

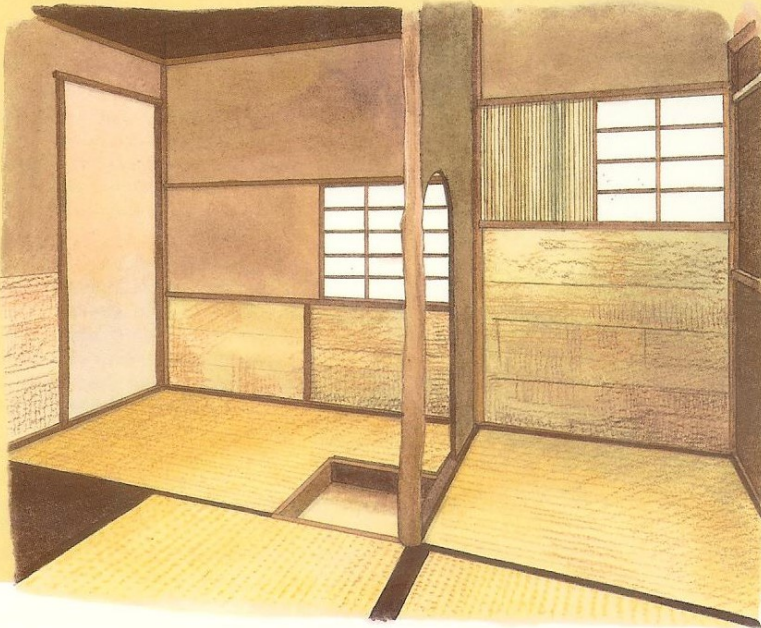
The Way of Tea

The tea ceremony had humble beginnings. Tea was originally employed by Buddhist monks to keep them awake during meditation. Later, tea was adopted by aristocrats for use in elaborate tea tasting games. Beginning in the Kamakura Period, tea drinking developed into a sophisticated ritual with different schools. The architecture associated with the Way of Tea (*chanoyu* or *sadō*) continues to make its influence felt.



Jo-an Teahouse

Jo-an Teahouse in Uraku Garden, Inuyama City, is a National Treasure constructed in 1618 by Oda Uraku, a disciple of Sen-no-Rikyū. It is built in the Sōan “grass hut” style. Though the teahouse is very small in size, Uraku’s genius can be seen in features such as window openings covered with vertical bamboo slats that admit light and air, the lower portion of a wall covered with old calendars, and a natural pole at the corner of the hearth. Other interesting features are a crawl door, a triangular wall adjacent to the *tokonoma* (not shown in the drawing below), a black lacquered wood area near the hearth, and an interior arched doorway.



Development of the Tea Ceremony

A tea ceremony can be conducted in a special room included in a building such as a private dwelling, palace, temple, or castle; or the ceremony can be conducted in a building constructed especially for that purpose. Here, the term “teahouse” is used to refer to both types.

In the Kamakura Period, tea drinking was endorsed by Zen Buddhism, which was newly introduced from China. Zen exerted a good deal of influence upon the development of the Way of Tea in the Muromachi and Momoyama Periods. The individual who made the greatest impact upon this transformation into a refined aesthetic ceremony with profound philosophical and religious connotations was Sen-no-Rikyū (1521–91), the personal tea master of the military ruler Nobunaga, as well as his successor, Hideyoshi.

Sen-no-Rikyū favored austerity, with an emphasis upon the aesthetic concepts of *sabi* (the patina that comes with age) and *wabi* (things that are simple, natural, and imperfect). These qualities are manifested in the tranquil garden setting, the austerity of the teahouse and its use of natural materials, the unassuming tea ceremony vessels, and the seemingly effortless and graceful movements of the tea master. It is said that Rikyū’s teahouses became smaller as Hideyoshi’s Osaka Castle grew larger—an implied criticism of the often extravagant taste of the great warlord. Eventually, the two had an unfortunate parting of the ways.

Later History of the Tea Ceremony

The tea ceremony was passed on to three of Sen-no-Rikyū’s relatives, including his stepson, each of whom started a different tea lineage. All three lineages continued to favor Rikyū’s emphasis upon austerity and understatement and to employ the Sōan (grass hut) style teahouse, which is small and simple. Rikyū also had seven other disciples, mainly Hideyoshi’s samurai retainers, who adopted Shoin style architecture for their teahouses. Shoin teahouses, befitting their aristocratic origins, were larger and less rustic than their Sōan cousins. By the beginning of the Edo Period, there was a tendency for both styles to adopt specific features from each other.

Common Features of Teahouses

There is disagreement about the original inspiration for Sōan teahouse architecture, but most historians agree that one influence was the Japanese farmhouse, with its natural materials and relaxed, rustic atmosphere. Features borrowed from the farmhouse were, of course, reworked to achieve the desired aesthetic effect appropriate to a ceremony with subtle religious and aesthetic meanings. The teahouse also was influenced by Shoin style architecture.

A teahouse is composed of two main elements: the building itself and the garden. Access to the building is sometimes through a low “crawl door,” originally designed to prevent samurai from entering with their swords. It also symbolizes the fact that once inside, all participants are equal, regardless of rank. The interior consists of *tatami* mats where the participants sit, a recessed alcove (*tokonoma*) for a hanging scroll and flower arrangement, and one or more optional ante-rooms where preparations are done. The size of the room ranges from two to eight or more *tatami* mats, depending upon the type of ceremony. Before Sen-no-Rikyū’s time, walls were made of mud covered with white



paper. After Rikyū, plain mud walls became popular, sometimes painted the color of green tea powder or given a red cast from mixing red shells or husks with the mud. The lower portion of these mud walls had to be faced with Japanese paper or boards to keep clothing from getting soiled. Windows consist of holes of different sizes and shapes, covered with materials such as bamboo slats or Japanese rice paper. Natural poles used in the interior are debarked and often painted with a red pigment mixed with soot to create a subdued, dark color that complements the beauty of the tea utensils.

The adjacent garden is usually divided into two areas by gates. The first area provides covered seating for guests waiting to attend the ceremony. The second area has additional seating, a water basin for washing hands, and stepping stones on which guests are expected to walk. Larger stones indicate where one may pause before continuing the approach to the teahouse. The second area also may contain a stone lantern and some trees or shrubs.

Sekkatei Teahouse at Kinkakuji Temple in Kyoto, built by Kanamori Sōwa, a tea master in the Edo Period. In front of the teahouse are a stone lantern and stone wash basin treasured by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, founder of Ginkakuji Temple.

Left: Shōdenin, a large Shoin style house, adjacent to Jo-an, where Uraku lived and entertained guests with tea ceremonies. The building has several large *tatami* mat rooms, divided by sliding doors. Behind the hearth, in the lower middle of the photograph, is the *tokonoma*. A building this size could seat a rather large number of guests.