architecture. A skylight is installed in the roof or high up on the wall to allow sunlight into the passage.

## Guest Room (zashiki)

Zashiki is a reception room for receiving important guests. The decorations in the alcove (tokonoma) are changed according to the season for welcoming the guest.

## Courtyard Garden (Nakaninwa, also known as "Tsuboniwa")

Although the origin of "tsuboniwa" dates back to the Heian period (around 9c-12c), it is now established as an indispensable garden design for machiya townhouses since the Edo period (17c-19c). It is located between the front shop and dwelling house at the rear. This small courtyard garden supplies ventilation and sunlight. It provides not only a cool breeze in summer, but also adds a pleasant green landscape.

## Earthen Passage (Toriniwa, namely "passage garden")

A narrow earthen-floored passageway which penetrates from the front to the rear of kyo-machiya is generally referred to as "toriniwa". A door in the middle divides the two parts: the front is called "mise-niwa" (shop garden) and the rear is called "hashiri-niwa (kitchen passage)" which is used for cooking. This passage functioned in many ways in the former days, as an entrance for workers such as carpenters and gardeners, or a passage for the sewage collector from the rear toilet to take the sewage away from the front. This is the reason why an earthen floor is used.

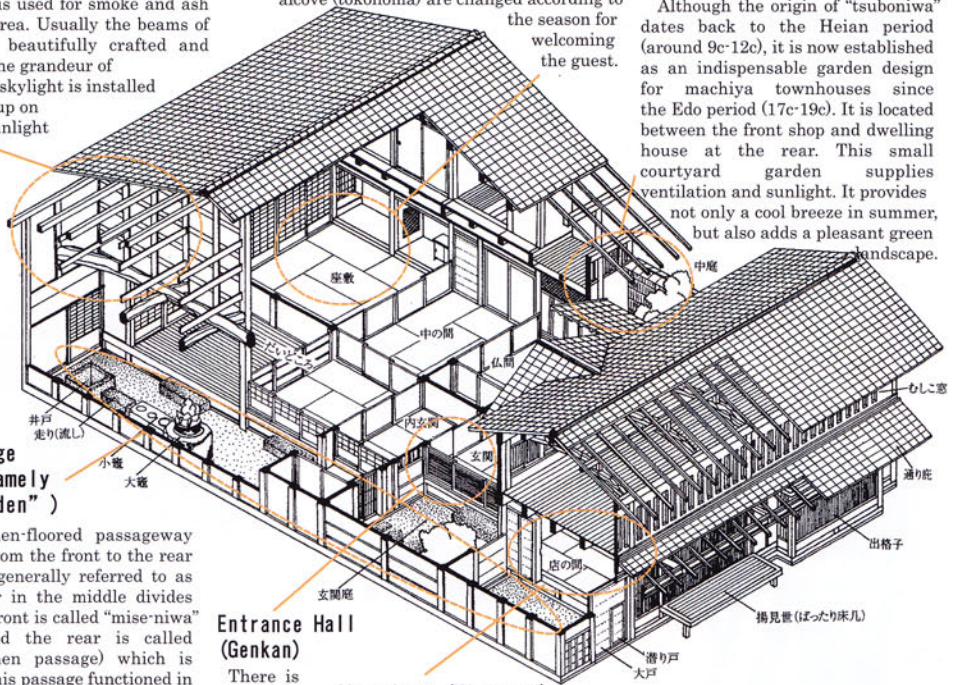
## Entrance Hall (Genkan)

There is a private entrance hall at the rear of the shop area,

## Shop Area (Misenoma)

One of the major characteristics of kyo-machiya is that working and living spaces are integrated. There is a shop place or public working space (misenoma) with the private living space at the rear.

Illustration:  
"City, Gion Festival, Residence in Kyoto"  
By Naoki Tani, Masaya Masui,  
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Smoke Shaft (Hibukuro)



Guest Room (Zashiki)



Shop Area (Misenoma)



Entrance Hall (Genkan)



Rear Garden



Courtyard Garden



Earthen Passage (Toriniwa)



Alcove (Tokonoma)